

Tourism Education and Entrepreneurship Readiness: A Comparative Content Analysis of Syllabi in Kerala and Karnataka

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Abstract

The increasing demands for entrepreneurial competencies in tourism are leading to calls for the transformation of the curriculum within higher education. This research assesses the degree to which tourism higher education programs in Kerala and Karnataka incorporate both competency-based learning and entrepreneurship readiness through examining the presence of digital competences, experiential learning, skill development and entrepreneurial orientation. Eight university curricula – four from Kerala and four from Karnataka – have been examined using a directed qualitative content analysis approach to identify regional disparities and examine conformity to UNWTO competency standards and NEP 2020 directives. Results suggest that the Universities of Karnataka have shown greater levels of incorporation of skills-based learning and structured practical elements when compared to the Programs in Universities of Kerala where the majority of programs were found to be theoretical with minimal operationalization of entrepreneurial elements. Although most of the programs included soft skills, significant gaps were identified in terms of digital training, innovative practices, and experiential entrepreneurship education. This study has demonstrated that there is a requirement for curriculum reform aligned to UNWTO competency standards and NEP 2020. This research also contributes to tourism

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education literature through providing a comparative framework and action-oriented suggestions for enhancing entrepreneurial preparedness.

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1. Introduction

Curriculum design in higher education has moved beyond a rigid body of knowledge to an evolving and responsive model based on the integration of theory, practice, and social relevance. There are three ways that curriculum design is typically viewed and it can be seen as a product, a process, or a praxis (Pacala, 2023) – with praxis being characterized by its focus on the interconnection of knowledge and action. Praxis promotes an adaptive approach to curriculum design, focuses on learners' needs and perspectives, and is located within authentic settings. These characteristics support learners in developing their ability to think critically and creatively to solve problems. The inclusion of experiential entrepreneurship education has also been identified as an effective way to enhance students' entrepreneurial intentions to prepare them for the practical realities of starting a business (Subedi & Bhandari, 2024; Nabi et al., 2021).

Tourism education faces similar issues regarding rapid change in the industry and technological environment. In response to this requirement there is a need for a thorough assessment of the existing pedagogical structures to determine whether they provide adequate support to students by embedding entrepreneurial principles into their curricula and developing an entrepreneurial mindset among students (Roy & Mukherjee, 2017). Tourism educators have acknowledged that the increasing use of digital technologies requires changes to the competency-based nature of their programs and a move towards innovation-led programs (Gretzel et al., 2020; Mariani & Baggio, 2022; Ratten, 2020). However, despite advances in technology, studies have shown that many tourism programs still overemphasize theoretical knowledge at the expense of practical application and therefore limit the preparedness of graduates to function effectively in rapidly changing industry environments (Bagri & Dhodi, 2022; Dredge et al., 2012; Airey & Tribe, 2005; Ezeuduji et al., 2023; Farsari, 2022).

India is one of the world's largest growing tourism markets and is currently implementing reforms in its higher education system through the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which provides emphasis on experiential learning, interdisciplinary learning and

entrepreneurship as key outcomes of education. This context presents a unique opportunity for conducting this type of comparative analysis. Although there exist several tourism programs at undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) levels in Kerala and Karnataka, which are two of India's top tourist-destination states, there exists very little published comparative analysis on the curricular designs of these programs (Dighliya & Dahiya, 2024; Roy & Mukherjee, 2017).

Although the value of entrepreneurship education has received growing recognition over recent years, it continues to be poorly represented in higher education curricula. A persistent gap exists between what is expected of curricular designs by educators and how they believe their graduates will need to apply that content in an employment setting, particularly with regard to developing entrepreneurial capabilities. As such, by viewing curriculum design as praxis (the interplay of knowledge and action), a more reflective learning environment can be created for students which allows for greater opportunities for deeper reflection and critical thinking as required to effectively navigate complex job responsibilities. The following research question (RQ) will guide this investigation.

1. RQ1: To what extent do tourism higher education curricula in Kerala and Karnataka incorporate entrepreneurial-related competences at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels?
2. RQ2: What differences exist between the two regions when it comes to the use of experiential learning, digital competence development and applied skill development?
3. RQ3: To what degree do current tourism curricula in both states align with UNWTO competency standards and the directives of NEP 2020?

A content analysis was conducted to examine the syllabi of tourism education programs in Kerala and Karnataka to identify the presence and intensity of entrepreneurial content, digital competency training and sustainability-focused modules (Fernández-Villarán et al., 2024). This systematic review will reveal how educational practices are currently being implemented to better equip students with the knowledge and skills required to promote innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship in a fast-changing tourism landscape (Salite et al., 2025). Specifically, this study explores how entrepreneurial attitudes and skills are developed through innovative educational programs, including project-based learning methodologies developed through design thinking processes (Nugraheni et al., 2019). One of the most important aspects of this study is examining whether current pedagogies prioritise standard knowledge or experience-based learning that provides a transformative process – a differentiation

that is essential to close the long-standing theory-practice gap in tourism education (Ahmad et al., 2017; Melchor-Duran et al., 2025).

2. Literature Review

The literature supporting this study will be reviewed under five themes: (1) Theory and Practice of Curriculum Development within Higher Education; (2) Entrepreneurship Education Frameworks; (3) Content Analysis as a Methodology for Conducting Research on Curriculum Studies; (4) Tourism Education within India; and (5) Gaps in Existing Literature and Conceptual Framework of Study.

2.1. Curriculum Theory and Praxis in Higher Education

Experiential learning provides a basis for designing tourism education curricula. Dewey's (1938) philosophy of education argues that learning should be grounded in continuity and interaction. Kolb (1984) conceptualized learning as a cyclical process comprising experience, reflection, and application. Both views indicate that curricula in tourism education should be designed to provide both theoretical knowledge and meaningful practice-oriented learning experiences. Competence-based and interdisciplinary curriculum designs help to align tourism education with the changes occurring in the tourism industry, including the effects of digitalization and global uncertainty (Sharma et al., 2024; Zhang & Chen, 2023).

