



# Ecosystem Engagement in Entrepreneurship Education: A View from Sri Lanka

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the rapid growth of entrepreneurship education among universities around the world (Rauch & Hulsink, 2015), university-based entrepreneurship ecosystems (U-BEEs) is still evolving as a concept, including their definition (Hsieh & Kelley, 2020). Within the current understanding, stakeholders (i.e. actors) are fundamental in the U-BEE as they create a conducive environment for students aspiring for an entrepreneurial career. These stakeholders are the human and social elements of ecosystems that create engagement and dynamism (Johnson

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et al., 2019). Successful ecosystems can foster entrepreneurial intention to become an entrepreneur among undergraduate students; nurture their ability to create start-ups with growth potential; connect budding student entrepreneurs to stakeholders while developing their entrepreneurial knowledge and competencies. Thus, stakeholder engagement within the ecosystem contributes towards undergraduate entrepreneurial transformation.

Although stakeholders are a key component of U-BEEs, limited attention has been given to stakeholders and their collaboration in entrepreneurship education (Bischoff et al., 2018). Universities creating shared value combined with stakeholders have been studied previously in other disciplines (Karwowska, 2019) but not extensively within an ecosystem setting. Further, stakeholders and their engagement have received less attention with only a few studies exploring stakeholders in U-BEEs. Therefore, it is unclear how universities can engage stakeholders in their ecosystem for entrepreneurship education. Thus, in this chapter, an opportunity emerges to understand and establish new knowledge on the stakeholders' moderator role in influencing the entrepreneurial behaviour of undergraduates.

By investigating ecosystem engagement in entrepreneurship education, this chapter improves current knowledge of stakeholder engagement in higher education. The study advances U-BEE theory through three theoretical contributions including the addition of parents as a new stakeholder to U-BEEs and provides the scope for building a broader view of the concept. Another contribution of this chapter is the insights on ecosystem engagement in U-BEE factors; entrepreneurship curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments within the context of Sri Lanka, a developing country. These U-BEE factors are discussed in conjunction to theory of planned behaviour. We have also proposed recommendations as practical guidance for higher education providers to co-create their U-BEE, thus recognising key actors and fostering the engagement of multiple stakeholders in the ecosystem for the pursuit of undergraduate entrepreneurial education.

## 2 WHERE DID IT BEGIN?

Traditionally, universities were known for the provision of education producing highly skilled graduates and specialised talent (Bramwell & Wolfe, 2008) in the role of shaping a nation's community and society

(Redford & Fayolle, 2014). More recently, entrepreneurial universities are undertaking the third mission<sup>1</sup> by contributing to an entrepreneurially engaged economy and society (Etzkowitz, 2011). To promote entrepreneurship nationally, universities are advancing education in entrepreneurship and thus, entrepreneurship education has experienced exponential growth in recent years (Bischoff et al., 2018; Rauch & Hulsink, 2015). Scholars have conceptualised a university's environment as an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Fetters et al., 2010) and creating a university-based entrepreneurship ecosystem is a significant element of an entrepreneurial university. This ecosystem of entrepreneurial universities plays a vital role in developing more and/or better student entrepreneurs with greater entrepreneurial knowledge and competencies (Martin et al., 2013). Through the impetus of entrepreneurial universities, U-BEEs gained momentum among academics, researchers and policymakers (Brush Candida, 2014).

While entrepreneurial ecosystem was described as '*a set of individual components...*' (Isenberg, 2010, p. 43) the concept is further defined as '*a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory*' (Stam, 2015, p. 1765). In the extension from entrepreneurial ecosystems to U-BEEs, U-BEE include a combination of actors and factors associated with entrepreneurship education, co-curricular, research, support and commercialization (Brush Candida, 2014; Miller & Acs, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship is a complex process that relies on the numerous stakeholders socially embedded in the environment (Neck et al., 2004) and entrepreneurial ecosystems involve multiple stakeholders and processes in various contexts (Isenberg, 2010). For this study, we undertake a stakeholder view of entrepreneurship education in U-BEEs of a developing country.

