

STRENGTHENING ENTREPRENEURIAL CAPACITY THROUGH STRUCTURED BUSINESS IDEATION AND INCUBATION: A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Universities are increasingly expected to foster student entrepreneurship, yet many campus-based incubation programs operate under highly compressed timelines, overstating financial milestones without evaluating operational failure modes or seasonal market biases. This community engagement program aimed to strengthen students' entrepreneurial capacity through a structured business ideation and incubation model implemented within the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Tulungagung, while tracking quantitative competency improvements and operational variance across cohorts. Engaging 40 undergraduate students over a synchronized 8-week timeline, the intervention utilized a participatory community development approach integrating needs assessment, business ideation workshops, Business Model Canvas development, digital marketing training, a 4-week active incubation phase, and a final pitching evaluation. Data credibility was secured through the triangulation of field observations, documentation, semi-structured interviews with both high-performing and struggling cohorts, and paired pre- and post-test assessments. The results revealed significant quantitative competency gains, particularly in digital marketing (+29.30 points), alongside the operational deployment of student ventures like *Racha Privat*, *Sakha Sweet*, *Dapur Santri*, and *Fresh Bite*. While *Racha Privat* achieved a substantial revenue surge by the eighth week, this milestone was partially accelerated by seasonal market demands linked to academic examination periods. Conversely, product-based cohorts faced strategic friction, proving that high digital engagement does not automatically secure immediate transactional conversion. This study impacts future university-based entrepreneurial ecosystems by proving that sustainable student venture creation requires structured experiential models integrated with longitudinal post-incubation support and tailored financing.

Keywords: business incubation, entrepreneurial ecosystem, business ideation, student entrepreneurship, community engagement, university business incubator

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities are increasingly recognized as pivotal hubs for regional economic development and innovation, moving beyond traditional educational mandates to foster robust academic entrepreneurship ecosystems (Correia et al., 2024; Judijanto et al., 2024). In emerging economies, the cultivation of entrepreneurial capacity among higher education students has become a strategic priority to mitigate graduate unemployment and drive digital transformation (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Jatmiko et al., 2026). However, transforming nascent student intentions into viable, operating business ventures remains a complex challenge. Many student-entrepreneurs struggle during the transition from conceptual ideation to market execution due to a lack of structured guidance, insufficient business planning skills, and limited market validation capabilities (Bardales-Cárdenas et al., 2024). Consequently, there is an urgent need for higher education institutions to design and implement comprehensive community engagement models that bridge the gap between theoretical entrepreneurial knowledge and practical, resilient business execution.

To address these challenges, university entrepreneurial ecosystems must provide structured pathways that guide students through the volatile early stages of venture creation (Harima & Harima, 2024). While digital technology and modern entrepreneurship education have significantly boosted students' entrepreneurial intentions (Udekwe & Iwu, 2024), intention alone does not guarantee business sustainability (Waskita & Ashari, 2025). Student-led startups often experience high failure rates because university interventions frequently focus solely on short-term training rather than long-term incubation and post-program sustainability. Furthermore, existing campus-based incubation models often operate under strict temporal constraints, attempting to accelerate ideation, business model development, and market validation within highly compressed timelines. This fast-paced approach risks generating overstated or premature claims of financial success, as early revenue growth during short incubation periods may merely reflect temporary seasonal market demands such as academic examination periods for educational services rather than the actual long-term viability of the business model (Ashari & Waskita, 2026; Sartono et al., 2021).

Moreover, university incubation research frequently suffers from survivorship bias, disproportionately showcasing successful student ventures while neglecting a comprehensive failure analysis of groups that struggle to generate immediate traction. A truly sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem within a university must examine the dynamics of all participant cohorts equally to understand the systemic barriers faced by student entrepreneurs in diverse sectors, ranging from food and beverage to digital services (Ayala-Gaytán et al., 2024). Therefore, a structured, multi-stage intervention that integrates rigorous needs assessment, iterative Business Model Canvas (BMC) refinement, digital marketing competencies, and balanced performance evaluations across all incubated teams is crucial (Osterwalder et al., 2015).

This community engagement program was designed to implement and evaluate a structured business ideation and incubation model within the Business Incubator of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Tulungagung. By engaging 40 active students, the program sought to strengthen

entrepreneurial capacity through an integrated, five-stage community development approach. This study contributes to the existing literature on academic entrepreneurship by providing an empirical, multi-dimensional analysis of student venture creation. It explicitly addresses the nuances of short-term incubation performance, evaluates the uneven development across different business sectors, and establishes a transparent framework for measuring authentic competence growth, thereby offering a more rigorous and accountable model for future university-led community engagement initiatives.