The concept of curriculum and syllabi in higher education in the tourism field is very important because of the rapid development of the tourism sector. This is mainly driven by the increased focus on sustainability, digitalization, and globalization (Sigala, 2018; Fernández-Villarán et al., 2024). Modern curriculum designs increasingly combine experiential learning and technology-enabled pedagogies to prepare students for the dynamic environment of the tourism industry (Wan et al., 2025).

Employability of graduates has become an important issue in higher education, as companies increasingly look for employees who are prepared for work (Tomlinson, 2012; Yorke & Knight, 2007). In addition to possessing technical competence, employers seek graduates who are adaptable, flexible, critically minded, and able to function well under conditions of uncertainty. According to Yorke and Knight (2007), employability needs to be incorporated into all aspects of curriculum design, rather than simply providing students with additional support or training upon graduation. To achieve this goal, educators need to consider the incorporation of knowledge, skills, and reflective practices into the classroom and learning

settings. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) has been proposed as a way of achieving this (Jackson, 2024).

2.2. Entrepreneurship Education Frameworks

Entrepreneurship education is gaining popularity as a tool for stimulating innovation, job creation, and economic growth. Studies show that this type of education enhances entrepreneurial intentions of students (Wilson et al., 2007; Sánchez, 2011; Nabi et al., 2017), self-efficacy, and their capacity to recognize opportunities. However, the success of entrepreneurship education is heavily dependent on its pedagogical delivery. Fayolle and Gailly (2015) distinguish between "teaching about" entrepreneurship and "teaching through" entrepreneurship. They suggest that the former does not necessarily involve hands-on, experiential and action-based learning, while the latter does. Experiential entrepreneurship education has proven effective at enhancing entrepreneurial competences of students, self-efficacy and innovation capacities (Subedi & Bhandari, 2024). A number of studies have demonstrated that simulating real-world business situations (e.g., using business plan competitions), establishing incubators for student-led businesses, implementing project-based learning activities and providing access to entrepreneur and alumni networks are effective ways to develop entrepreneurial competences (Ratten, 2020; Tiberius & Weyland, 2024; Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

Typically, programs in tourism/hospitality/entrepreneurship education fail to address critical competencies such as innovation, risk-taking and creating new opportunities (Malekipour et al., 2017; Rae, 2006). Furthermore, interdisciplinary competency-based education is becoming a popular model for developing curricula that combine domain-specific knowledge with transferable skills (Khaled et al., 2014). More recently, researchers have argued that innovative pedagogies combined with digital tools and an interdisciplinary approach will continue to improve the quality of entrepreneurship education (Romero Caballero et al., 2025; Saputra, 2025). One major limitation in entrepreneurship education is the lack of standardization in curriculum design and instructional methods (Marvel et al., 2025; Pittaway et al., 2025). With the advent of smart technologies and platform-based business models in tourism destinations worldwide, there is now a pressing need to integrate digital competences and data-driven decision making skills into tourism curricula (Buhalis et al., 2023; Mariani & Baggio, 2022). Therefore, tourism education institutions need to transition from traditional content-based approaches to more holistic and learner-centered frameworks.

2.3. Content Analysis in Curriculum Research

Content analysis has emerged as a viable methodology for studying the structure of curricula as well as identifying discrepancies between the intended and actual delivery of learning outcomes. Formal representations of course design offer insight into the pedagogic emphases and competences foregrounded in educational programs (Benito Olalla & Merino, 2019). Content analysis enables systematic coding and thematic interpretation of textual data. Systematic coding enables researchers to identify both explicit and implicit curriculum components (Schreier, 2012; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Structured frameworks are used to increase reliability in content analysis by ensuring consistent coding procedures across researchers. Content analysis has been used successfully to identify disparities between curriculum design and industry expectations in professional fields including tourism and hospitality (Pathrose & Verma, 2022; Pilz et al., 2016). Through the analysis of learning outcomes, courses offered and assessment methodologies used to measure student performance during coursework content analysis offers a comprehensive view of how curricula influence competency development including digital and entrepreneurial competences (Tiberius & Weyland, 2024). The increasing complexity in today's tourism industry makes continued evaluation and improvement of tourism curricula necessary. Harden (2001) stresses the importance of structured frameworks for curriculum development that address objectives, content, pedagogy and assessments.

2.4. Tourism Education in the Indian Context

Tourism education in India exists in a unique space within global higher education systems. Given its significant contribution to India's economy accounting for nearly 7.5% of GDP, the expansion of India's tourism industry has been rapid. The supporting educational infrastructure however has expanded much less consistently. Roy and Mukherjee (2017) found that entrepreneurial education in Indian tourism and hospitality programs places little emphasis on applied entrepreneurial skills. Rather than emphasizing applications skills, these programs typically emphasize foundational theoretical concepts related to the tourism industry. Similarly, Dighliya and Dahiya (2024) stated that Indian tourism education lags behind international norms in terms of the inclusion of innovation-oriented and technology-enhanced pedagogy – especially when compared with programs in Southeast Asia and Europe.

Kerala and Karnataka are two of India's most prominent tourism economies, each hosting multiple university-level tourism education programmes. Kerala has focused on developing its brand image based on

sustainable and responsible tourism whereas Karnataka has created a diverse range of products — ranging from heritage tourism to pilgrimage tourism — which include MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism and wildlife tourism. There is currently no empirical research comparing entrepreneurship education within their respective higher education curricula. This omission constitutes a significant gap within current literature. NEP 2020 provides a timely policy framework for evaluating whether curricula in both states are moving towards greater flexibility, multidisciplinary education, and graduate employability (Ministry of Education, 2020). International guidelines for assessing the quality of tourism education exist via the Tourism Education Quality Standards (TedQual) of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which serve as another benchmark against which regional curricula may be evaluated. The Certification Framework Tourism Education Quality (TedQual), created by the UNWTO, has been established to assess the quality of educational programs in tourism and hospitality, through curricula, teaching methods, instructor qualifications, and links with the tourism and hospitality industry. As a global standard of excellence for tourism and hospitality educational programs, TedQual promotes graduates' employment opportunities and sustainable tourism development (UNWTO, 2019).