U-BEEs are co-created by consolidated efforts undertaken by universities to nurture and sustain entrepreneurial communities, in particular nascent entrepreneurs among students (Rice et al., 2014). Universities' provision of these efforts in the ecosystem actively contributes to enhancing students' career intentions of becoming an entrepreneur, commercialization of knowledge and new private businesses for the economy (Ho et al., 2010). Such efforts of ecosystems can also ease

<sup>1</sup> Third mission refers to the third role beyond teaching and research that centers on the contribution for economic and social development.

the process of market testing, market-entry and networking with external actors (Belitski & Heron, 2016). While the benefits can be common, U-BEES are unique when compared to each university and geographic context as scholarly work argues that these ecosystems do not follow a one-size fits all approach (Ricci et al., 2019). The multi-stakeholder environment includes stakeholders who may facilitate or hinder entrepreneurship education and the development of new ventures (Belitski & Heron, 2016). This establishes the significance of exploring context-specific stakeholders within U-BEES.

### 3 WHAT IS KNOWN?

As every U-BEE is distinct, each ecosystem consists of a set of actors and factors unique to the university (Miller & Acs, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2014). Although scholars emphasise the importance of stakeholder engagement, universities lack a broader understanding of stakeholder collaboration in entrepreneurship education and their ecosystems (Bischoff et al., 2018). When managing stakeholder engagement in U-BEES, universities need to be mindful that it is a progressive process that can be planned and phased (Redford & Fayolle, 2014). By embedding key stakeholders into the ecosystem and engaging them effectively, universities can sustain entrepreneurial activity within their U-BEE and contribute to their region and country. In the below section, we establish the variety of stakeholders, types of relationships, levels of involvement, roles of stakeholders, points of engagement and methods of collaboration from U-BEE literature.

#### *Variety of Stakeholders*

Stakeholders are classified using various criteria in related entrepreneurial literature. From the inception of U-BEES, a combination of internal and external stakeholders is evident among U-BEES. In higher education, the internal stakeholders are the students, faculty, staff, administrators and sometimes the government depending on the country and higher education structure. Emerging studies emphasise how connections with various external actors shape the U-BEE's development and the significance of managing these external actors to increase entrepreneurial activity (Alvedalen & Boschma, 2017; Link & Sarala, 2019). For instance, Babson College (US) receives external funding for its ecosystem operations and

these funds secured from various sources outside the university are a key success factor (Hancock, 2011). Entrepreneurs and corporates are the most common external stakeholders engaged in sharing the practical essence of entrepreneurship and complementing the academic views (Bischoff et al., 2018). Students intending to become entrepreneurs or alumni creating a start-up value this practical knowledge and are influenced by the external environment as much as the university's ecosystem (Hayter et al., 2017). The interactions and interconnectedness among various stakeholders may result in a truly entrepreneurial learning experience for students and highlight the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial activity within the ecosystem (Wright et al., 2017). This draws on the importance of the variety of stakeholders within the U-BEE, especially external stakeholders from the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem (Wright et al., 2017).

### *Type of Relationships*

An entrepreneurial university becomes a relationship builder that creates a configuration of stakeholders through its relationships and these relationships are likely to change throughout the university's life cycle (Redford & Fayolle, 2014). Different stakeholders within the university such as management, faculty, and students and external stakeholders at local, regional and national levels share synergies in the ecosystem. These relationships are networks of various stakeholders from the university and its external domain (Belitski & Heron, 2016). In a successful ecosystem, some relationships can be internal to internal (faculty and student), external to internal (entrepreneur and student) and external to external (alumni to investor) (Powell & Walsh, 2018). While stable relationships can be critical in the flow of entrepreneurship education (Bischoff et al., 2018), creating a balance in synergies between these stakeholders is complex (Leydesdorff, 2000).

### *Levels of Involvement*

Levels of stakeholder involvement and interaction vary from high to low among universities and stakeholder groups (Bischoff et al., 2018). Perceptions and interests held by stakeholders influence their involvement and contribution to entrepreneurship education and its outcomes in higher education (Matlay, 2009). Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders

must be mutually beneficial and self-sustaining where the ecosystem works together with shared efforts in stimulating entrepreneurial ventures (Wadee & Padayachee, 2017). Such involvement can be geographically constrained creating a boundary and making it difficult for stakeholders to effectively engage (Acs et al., 2014). The dynamics of the environment affect the ecosystem and its outcomes; however, the involvement of stakeholders significantly impacts each other and factors of the ecosystem (Godley et al., 2019).