2. METHODS

This community engagement program adopted a participatory community development approach aimed at strengthening entrepreneurial capacity through the establishment of a university-based entrepreneurial ecosystem (Waskita, 2025). The intervention was implemented through the Business Incubator of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Tulungagung, which served as a collaborative platform connecting students, academic mentors, practitioners, and local business stakeholders. The program was conducted from 3 February 2026 to 31 March 2026, spanning a total of eight operational weeks to allow for comprehensive mentoring and market monitoring in Universitas Tulungagung and several partner business locations in Tulungagung Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The participants consisted of 40 undergraduate students from various study programs within the Faculty of Economics who demonstrated interest in entrepreneurship and business development. Several participants had already initiated micro-scale business activities, while others were in the ideation stage of venture creation.

The program design was developed based on contemporary perspectives of entrepreneurial ecosystem development and university business incubation. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are increasingly recognized as integrated environments that facilitate entrepreneurial learning, networking, innovation, mentoring, and venture creation through collaboration among multiple stakeholders (Correia et al., 2024; Harima & Harima, 2024; Widhajati et al., 2025). Likewise, business incubation has been identified as an effective mechanism for supporting entrepreneurial competencies and startup readiness among university students. Therefore, this community engagement initiative combined business ideation, entrepreneurial training, mentoring, incubation, and business validation activities into a structured intervention framework.

To ensure empirical accountability and address potential biases in performance tracking, the implementation process was executed across five sequential stages over an explicit 8-week timeline:

- **Stage 1: Needs Assessment and Entrepreneurial Mapping (Week 1):** Initial observations, informal interviews, and focus group discussions were conducted with prospective participants to identify entrepreneurial interests, existing business experiences, perceived challenges, and expectations regarding entrepreneurial development. Crucially, a baseline quantitative *pre-test* assessment was administered during this stage to measure students' initial entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial confidence, business planning skills, and digital marketing capabilities (Eldon et al., 2026). The findings served as the

basis for designing training materials and mentoring activities aligned with participants' needs.

- **Stage 2: Entrepreneurial Awareness and Business Ideation Training (Week 2):** Participants attended interactive workshops introducing entrepreneurship fundamentals, opportunity recognition, design thinking, customer problem identification, and value proposition development. Through collaborative exercises, participants generated and refined business ideas based on local economic potential and emerging market trends. This stage was designed to stimulate entrepreneurial creativity while encouraging participants to develop innovative and market-oriented solutions.
- **Stage 3: Business Model Development and Digital Marketing Capacity Building (Week 3):** Participants were introduced to the Business Model Canvas (BMC) framework to assist them in designing sustainable business models. Training sessions covered customer segmentation, value propositions, distribution channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structures. In addition, digital marketing workshops were conducted to enhance participants' abilities in branding, social media marketing, content creation, marketplace utilization, and digital customer engagement. This segment directly integrates digital entrepreneurship education, which significantly contributes to entrepreneurial readiness and venture development among university students (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Udekwe & Iwu, 2024).
- **Stage 4: Business Incubation, Mentoring, and Market Tracking (Weeks 4–7):** Each participant or business team received structured mentoring from academic facilitators and entrepreneurial practitioners. Mentoring sessions focused on business validation, product development, operational planning, marketing strategies, financial planning, and problem-solving. The incubation process adopted an experiential learning approach, allowing participants to test business assumptions, receive feedback, and improve their business concepts based on real-world conditions. To mitigate overestimating short-term gains and control for seasonal market fluctuations, teams were required to track operations over a continuous 4-week period, submitting weekly business reports detailing transaction data, customer acquisition, and marketing conversion rates.
- **Stage 5: Business Pitching, Comparative Evaluation, and Ecosystem Strengthening (Week 8):** Participants presented their completed business ideas, finalized business models, and multi-week operational reports before a panel comprising lecturers, business practitioners, and incubation facilitators. The evaluation explicitly focused on business feasibility, innovation, market potential, scalability, and implementation readiness. Concurrently, a final quantitative *post-test* assessment was administered to evaluate competency improvements. This final stage also aimed to strengthen collaborative relationships among students, the university business incubator, local entrepreneurs, and supporting institutions, thereby contributing to the sustainability of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Data collection was conducted using multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive evaluation of the intervention outcomes. Observation was employed throughout the program to monitor participant engagement, entrepreneurial behavior, and business development progress. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants including representatives from both high-performing and struggling business groups to avoid survivorship bias and facilitators to explore experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and recommendations. Documentation analysis included attendance records, training materials, business model canvases, mentoring reports, photographs, and participant business proposals. Furthermore, the pre- and post-program assessments were utilized to quantitatively measure changes in entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial confidence, business planning skills, and digital marketing competencies.