2.5. Research Gaps and Conceptual Framework

Research conducted previously has established that many curricula fail to adequately incorporate entrepreneurial competences — particularly those associated with innovation, opportunity recognition, and practical business application skills (Malekipour et al., 2017). Limited attention has been paid to the incorporation of digital competences, innovation ecosystems and interdisciplinary approaches within tourism curricula even though they are increasingly relevant to current industry practices (Sigala, 2018; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). Despite an extensive body of research exploring topics related to tourism education and entrepreneurship education, there are still several key limitations. First, previous research tends to focus primarily on perceptions-based data rather than conducting rigorous syllabus analysis (Nabi et al., 2017; Tiberius & Weyland, 2024). Second, there are very few comparative studies exploring different regions within India. Finally, although entrepreneurship is commonly taught within various curricula, there is limited evidence demonstrating how effectively it is translated into experiential learning activities or assessed as a competency. This study addresses these limitations through employing a conceptual framework consisting of three interconnected theoretical strands: Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which serves as a reference

point for measuring how well curriculum design meets pedagogical expectations; Fayolle and Gailly's (2015) distinction between "teaching about" and "teaching through" entrepreneurship – which guides the coding of entrepreneurial content; Competency-Based Education (CBE) principles – which frame the assessment of students' skill development and assess the degree to which assessments match skill development expectations. Collectively, these three strands enable a rigorous evaluation of the extent to which syllabi translate entrepreneurship from a theoretical topic into a practiced competency.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Philosophy and Design

The study employs a qualitative document analysis methodology that adopts a theory-driven DQCA (expand this) approach to analyze syllabus documents. Creswell and Poth (2016) note that "meaning" is socially constructed and as such, educators need to understand how educational concepts/phenomena (phenomenon, such as curriculum design) exist within social and political contexts. Therefore, a qualitative document analysis was deemed most appropriate.

Document analysis is a common method used in curriculum research, however, Bowen (2009) notes that very few studies have examined document analysis as a viable research strategy in this field. Document analysis is an examination of educational documents to determine if there exists evidence of a particular concept. Schreier (2012) noted that document analysis is most commonly used when examining curriculum documentation and allows for a systematic examination of curriculum design based on specific criteria. Thus, while this study is both conceptual and qualitative in nature, the theory driven document analysis will allow the researchers to explore the relationships among the variables of interest.

A content analysis of the syllabus documents was conducted to identify and describe patterns, themes, and gaps in the educational documents. As such, this type of analysis is very useful in tourism education where researchers want to see the degree to which curricula match industry expectations related to skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment. Camprubí and Coromina (2016) also found that content analysis is a viable way to examine tourism education and its alignment with industry needs. Furthermore, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) suggest that DQCA can provide both deductive (theory driven) and inductive (data driven) approaches to the analysis of qualitative data. Additionally, since content analysis and qualitative coding methods share

many similarities, DQCA can provide both types of analysis, thereby increasing analytical depth and theoretical integration.

3.2. Conceptual-Analytical Framework: The Bridge Between Theory and Data

The conceptual components of this study include Kolb's (1984) ELT, Fayolle and Gailly's (2015) entrepreneurship education framework, and the competency-based education (CBE) principles. These conceptual components were operationalized into a six-category coding system that was applied systematically to each syllabus document. The operationalization of these conceptual components into the coding system is presented in Table 1. Below is the rationale for each conceptual component (pillar):

Pillar 1 – Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's (1984) ELT posits that learning occurs as individuals move through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience → reflective observation → abstract conceptualization → active experimentation. A curriculum that embodies ELT would contain at least one form of active experimentation and reflection as part of its assessment methods. A syllabus that includes only end-of-semester written exams reflects that only the abstract conceptualisation stage is being formally assessed. ELT establishes the two primary coding categories for this study: experiential learning (are field-based, simulation-based, or project-based activities included?), and assessment diversity (do assessments evaluate active experimentation and reflection or only knowledge recall?).

Pillar 2 – Fayolle and Gailly's (2015) entrepreneurship education framework

This framework categorises the types of pedagogy in entrepreneurship education into three [categorises]:

- Teaching about Entrepreneurship (theoretical content): definitions; typology; economic theory)
- Teaching for Entrepreneurship (skills-focused): identifying opportunities; writing business plans)
- Teaching through Entrepreneurship (immersive) : startup creation; incubation; live ventures

These are treated by the researchers as an ordinal scale. A syllabus with "Entrepreneurship" in the module titles but does not provide definition/theory of entrepreneurship is a lower score on this scale. A syllabus that requires students to create/pitch a business plan is a higher

score. A syllabus that allows students to have hands-on experience with incubators/live ventures will be a higher score than both of the above. This framework also establishes direct ground for coding entrepreneurial orientation and differentiates the inclusion of superficial "entrepreneurship" from actual incorporation.

Pillar 3 – Competency-Based Education (CBE) Principles

CBE, as described by Khaled et al., (2014) and UNWTO TedQual competency frameworks, asserts that curricula should be designed backward from desired graduate competencies – i.e. What graduates must be able to perform after completing a program in order to structure content, pedagogy, and assessment accordingly. CBE principles serve as the foundation for the three coding categories: Skill Development (are learning outcomes stated as competencies and abilities rather than solely as knowledge acquisition?); Digital Competency (are technology-related competencies specifically stated and sequenced?); and Sustainability Orientation (are sustainability competencies defined and measurable?).

The three pillars together produce the six coding categories. This relationship between the theoretical pillars, coding categories and research questions is shown in Figure 1.