### *Roles of Stakeholders*

Entrepreneurial universities play a prominent role in economic development and social transformation in a nation (Leydesdorff, 2000). In U-BEE studies stakeholders play roles related to leadership (Rice et al., 2014), engagement with the wider communities (Morris & Kuratko, 2013), support as intermediary or innovation agents for incubators and technology transfer offices (Rothaermel et al., 2007), resources providers (Belitski, 2019). Within entrepreneurial ecosystems literature, stakeholders contribute by sharing knowledge (Bischoff et al., 2018) and entrepreneurial insights (Godley et al., 2019) while connecting with other stakeholders (Spigel, 2017). The interplay of stakeholders and their engagement in entrepreneurial universities have extended the roles of stakeholders such as researchers being a support system, developing transferrable skills and contributing to active teaching/learning for students (Clauss et al., 2018). In the case of each U-BEE, all stakeholders have their roles (Galvão et al., 2020) to create an entrepreneurial experience and not just entrepreneurship education (Belitski & Heron, 2016).

### *Points of Engagement*

U-BEEs appeal to collective action from engaged stakeholders instilling entrepreneurial knowledge and competencies among aspirants and promoting networking among students (Redford & Fayolle, 2014). In addition to stakeholders from the university, engaging external stakeholders in providing and promoting entrepreneurship education is deemed necessary (Bischoff et al., 2018). Internal and external stakeholders are involved in educational factors such as curriculum and co-curriculum design and activities within the U-BEE (Belitski & Heron, 2016; Brush Candida, 2014). Increasing initiatives are taken by

universities to collaborate with industry and entrepreneurs to support teaching/learning (Secundo et al., 2019). Co-curricular activities such as mentoring, start-up competitions and entrepreneurial presentations can be conducted along with external stakeholders, thus, extending beyond the internal staff (Ferrandiz et al., 2018). Stakeholders may engage in other factors of the U-BEES for research, support services and/or commercialization.

### *Methods of Collaboration*

Collaborations with and among stakeholders are essential for the U-BEE (Rice et al., 2014) and methods of collaboration in entrepreneurship education are developing. One method of collaboration is where internal and external stakeholders are connected as networks and these networks combine and share knowledge, experiences and resources for an entrepreneurial future (Galvão et al., 2020). Growing ecosystem engagement through a stakeholder network can be an iterative process through trial and error to increase means and decrease constraints to/on stakeholders (Yi & Uyerra, 2018). Another method of collaboration is public and private partnerships between universities and stakeholders for mutually beneficial services while building successful U-BEES (Guerrero et al., 2016). These networks and partnerships enable learning by connecting academic content and real-world experiences, mentoring and coaching to provide students with feedback and participation in events to exchange knowledge and network (Bischoff et al., 2018).

Stakeholders interconnect and interact by collaborating in various engagement points of U-BEES to foster entrepreneurship education. Despite managing stakeholders not being a new concept, understanding the variety of stakeholders, their roles, and possibilities for collaboration is critical in developing a well-connected and productive U-BEE (Brush Candida, 2014). The next section is an overview of the context in which empirical investigation was conducted for this study.

## 4 WHERE IS THE CONTEXT?

Governments around the world benchmark and attempt to replicate characteristics of entrepreneurial ecosystems proven to be successful in other countries into their development plans and policies (Hruskova & Mason, 2020). However, such successful environments are impossible to recreate

in the context of entrepreneurship education and ecosystems as successful U-BEEs are context-dependent embracing local conditions and characteristics (Spigel, 2016). The concept U-BEEs began in the United States (Kirby, 2004) and is commonly investigated in the geographic context of developed countries and high-income economies. With the paucity of graduate entrepreneurship-related studies in developing countries (Nabi & Liñán, 2011) and the current century coined as the 'Asian century' (Walmsley, 2018), we extend the research to Sri Lanka, a lower-middle-income country in the Asian continent (The World Bank, 2021). Examining how U-BEEs are emerging in developing countries such as Sri Lanka provides an opportunity to see how the ecosystem evolves uniquely in geographically dispersed contexts.