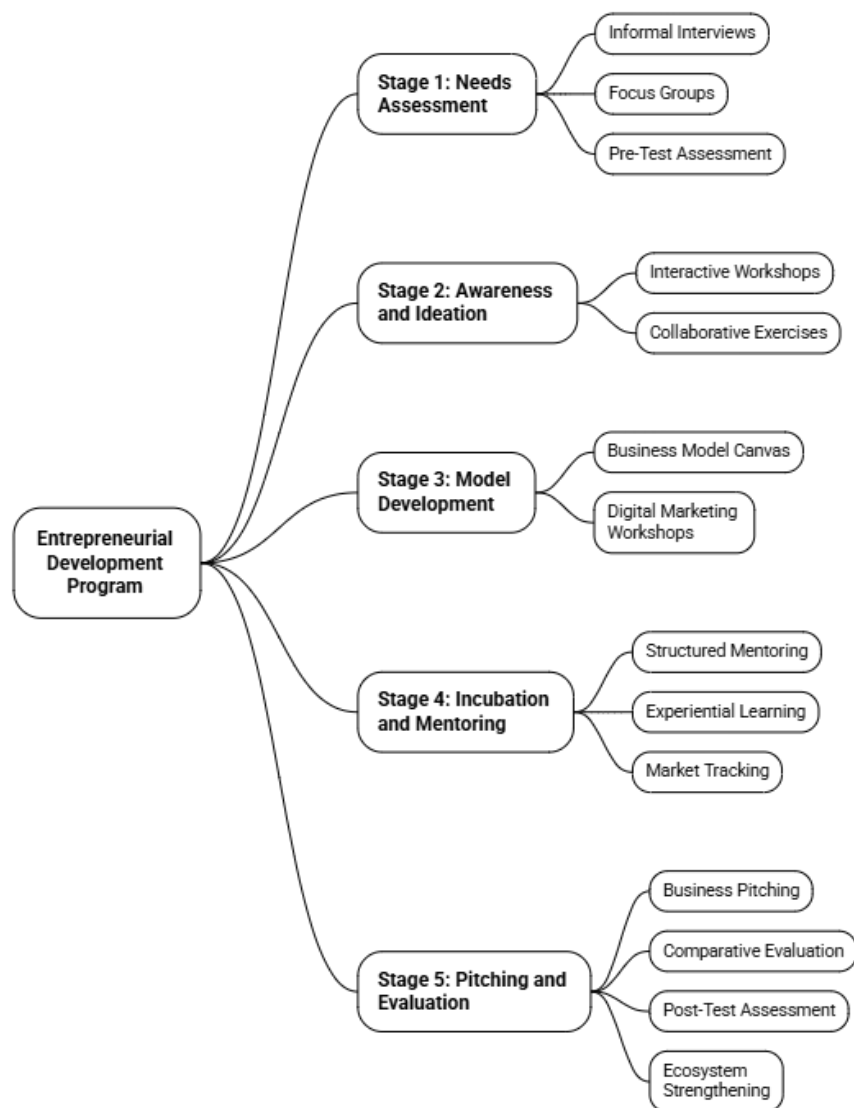


Figure 1. Entrepreneurial Development Program Structure

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures involving data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. Quantitative descriptive analysis specifically utilizing paired-sample frameworks to compare the baseline *pre-test* and culmination *post-test* scores was utilized to summarize participant characteristics, training participation, and competency improvement indicators. Triangulation among observations, interviews, documentation, and quantitative assessment results was applied to enhance data credibility and ensure robust, multi-dimensional evaluation of program outcomes.

The strategic framework underlying this intervention was based on a community development perspective that views entrepreneurial capacity building as a continuous process involving knowledge enhancement, capability development, mentoring support, and ecosystem strengthening (Ashari & Waskita, 2025). Rather than emphasizing entrepreneurship training alone, the program integrated business ideation, incubation, mentoring, and stakeholder collaboration into a holistic entrepreneurial ecosystem model (Waskita et al., 2024). This integrated approach is consistent with recent literature suggesting that entrepreneurial success among university students is more likely to emerge when educational interventions are embedded within supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems that provide access to resources, networks, mentorship, and practical business experiences (Ayala-Gaytán et al., 2024; Correia et al., 2024; Harima & Harima, 2024).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the community engagement program through the Business Incubator of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Tulungagung, successfully facilitated the transformation of entrepreneurial intentions into entrepreneurial actions among participating students. The program involved 40 students who were encouraged to develop business ideas, validate market opportunities, design business models, implement digital marketing strategies, and operate real business ventures under a structured incubation framework. The intervention was designed not merely to transfer entrepreneurial knowledge but to create a practical entrepreneurial ecosystem where students could experience the process of venture creation and business development.