Table 1: Conceptual-Analytical Framework: From Theory to Coding Categories to Research Questions

Theoretical Pillar	Coding Categories Derived	Research Question Addressed
Kolb (1984) Experiential Learning Theory	Experiential Learning; Assessment Diversity	RQ2: How do regions differ in experiential learning and skill-building approaches?
Fayolle & Gailly (2015) Entrepreneurship Education Framework	Entrepreneurial Orientation	RQ1: To what extent do curricula integrate entrepreneurship competencies?
Khaled et al. (2014); UNWTO TedQual Competency-Based Education	Skill Development; Digital Competency; Sustainability Orientation	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3: Competency depth, digital integration, and UNWTO/NEP 2020 alignment

Note. All six coding categories were deductively derived from the three theoretical pillars prior to data collection. Three additional inductive codes emerged during analysis and are described in Section 3.4

3.3. Sampling and Document Selection

The study uses a purposeful sample of eight universities – four in Kerala and four in Karnataka. Purposeful sampling can be particularly useful when the goal of the study is to develop a deeper theoretical understanding and to provide a comparative analysis (Patton, 2014). The selection process was specifically guided by the following three criteria: (a) active enrolment in undergraduate or postgraduate programs related to tourism; (b) access to complete, publicly available course outlines through the official university websites or those of their affiliate colleges; and (c) both UGC recognition and NAAC accreditation. These criteria provided assurance that the sampled institutions represent mainstream, formally recognized tourism education programs within each state and, rather than peripheral or unrecognised ones.

Content analysis was conducted using syllabi in effect for the academic year 2025-2026, covering both undergraduate and postgraduate degree programme curricula. More specifically, content analysis of the syllabi for undergraduate degree programs BTTM (Bachelor of Tourism and Travel Management), BBA (Tourism), BHM (Bachelor of Hotel Management), and B.Com. (Vocational); and postgraduate degree programmes MTTM (Master of Tourism and Travel Management), MBA (Tourism), and MTHM (Master of Tourism and Hotel Management); were conducted. Course syllabi were accessed online through official university websites and/or academic databases between January and February 2026 to ensure the validity and timeliness of all data sources.

Table 2: Sample Universities, Programmes, and Levels of Study

#	State	University	Programmes Analysed	Level	NAAC
1	Kerala	University of Calicut	BTTM, MTTM	UG & PG	A+
2	Kerala	Kannur University	BBA (Tourism), MBA (Tourism)	UG & PG	A
3	Kerala	Mahatma Gandhi University	BHM, MTHM	UG & PG	A+
4	Kerala	Kerala University	B.Com. (Vocational), MTTM	UG & PG	A++
5	Karnataka	Bangalore University	BTTM, MTTM	UG & PG	A+
6	Karnataka	Christ University	BBA (Tourism), MBA (Tourism)	UG & PG	A++

#	State	University	Programmes Analysed	Level	NAAC
7	Karnataka	Mysore University	BTTM, BHM	UG	A+
8	Karnataka	Mangalore University	MTTM, MTHM	PG	A

3.4. Coding Framework and Procedure

The main point for examination will be the programme syllabus that includes; programme learning outcomes (what students learn), programme teaching content (programme modules), program teaching methods (course assignments etc.), and assessment criteria. Together they make up an entire curriculum for a tourism education program. Therefore, to assess each one systematically, the study developed a systematic coded framework to evaluate them. The coded framework was developed based on the theoretical models described in section 3.2.

Table 3: Coding Framework: Categories, Theoretical Derivation, Indicators, and Syllabus Examples

Category	Theoretical Source	Definition	Coding Indicators	Illustrative Syllabus Example
Skill Development	Khaled et al. (2014); UNWTO TedQual	Explicit articulation of applied or transferable skill acquisition as a learning outcome	Keywords: skill, competency, ability, proficiency, practical, applied; learning outcomes framed as "students will be able to"	Students will develop communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills in tourism management contexts
Experiential Learning	Kolb (1984) ELT Stages 1 & 4	Pedagogical mechanisms requiring active, real-world engagement beyond	Keywords: internship, field visit, project, simulation, case study, practicum,	Industrial training (6 weeks) at approved tourism/hospitality establishment;

Category	Theoretical Source	Definition	Coding Indicators	Illustrative Syllabus Example
		classroom instruction	industrial training	field report required
Entrepreneurial Orientation	Fayolle & Gailly (2015) – about / for / through taxonomy	Content relating to venture creation, business planning, opportunity recognition, or innovation – coded by depth (about/for/through)	Keywords: entrepreneurship, startup, venture, innovation, business plan, opportunity recognition	Tourism Entrepreneurship: Business plan preparation, venture feasibility analysis, and elevator pitch [coded: for/through]
Digital Competency	Khaled et al. (2014) CBE; UNWTO TedQual digital domain	Integration of technology tools, platforms, or data-driven competencies within the curriculum	Keywords: digital, ICT (information and Communication Technology), e-tourism, data analytics, social media, AI, GDS (Global Distribution System), online platforms	Tourism Information Systems and e-Marketing: GDS applications, social media strategy, and digital customer experience design
Sustainability Orientation	UNWTO TedQual sustainability domain; NEP 2020	Inclusion of environmental, social responsibility, or	Keywords: sustainable, responsible, ecotourism, green,	Sustainable Tourism Development: Principles and practices of

Category	Theoretical Source	Definition	Coding Indicators	Illustrative Syllabus Example
	environmental goals	responsible tourism content	carbon footprint, CSR, community-based	responsible tourism management and eco-certification
Assessment Diversity	Kolb (1984) ELT Stages 2 & 3; CBE assessment principles	Use of non-traditional assessment instruments beyond end-semester written examination	Keywords: project, presentation, portfolio, viva, seminar, field report, continuous assessment	Evaluation: 60% internal (project, seminar, viva, field report) + 40% end-semester examination

Note. All six categories are deductive (theory-derived). Coding applied to both manifest content (explicit keyword mentions) and latent content (implicit pedagogical intent) per Krippendorff (2018). The 'Entrepreneurial Orientation' category was further sub-coded on a three-point depth scale (about/for/through) based on Fayolle and Gailly (2015).