Sri Lanka faces national challenges including youth unemployment and underemployment. A steady increase in unemployment among youth was recorded from 18.1% in 2013 to 21.02% in 2019 (Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2018). A quarter of its total youth population was identified as disengaged meaning they are neither in education, training or employment (Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2018). Within the South Asian context, Sri Lanka suffers from the highest rate of youth unemployment indicating underutilised human capital (Jayathilake, 2020).

Along with 192 other nations, Sri Lanka is committed to achieving sustainable development by providing quality education and supporting economic growth under the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020). The 2030 agenda for sustainable development encourages entrepreneurship as an effective measure to alleviate economic and social challenges (The World Bank, 2021). Further, scholars postulate that entrepreneurship can help nations recover after the COVID-19 pandemic (Maritz et al., 2020). With the impetus of change from outside, universities and higher education institutes in Sri Lanka and around the world are now facing a greater responsibility to contribute to economic and social development through their entrepreneurship ecosystems.

For this study, we undertook qualitative research to explore broad views from stakeholders while gaining a deep understanding of U-BEEs in Sri Lanka. To investigate ecosystem engagement in entrepreneurship education, thirty online interviews were conducted among five stakeholder groups of U-BEEs. Perceptions and experiences from academics/educators, mentors, alumni from private higher education institutes, and entrepreneurs and incubator organisations located in



Colombo, Sri Lanka are included in this empirical study. Thematically analyzed data led to the below section on academic and practical insights relating to current practices, gaps and opportunities in stakeholder engagement within U-BEEs in Sri Lanka.

## 5 WHAT DID STAKEHOLDERS SAY?

In this study, a set of diverse stakeholders including academics, mentors, alumni entrepreneurs, expert entrepreneurs and representatives from incubators shared their perceptions on ecosystem engagement in entrepreneurship education. Below is an exclusive discussion of closely related higher education elements; curriculum, pedagogy and assessment based on stakeholders and their ecosystem engagement in entrepreneurship education. These factors are frequently included in U-BEEs (Brush Candida, 2014; Miller & Acs, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2019; Rice et al., 2014) and this study explores context-specific insights in a developing country.

### *Entrepreneurship Curriculum*

Curriculum refers to a course and its content based on a syllabus organized by a discipline or concentration for a degree (Brush Candida, 2014). Currently, the undergraduate degrees in entrepreneurship are minimal and only a few private higher education institutes offer entrepreneurship as a major course in Sri Lanka. Some entrepreneurs and mentors/coaches argue that more institutes should offer a major in entrepreneurship and minors by identifying specific undergraduate groups. For instance, in Sri Lanka, it is common for the younger generation to join parents in the family business resulting in family entrepreneurs. Such family business-oriented parents seek suitable entrepreneurship education for their children. However, the majority of offered Business degrees are limited to Business Management and Business Administration. These courses only cover a minimal extent of entrepreneurship within the degree. For example, by including one module such as 'Entrepreneurship Essentials' covering the fundamentals on entrepreneurship or a view of entrepreneurship through 'Entrepreneurial Marketing'. Thus it became evident that curriculum development lacked external influences such as parents of students. Although parents have been identified as an influence on student's

entrepreneurial intention (Webber et al., 2020) and parents are not currently recognized within the U-BEE. Thus, it appears that there is a disengagement between these institutes and their broader environment where the U-BEE requires to address the students' needs and other key stakeholders such as parents.

### *Adapting Pedagogical Practices*

At present, entrepreneurship units are largely taught by entrepreneurship or management qualified academics with no or limited entrepreneurship experience among investigated institutes. On the contrary, external stakeholders perceive that facilitating entrepreneurship education should be the task of entrepreneurship-experienced academics combined with practitioners such as start-up founders and entrepreneurs. For instance, curriculum content can be delivered by in-campus entrepreneurship experienced faculty while tutorials consisting of learning activities are conducted by practitioners such as alumni entrepreneurs. This combination of academics and practitioners creates a unique learning experience relevant for entrepreneurship. Moreover, when learning entrepreneurship, the facilitator's passion and charisma play an essential role, and this may not happen through an individual who does not possess entrepreneurial background. Further, institutes in Sri Lanka are mainly connected with large companies and these companies may not be the most suitable for facilitating entrepreneurship. This is because the experiences and insights of start-up founders and entrepreneurs are more recent and relevant to knowledge transfers in entrepreneurship education. Therefore, involving alumni, who have successfully become entrepreneurs or failed, offers richer learning experience and interconnects the U-BEE better with practitioners.

### *Assessment and Evaluations*

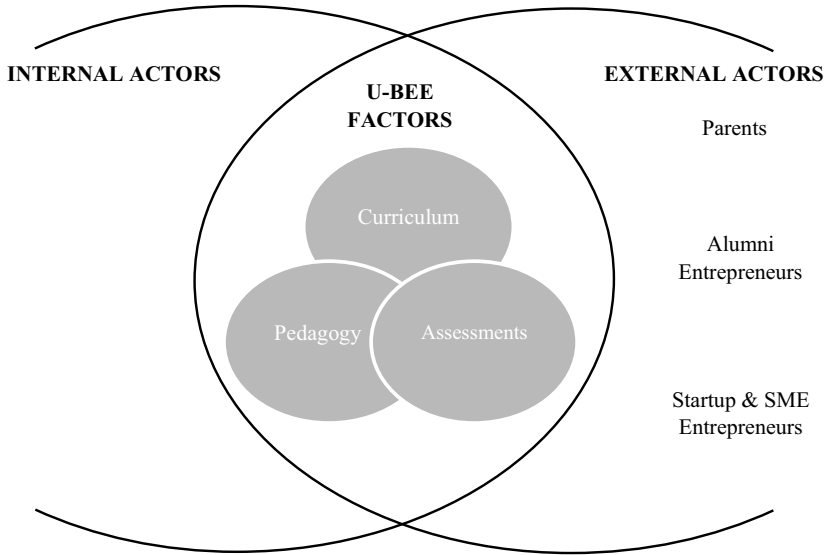
Assessments of entrepreneurial units are mainly in the form of written reports, reflections and activities such as an idea pitch or role play. The strong belief among entrepreneurs and incubation representatives is that assessments require to be practical as much as the other educational factors. Students should have access and interactions with real-world entrepreneurs or potential customers through assessments. A suggestion was that students should have work placements as assessments. Such

an opportunity involves placing students with start-ups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) where students work a certain number of hours or days, gain experience and report back at the end of a semester. Such experience as part of an assessment may help students to find solutions for real business problems and challenges that start-ups face. However, there was no evidence of such assessments for undergraduates among investigated institutes. The challenge may stem from the norm that Sri Lanka does not foster a working culture among undergraduates and such assessments are uncommon within the employment structure. While assessments are evaluated by academics, stakeholders indicate that students will benefit from evaluations and feedback by practitioners such as entrepreneurs, in addition to academics. Work assessment could extend to the degree where the entrepreneur can evaluate the student on observed entrepreneurial traits and characteristics such as leadership, team working, risk-taking, problem-solving, innovation and creativity. Such assessments not only create the opportunity for students to showcase their talent and ideas to an external audience but also receive feedback from entrepreneurs. Assessments beyond academic-based evaluations will provide students a more practical review of their performance.

An evolving U-BEE is illustrated in Fig. 1 that fits and frames the findings from this study. Drawing from the above current practices, gaps and opportunities, the understanding is that private higher education institutes need to strengthen their U-BEE through stakeholder engagement. Despite stakeholders being involved to some extent such as ad-hoc guest lectures by entrepreneurs and corporates, when improving or developing ecosystems, universities must identify key stakeholders and engage relevant stakeholders to support the U-BEE.

## 6 WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Leading from the above literature and investigation, the cornerstone of this empirical study is new insights that lead to theoretical contributions on entrepreneurship education and ecosystems for undergraduates. The following discusses suggestions to offer the practical contribution for higher education providers of similar context.