Deductive and Inductive Coding

Coding involved the identification of keywords, phrases, and thematic patterns within each of the syllabi and their classification into the six deductive categories identified above. Manifest content (the explicit mention) and latent content (the implicit theme) were analysed to provide a complete picture of how the curricula were structured. In addition to the six deductive categories, three inductive codes emerged naturally from the close analysis of the data, which were kept as additional findings: and were retained as additional findings: (a) Women's Entrepreneurship — found in only one of the Karnataka Syllabi modules as a separate subject area; (b) Heritage Interpretation as Entrepreneurial Activity — appeared in Kerala syllabi as an implied connection between cultural knowledge and entrepreneurial activity; (c) Alumni Mentoring — mentioned in both of the both Karnataka syllabi as a form of experiential co-curricular learning. The inductive codes were reported in descriptive terms in the Results section but are not included in the main comparative frequency tables due to their limited and inconsistent presence throughout across the sample.

3.5. Data analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic and iterative DQCA process to ensure analytical depth, transparency and methodological rigor. The process consisted of five consecutive stages, according to Schreier (2012), for qualitative content analysis.

1. Stage 1 – Document familiarisation. All selected syllabi underwent multiple readings by members of the research team prior to the commencement of coding. Stage 1 provided an opportunity for the research team to develop a contextual understanding of each institution's program and its overall curriculum organization, sequence and general pedagogy and to identify early indications of patterns that may exist prior to the start of formal coding.
2. Stage 2 – Framework application (Deductive coding). Members of the research team engaged in the systematic assignment of codes to each syllabus based on the six predetermined categories. In addition to applying the predetermined codes, members also used a specially created coding template to apply an additional coding system related to the entrepreneurial orientation category. For example, if a specific syllabus contained a statement such as "we want our students to think like entrepreneurs," members would assign this as an 'about' statement. Conversely, if a statement such as "we expect our students to start businesses" was located in another syllabus, members would assign it as a "for" statement. If a statement such as "students will learn how to create business plans" was found in yet another syllabus, members assigned it as a 'through' statement.
3. Stage 3 – Inductive Coding. Following completion of stage 2 – application of framework codes – members of the research team completed a secondary review of each syllabus with the objective of identifying material that did not fit within the previously developed frameworks. Emerging codes were documented, reviewed among researchers, and either subsumed into an existing category or retained as an inductively derived code. Only three emerging codes reached a level sufficient for inclusion in subsequent reporting (as outlined in Section 3.4).
4. Stage 4 – Quantification and comparison of frequency counts. All coded elements were quantified per category, per university and per state to enable comparisons of frequency counts across universities and states in table 3 of the results. A cross-case comparative analysis was subsequently undertaken to determine structural similarities /differences/patterns in syllabi from Kerala versus Karnataka (Camprubí & Coromina, 2016; Çakar, 2022).

5. Stage 5 – Interpretive analysis. While the quantitative aspects of the data analysis focused on comparing frequency counts, the qualitative aspects examined how entrepreneurship was addressed (about/for/through), whether relevant skill-based learning objectives were clearly articulated or merely aspirational and whether assessment mechanisms could measure competence as indicated in the learning objectives. It is this qualitative component which differentiates DQCA from mere counting of words.

3.6. Reliability and Validity

Reliability was addressed through a multi-round iterative coding process to develop consistent themes. The level of intercoder reliability was examined by applying Cohen's Kappa Coefficient. This has been demonstrated to be one of the most commonly used statistical measures to evaluate coder agreement within the qualitative context. A Kappa statistic ranging between 0.80 and 0.85 indicated a strong degree of agreement and therefore high levels of reliability relative to established criteria (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Several strategies were also employed to establish validity. Firstly, the development of the coding framework utilized theoretical concepts related to teaching entrepreneurship, experiential learning and competency-based curricula (Nabi et al., 2017; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015), thus increasing construct validity. Secondly, both explicit and implicit elements of the curriculum were analysed. Lastly, results were evaluated against existing literature on entrepreneurial education at both theoretical and empirical levels providing additional support for theoretical triangulation.

3.7. Researcher Positionality & Ethical Issues

Positionality

The authors are affiliated with Indian universities operating within the same higher education system whose curriculum practices are examined in this study. This proximity affords familiarity with the constraints of institutions, regulations and programmatic structures, etc., which provides analytical advantages. At the same time, being close to the curricula could lead to a confirmation bias. Therefore, three steps were taken to limit this potential: (a) the coding scheme was developed before any data collection occurred; to prevent post-hoc adjustments driven by expected results. (b) two other independent researchers reviewed each coder's work during the Inter-Coder Reliability process; and (c) All claims made in the Results and Discussion sections are based on actual direct

evidence found in the syllabi texts, rather than on the researchers' own professional judgements.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this research were minimal, as the analysis was limited to publicly accessible curriculum documents acquired from official university sources. As a result, the research was guided by principles of academic integrity including providing accurate representations of the data, interpreting the data without bias, and properly acknowledging the source(s) of the data. Researchers using qualitative methods in recent years have been reminded that although ethics may involve the treatment of people involved in a study, researchers must still adhere to basic tenets of ethics even when conducting studies involving only documents (Vaz et al., 2025).

The study is subject to some limitations. First, it is based on an examination of course syllabus documents which reflect the planned curricula, and do not necessarily represent how these courses are actually taught by instructors; nor do they provide insight regarding the degree to which students engage with this material. These limitations highlight the difference between the intended curriculum (Bowen, 2009), and the enacted curriculum. Second, because we have used a purposeful sampling method to select eight Indian universities, the results cannot be generalized beyond those selected for this research. Thirdly, there was only a single source of data utilized for this study and only a single time point for collecting this data. Thus, while these data provides information about the content of tourism curricula at this specific time, they do not allow the researchers to explore changes over time. Finally, our focus has been limited to the formal curriculum. While this represents much of the content of tourism education at many institutions, there may also exist other forms of informal or "hidden" elements (e.g., the role of industry contacts) and non-academic experiences (e.g., co-curricular activities) that contribute to a tourism education experience. Consequently, it is important to view the findings as illustrative of the types of content educators intend to teach students in their tourism programs rather than as a direct measure of the quality of education delivered.

4. Results

The study demonstrates that there are considerable differences in how tourism programs are designed and implemented at universities in Kerala and Karnataka. Both regions share a similar emphasis on providing students with a foundation of theoretical knowledge, and on employability skills. However, each region demonstrates some notable differences in the

amount of skill development that is integrated into their respective curricula; the number of experiential learning opportunities available to students; and the degree to which they prepare students to become entrepreneurs. These differences illustrate larger system-wide differences in the way institutions approach curriculum development and pedagogy and highlight the uneven progression toward CBE among tourism programs

4.1. Quantitative Review of the Total Amount of Curriculum Content

The data presented in Table 4 are the aggregated numbers of frequency counts that were found to be categorized into the six major categories from each state by means of the systematic analysis of all eight university syllabi. Each count represents the sum of frequency counts for each category as they appeared in each syllabus for a particular state.

Table 4: Coded Mention Frequencies by Category and State

Coding Category	Kerala (n=4)	Karnataka (n=4)	Kerala Avg. per Syllabus	Karnataka Avg. per Syllabus
Skill Development	87	142	21.8	35.5
Experiential Learning	34	78	8.5	19.5
Entrepreneurial Orientation	22	51	5.5	12.8
Digital Competency	18	44	4.5	11.0
Sustainability Orientation	41	38	10.3	9.5
Assessment Diversity	29	61	7.3	15.3
TOTAL	231	414	57.8	103.5

Note. Frequencies represent total coded instances across all syllabi per state. One syllabus may generate multiple coded instances within the same category. Data derived from systematic coding of syllabi collected January–February 2026.

As shown by table 4, there is a substantial difference in the number of coded mentions per category when comparing the two states of Karnataka and Kerala. On average, syllabi produced by Karnataka contain almost twice as many coded mentions than those produced by Kerala (103.5 vs. 57.8 respectively). This trend is particularly evident with respect to both experiential learning and entrepreneurial orientation (experiential learning – Karnataka: 19.5 avg. vs. Kerala: 8.5; entrepreneurial orientation

– Karnataka: 12.8 vs. Kerala: 5.5) which clearly indicates a philosophical difference in curriculum design. An exception to this pattern is sustainability orientation where Kerala slightly out performs Karnataka (10.3 vs. 9.5 per syllabus) which may indicate Kerala's established branding around responsible tourism. These trends provide the basis for comparative claims made in the sections that follow.

4.2. Benchmarking Against UNWTO and NEP 2020

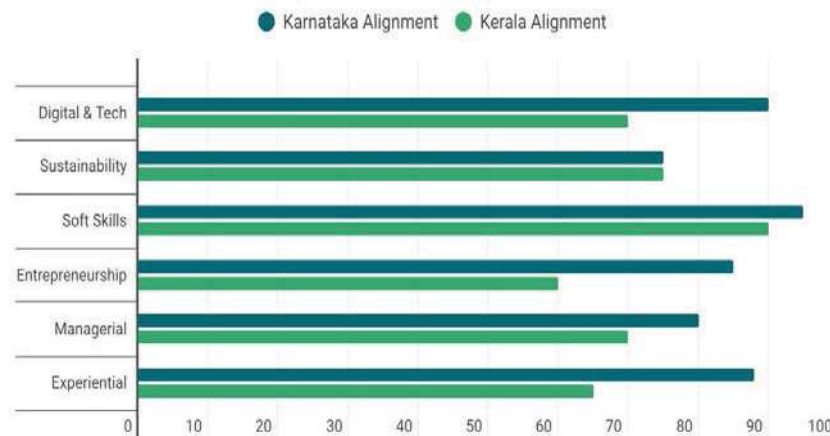


Figure 1: Benchmarking Against UNWTO & NEP-2020

Figure 1 compares tourism courses at universities in Kerala and Karnataka against key competency standards that drawn from the UNWTO TedQual framework and NEP 2020. The evaluation assesses the degree of alignment across six key areas - digital/technological competencies; sustainability focus; communication/soft skills; entrepreneurial orientation management competencies; and experiential learning. Karnataka demonstrates greater alignment with the UNWTO and NEP 2020 competency standards across all categories except sustainability and communication. Kerala is aligned with these competency standards, demonstrating relative strength in sustainability and communication. However, Kerala demonstrates lower levels of alignment in practical/experiential learning based on innovative approaches. Additionally, when comparing the two states' compliance with NEP 2020 directly, Karnataka programs demonstrate higher alignment with NEP 2020s' themes including interdisciplinary learning; skill-building; and connecting with the private sector.

4.3. Comparative Curriculum Dimensions

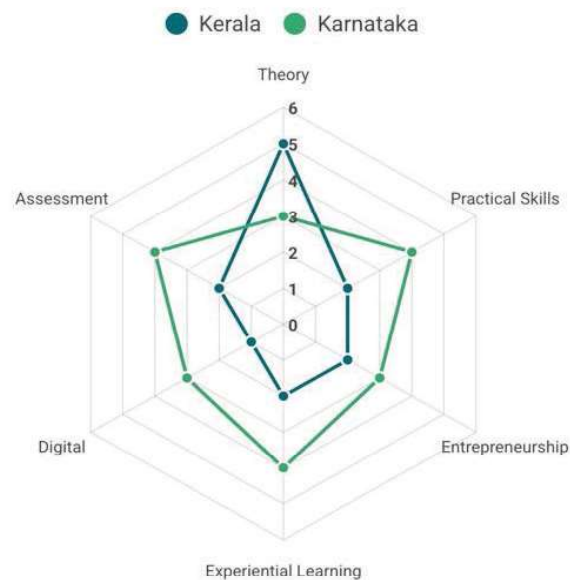


Figure 2: Comparative Assessment of Curriculum Dimensions in Tourism Programmes (*Kerala vs Karnataka*)

The radar-based visualisation (Figure 2) depicts the 6 dimensions of the curricula for tourism education – theoretical base, practical skills, entrepreneurial orientation, experiential learning, digital integration and assessment methods – as they apply to both states. The visualisation clearly illustrates how Kerala places a greater emphasis on theoretical foundation and sustainability, while Karnataka exhibits a more balanced distribution across practical and digital aspects. Most importantly, neither state has demonstrated an equally strong score across each of the 6 dimensions, which signifies that the goal of creating a fully competent tourism-education based on competence-oriented approach is still an aspiration in both regions.