**Fig. 1** External stakeholders contributing to U-BEE factors

### *Theoretical Contribution*

In an entrepreneurship education context, it is essential to discover the crucial and relevant stakeholder groups. When deciding on the various stakeholders, it is significant to determine the importance and prospective contribution of each stakeholder (Redford & Fayolle, 2014). Even though literature showcases stakeholders with different interests involved in facilitating entrepreneurship (Galvão et al., 2020), stakeholder collaboration has limited attention in entrepreneurship education (Bischoff et al., 2018) and context-specific stakeholders-based studies from developing countries are uncommon.

Through this exploratory empirical study, parents and entrepreneurs emerged as crucial external stakeholders that may engage and strengthen the U-BEE in the context of a developing country. Given this, the contribution to theory is three-fold and these contributions are discussed with the U-BEE factor, point of engagement, and Azjen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour (Refer Table 1) in the following paragraphs. Theory of planned behaviour is common within U-BEE literature and is widely

**Table 1** Actors engagement in U-BEE factors

<i>Stakeholder (i.e. actor)</i>	<i>U-BEE factors</i>	<i>Point of engagement</i>	<i>Link to theory of planned behaviour</i>
Parents of Students	Curriculum	Courses	Subjective norms
Entrepreneurs (Alumni)	Pedagogy	Tutorials	Perceived behavioural control
Entrepreneurs (Start-ups or SMEs)	Assessment	Work placements	Attitude towards behaviour

applied by U-BEE frameworks which focus on entrepreneurship intention as an outcome.

Literature asserts that parental entrepreneurship is the most prominent factor that influences a student's career choice and increases the probability of children following an entrepreneurial career (Lindquist et al., 2015). While entrepreneurial family culture is widely accepted and parental influence on student's entrepreneurial intention is investigated (Webber et al., 2020), to our knowledge U-BEE studies have not included parents as an external stakeholder within empirical and conceptual U-BEEs. Our first contribution to theory is the recognition of a new stakeholder 'parents' to the U-BEE framework as an external actor.

Discussions with multiple stakeholders of ecosystems divulged the parental influence on student's choice of education and intended career. From a theoretical perspective, specifically theory of planned behaviour, this influence relates to subjective norms where the student holds a belief that parents prefer the child to enrol in a specific degree (such as a major in entrepreneurship or small business) and join the family business as work in intended behaviour. The strong parental influence may come from their education and experience which conditions the children's career choices over time based on parents' life experiences (Webber et al., 2020). In Sri Lanka, the cultural norm is such that parents are highly involved in children's lives, even during adulthood decisions (Dissanayake, 2020). Moreover, parents heavily support children, which makes education and career-related decisions more family-based and less of an individual preference (Dissanayake, 2020). This impact emphasises a positive association between parents and students significant for U-BEEs.

Entrepreneurs are common in U-BEEs and are recognized as a primary stakeholder supporting to identify opportunity, offer confidence about the

business idea and create a start-up (Spigel & Harrison, 2017), however, this study divulges how their role can be enhanced within the U-BEE. For example, alumni who became entrepreneurs are known to serve universities as mentors, investors or donors, and they are also involved in teaching as visiting faculty (Powell & Walsh, 2018). As the second contribution to U-BEE theory, this study suggests the inclusion of alumni as educators in the role of conducting tutorials within pedagogy.

As U-BEEs promote ‘entrepreneurship’, stakeholders argue that naturally, the ecosystem should involve more entrepreneurs, such as alumni entrepreneurs, youth who have scaled up businesses from start-ups, and second-generation entrepreneurs in family businesses. Engaging entrepreneurs, such as alumni in pedagogy, for example conducting tutorials, can affect the student’s perception of his ability to perform a given behaviour (i.e. becoming an entrepreneur following undergraduate education). Through the lens of the theory of planned behaviour, this association refers to perceived behavioural control leading to entrepreneurial intention. This may encourage or impede an entrepreneurial related career intention; however, such an alumni entrepreneur in the role of a facilitator raises awareness through shared experiences and may improve student’s confidence through the entrepreneur’s personality. If students are interested in entrepreneurship and perceive they can become an entrepreneur, alumni may even become a role model for an aspiring undergraduate. Outside of the classroom setting, alumni may become mentors and coaches extending the established relationship. Such relationships between stakeholders improve the co-creation of U-BEE by which students receive entrepreneurship education most effectively.

In terms of assessment, the association between work placements and graduate entrepreneurship was investigated and found to be beneficial (Jones & Jones, 2014) however work placements do not appear among U-BEE models developed until now. Student’s perceptions establish that learnings, experience and networks from work placements drive the idea, intention and confidence to set up one’s start-up (Donald et al., 2018). Our third contribution to theory is the addition of work placements as part of assessments in U-BEEs, in collaboration with start-ups and SMEs.

Entrepreneurs express their belief in the importance of ‘hands-on’ experience for future graduate entrepreneurs and their willingness to get involved with higher education providers on a more regular and long-term arrangement. This creates an opportunity for students to participate

in work placements as an assessment within an entrepreneurship-related study unit. Entrepreneurs of start-ups and SMEs can assign work or tasks to students, which is aligned to their learning outcomes. The practical experience gained at a new or developing venture can impact the student's attitude towards behaviour in the setting of the theory of planned behaviour. From the outcomes, such as assessment feedback and student's performance in this real-life experience, the student may develop a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the entrepreneurial behaviour that leads to an intention on an entrepreneurial career. The right blend of actors and factors can strengthen the U-BEE from within facilitating entrepreneurial intention among students.

### *Practical Contribution*

The practical contribution is the context-specific insights provided by this empirical study, which could be tested and extended for developing countries. Findings reveal that a variety of stakeholders such as parents and entrepreneurs should be acknowledged and embraced to the U-BEE by higher education providers, forming a range of internal to external relationships. Ecosystem stakeholders may be involved at a low, moderate or high level according to their diverse roles that include influencing, knowledge/experience sharing and mentoring/coaching. Stakeholders may engage with the U-BEE through factors being curriculum, pedagogy and assessments. For this, higher education providers need to identify stakeholders and create suitable opportunities for them to engage. It may become beneficial for higher education providers to have collaborative strategies in place (1) to develop curriculum recognising parental influence on student's choice of study and career, (2) to build its alumni network creating a talent pool for facilitating tutorials and (3) to partner with start-ups and SMEs for work placements. We contend that this study presented an important practical contribution by advocating to connect and collaborate with external stakeholders (including parents, alumni entrepreneurs, start-up and SME entrepreneurs) with U-BEEs for entrepreneurship education.

## 7 CONCLUSION

U-BEE is a collective action and coordinated collaboration by universities and other stakeholders (Wright et al., 2017), yet stakeholders

have received less attention in the context of entrepreneurship education (Bischoff et al., 2018). Our focus in this chapter was to give an opportunity to stakeholders and hear these voices from a developing country, which relies on entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship for post-pandemic recovery and sustainable development. This chapter investigated how to improve ecosystem engagement in entrepreneurship education by examining current practices, gaps and opportunities in stakeholder collaboration. Findings indicate that stakeholder involvement is rather low and weak whereas all stakeholders highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement in U-BEEs. Further, the study highlighted the key role played by parents in student's education and shaping entrepreneurial intention. There is an opportunity for alumni, start-ups and SME entrepreneurs to join forces with universities in what has predominately remained internal—pedagogy and assessments, through networks and partnerships. These contribute to theory and practice where far too little is established on U-BEEs regarding the context-specific stakeholders and their engagement within the ecosystem.

Future research could build on the findings of this chapter where stakeholders such as parents, alumni, entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs are empirically investigated within a respective U-BEE. Based on these results, a U-BEE comprising context-dependent actors and factors could be established. Although the investigation of this study is based on Sri Lanka, these findings may be of relevance for other developing countries that share many of the same characteristics of Sri Lanka such as the importance of parents/family and the continuation of family-owned businesses. Further, an investigation can examine the impediments within the U-BEE to improve ecosystem engagement. While developed countries such as the United States and the UK led research and development of U-BEEs, there could be insights for developing countries, giving them a late-mover advantage. Scholars can investigate the comparison of U-BEE co-creation in developed versus developing countries involving the dynamics such as sociocultural influences. Finally, scholarly work on U-BEE may continue extending into the wider community of urban/regional/national entrepreneurial ecosystem.



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