4.4. Entrepreneurship Education: Degree of Implementation and Practical Application

Despite of these evident inter-regional distinctions regarding the degree of implementation and the level of practical application of

entrepreneurship education, there is one significant finding concerning both states: the lack of practice-based implementation of entrepreneurship education. Although many programs and courses include references to entrepreneurship in their program objectives and/or description, the integration of entrepreneurship has been mostly abstract/conceptual instead of being applied/practice-based. For example, in Kerala, three of eight analysed programs included modules titled 'entrepreneurship'. However, all three were based on theoretical models and did not provide students with a structured opportunity to learn through practical experiences. In Karnataka, six out of eight analyzed programs had titles including 'entrepreneurship', and in two of those (i.e., Christ University and Bangalore University) students received project-based evaluations to produce a business-plan. Nevertheless, even in these two strongest examples, the evaluation was strictly based on written work without providing any experience-based training components (such as participation in a startup incubator or involvement with investors/venture launch).

The results indicate that in both states, there is a clear trend: entrepreneurship is viewed as a subject of instruction and therefore primarily taught theoretically, rather than learned through practical experience. This distinction – namely the difference between learning entrepreneurship (e.g., through lectures) and learning through entrepreneurship (e.g., through hands-on experience) – represents the primary pedagogical gap identified by this research.

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that content analysis is effective for examining tourism education and provide the necessary methodology for this research (Yap, 2025; Yağmur et al., 2024). The results provide insight into the entrepreneurship-readiness and competency-orientation of tourism curricula in Kerala and Karnataka, showing not just region-specific differences, but also larger structural issues regarding the development and delivery of curricula. Tourism education globally is being expected to move away from simply transmitting knowledge, and toward developing entrepreneurial, digital, and adaptable competences (Dredge et al., 2012; Sigala, 2018).

5.1. Theory Practice Gap and Curriculum Praxis

One of the most significant findings of this study is the ongoing predominance of a theory-dominant curriculum model in institutions located in Kerala. While theoretically grounded curricula are important,

an over-reliance on theory at the expense of applied learning it can be difficult for students to transform their knowledge into application and represents a disconnection between curriculum as a "product" versus curriculum as "praxis." This result supports recent studies that have argued that many higher education systems in emerging economies have difficulty achieving an appropriate balance between academic rigor and relevancy to business/industry needs (Khoyry & Bellos, 2022; Tomlinson, 2018; Dighliya & Dahiya, 2024). There appears to be little emphasis on developing praxis-oriented learning processes in tourism curricula that reflect specific contexts or experiences. According to Gibb (2005), entrepreneurship education is concerned with learning through entrepreneurship, learning through whereby students develop knowledge through experiential learning in real or simulated entrepreneurial contexts and learning for entrepreneurship (conveys theories, models, and concepts). Conventional lecture-based education treats entrepreneurship as a body of content to be transmitted rather than a dynamic process of transformation inculcating a set of competencies to be practiced (Motta & Galina, 2023).

The present tourism and hospitality education calls for a shift from learning about entrepreneurship to learning through entrepreneurship necessitating a fundamental rethinking of the role of the educator to a learning facilitator. In recognition of this imperative, several higher education institutions recruit faculty members who possess substantive prior industry experience. This shift towards employing educators with industry experience can enrich teaching through simulations, case analysis and tourism industry opportunity identification and bring both academic rigour and real-world entrepreneurship expertise to the classroom (Huang et al., 2025). The faculty structure can be established strategically including full-time, part-time, and industry mentors (Huang et al., 2025).

In tourism entrepreneurial education, Problem Based Learning (PBL) must be adopted to enable students to engage experiential learning contexts that mirror professional and industrial practice (Ginaya et al., 2020). Institutions can build strong networks with tourism businesses and entrepreneurs which will facilitate student mentorships, internships, and real-world projects, enabling greater exposure to and deeper understanding of the industry.

5.2. Comparative Strengths and Remaining Gaps of Karnataka

The curriculum for tourism programs in Karnataka has a comparative advantage in terms of providing students with hands-on experience through structured internship opportunities and project work. Internal

evaluations of student performance provide additional opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills. These approaches are grounded in Kolb's (1984) ELT and have been proven to enhance employability and improve the ability of tourism program graduates to enter the profession. However, these experiences are still unevenly distributed across tourism education programs in Karnataka. There are few or no entrepreneurial experiences provided to students during their academic careers in the form of business simulation activities, incubator projects, or venture creation exercises. As a result, entrepreneurship education is primarily focused on the conceptual aspects of starting a new business and lacks real-world application (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Ratten, 2020; Tiberius & Weyland, 2024). Recent studies have indicated that entrepreneurship education is generally limited to a theoretical approach until it is accompanied by experiential and action-based learning experiences (Subedi & Bhandari, 2024; Gulzar, 2024).

5.3. Digital Competency Deficit

The tourism industry faces unprecedented rapid technological transformation, encompassing AI chatbots, big data analytics, blockchain and robotic technology, virtual tours, video conferencing platforms, online booking systems, and AI assisted service delivery. According to Khoo et al., (2024), women entrepreneurs face considerable obstacles in acquiring digital competencies due to gendered inequalities. Although the application of digital transformation has become central to modern tourism, educational programs generally provide only rudimentary information technology training. Consistent with current literature emphasizing the necessity of embedding digital skills into tourism education to enhance innovation and competitive advantage (Sigala, 2018; Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015), most programs include only basic IT skills while advanced digital skills including data analysis, artificial intelligence, and digital marketing. Additionally, this deficiency is exacerbated by post-COVID-19 adoption of digital or hybrid tourism models that have accelerated industry's shift away from traditional tourist service delivery models (Buhalis et al., 2023; Gretzel et al., 2020; Mariani & Baggio, 2022). Strengthening faculty training in digital and innovative pedagogies to enhance their capacity to use modern educational platforms and technologies is essential (Huang et al., 2025).

5.4. Assessment Practices and Learning Outcomes

In addition to program structure and delivery models, there is a significant difference in how students are assessed that has an impact on

their student learning experiences. Many programs still use the traditional method of assessing students through written exams. Written exams alone cannot measure higher-order skills such as creative problem-solving, innovative thinking and entrepreneurial mindsets. Assessments based on competency - project based assessments, self-reflection and performance-based evaluations - help develop these types of skills (Khaled et al., 2014; Farsari, 2022). The lack of consistency with assessment approaches used by non-autonomous institutions, autonomous institutions and deemed universities also adds to inconsistencies in comparing or measuring learning outcomes. These findings provide evidence that many business school curricula do not systematically incorporate entrepreneurship into their curricula (Malekipour et al., 2017).

5.5. Differences between Undergraduate and Graduate curricula

In addition to differences in program levels, there is a concern about how curricula progress from one level to the next. Postgraduate programs that are supposed to develop advanced skills and the ability to strategically apply knowledge in practice often appear to focus on theory and may have little or no differentiation from their undergraduate counterparts. Therefore, the overall value of graduate education in preparing future leaders and entrepreneurs remains limited by its failure to provide adequate preparation (Airey & Tribe, 2005; ezeuduji et al., 2023)

The gap between conceptual and operational approaches to tourism entrepreneurship education has been identified in this research. According to Motta & Galina (2023), the skills to be inculcated through entrepreneurial education include self-efficacy, persuasion, creativity, teamwork and collaboration, risk-taking, problem-solving, managerial abilities, and networking. Nevertheless, a lack of alignment exists within both curriculum development and the changing requirements for competencies in the tourism sector. Despite an increasing number of government policies emphasizing entrepreneurship, employability, and innovation, these priorities are still not being successfully integrated into curriculum delivery. This research adds value to the existing body of knowledge, which previously indicated that while the curriculum can determine if students have developed their entrepreneurial readiness, it is also dependent upon the effectiveness with which these components are delivered through all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment (Melchor-Duran et al., 2025; Ratten, 2020). While there is an established consensus across academia that entrepreneurship should be seen as one of the primary outcomes of a successful tourism graduate program, it appears that the inclusion of entrepreneurship as part of the curriculum continues to be largely symbolic. Therefore, this finding aligns with

previous studies indicating that entrepreneurship education typically occurs via theory-based instruction and rarely as a hands-on or experiential process (Nabi et al., 2017; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

5.7. Implications

The results have important implications for theory, policy, and practice. From a theoretical standpoint, this study supports the necessity of rethinking tourism curriculums as CBE frameworks that are both praxis-oriented and encompass knowledge, skill, and an entrepreneurial mindset (Pacala, 2023; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). In terms of policy, tourism curricular reforms will be required in order for higher education regulators to link tourism curricula to emerging trends related to digital transformation, sustainability and innovation using competency-based models as well as to strengthen academia-industry partnerships (Mariani & Baggio, 2022; Gretzel et al., 2020). For example, there is specific evidence of Kerala's under-performance relative to Karnataka in terms of the degree to which each state integrated entrepreneurship into their tourism programs (Kerala = 5.5 vs. Karnataka = 12.8 coded mentions per syllabus on average), suggesting that the university regulatory agencies in Kerala should consider revising the curriculum. At the institutional level, tourism program managers should include structured entrepreneurship elements (including start up incubation modules, business plan development, and simulation-based learning) in conjunction with advanced digital competence when developing their tourism programs. They also should transition from traditional assessments based on written exams to project-based and reflective evaluations that can measure the higher-order skills being taught and learned (Tiberius & Weyland, 2024; Farsari, 2022).

5.8. Potential Areas for Future Research

The study could be extended beyond syllabus analysis to include empirical validation of the effectiveness of tourism curricula based on three types of stakeholders: students, faculty members and the private sector. The study can also be extended to longitudinal studies that analyse the influence of tourism education on the development of entrepreneurs' results. Future research may concentrate areas including understanding how digital innovation, sustainability competencies and gender inclusive entrepreneurship education are going to shape the next generation of tourism professionals (Henry et al., 2024; Melchor-Duran et al., 2025), or how autonomous colleges compared to affiliated universities contribute to create innovative curriculums. To provide a more comprehensive view of the quality of entrepreneurship education in India's tourism programs

future studies should combine syllabus analysis with classroom observations, student survey data and graduate tracer studies.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how UG and PG tourism programs in Kerala and Karnataka prepare students to be entrepreneurs, using an assessment model based on CBE principles. While both states have implemented a high level of theory into their tourism education programs, and have incorporated many employability-related elements into their programs, the application of these theories in a real-world setting has been lacking. Specifically, entrepreneurship education is heavily focused on concepts related to being an entrepreneur, rather than providing students with skills necessary to develop entrepreneurial competencies through experiential learning experiences.

The limited inclusion of digital competencies and innovation oriented learning highlights a misalignment between the current curriculum designs used by both states and the changing requirements of the tourism industry. The necessity for a paradigm shift towards CBE-experiential-interdisciplinary curriculum frameworks that include entrepreneurship as a key learning objective is demonstrated in this study. This type of transition will enable educators to better prepare students to find employment opportunities within the tourism industry, and to create new innovative products and services that contribute to sustainable development and economic growth (Melchor-Duran et al., 2025; Gretzel et al., 2020).

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