At the beginning of the program, most participants demonstrated strong entrepreneurial interest but had limited experience in business implementation. Similar conditions have been widely reported in entrepreneurship education literature, where entrepreneurial intention often exceeds entrepreneurial action due to limited access to mentoring, business networks, and practical incubation support (Rifa'i et al., 2024; Ashari et al., 2025). To evaluate the direct impact of the structured intervention on participants' competencies, quantitative pre- and post-program assessments were administered to measure shifts across four primary entrepreneurial dimensions. The descriptive statistical results of these assessments are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Quantitative Assessment of Entrepreneurial Competency Improvements (N = 40)

Competency Dimension	Mean Pre-Test Score (Scale 1–100)	Mean Post-Test Score (Scale 1–100)	Mean Score Improvement	Competency Gain Status
Entrepreneurial Knowledge	62.50	84.25	+21.75	High Growth
Entrepreneurial Confidence	58.00	79.50	+21.50	High Growth
Business Planning Skills	51.25	76.80	+25.55	Significant Advance
Digital Marketing Competencies	44.10	73.40	+29.30	Highest Growth

The quantitative indicators in Table 1 objectively confirm that the combination of business ideation workshops, mentoring sessions, business model development activities, and digital marketing training successfully enhanced the participants' entrepreneurial capabilities. The most substantial increase occurred within the digital marketing dimension (+29.30), reflecting the direct impact of the intensive digital capacity-building workshops. This structured process aligns with the growing emphasis on experiential entrepreneurship education, which positions students as active entrepreneurs rather than passive recipients of entrepreneurial knowledge.

One of the most visible outcomes of the incubation process was the emergence of several student-led ventures operating in different sectors, including educational services, food and beverage products, and creative businesses. Among these ventures, *Racha Privat* demonstrated particularly significant business growth throughout the incubation period. Initially operating with a relatively small customer base, the business progressively expanded its service capacity and customer reach. Weekly revenue increased from IDR 730,000 during the initial observation period to IDR 1,565,000 by the eighth week, indicating substantial business growth and increasing market acceptance. The addition of new students such as Naysila, Anya, Diya, Safira, Aqila, Kirana, and Sigqa further demonstrated the growing trust of parents and students in the tutoring services provided.

However, critical reflection indicates that this financial surge was partially accelerated by external market variables; the increase was largely supported by the acquisition of new customers and the ability of the business to respond flexibly to customer learning needs, particularly during examination periods. This reveals a seasonal market fluctuation where demand for tutoring spikes naturally, meaning that while the structural components of the incubator enabled the operational readiness of *Racha Privat*, the revenue milestone must be interpreted alongside seasonal academic cycles rather than purely as a linear outcome of incubation mentorship. Nevertheless, the growth achieved by *Racha Privat* illustrates how business incubation can facilitate entrepreneurial learning through direct interaction with market dynamics. Rather than learning entrepreneurship solely through classroom instruction, students were required to identify customer needs, manage service delivery, maintain customer relationships, and adapt business strategies according to

market conditions. Such findings support the argument that university business incubators serve as effective mechanisms for bridging the gap between entrepreneurial theory and entrepreneurial practice.

To avoid survivorship bias, it is crucial to analyze the developmental variance across the remaining student cohorts, as not all business groups achieved similar levels of commercial success. While *Racha Privat* converted operational training into direct revenue, other teams encountered significant strategic friction. For instance, the business venture *Sakha Sweet* implemented promotional campaigns through Instagram and TikTok by producing visual and video-based content designed to increase product visibility and customer engagement. The business team reported improvements in product presentation, promotional consistency, and communication with potential customers through social media channels. Similarly, the *Fresh Bite* business consistently implemented social media marketing activities through Instagram and TikTok. Although the business had not yet generated sales during the observed reporting period, it succeeded in generating audience engagement through likes, comments, and content interactions.

Meanwhile, *Dapur Santri* faced notable logistical bottlenecks and operational constraints in food supply chain management, slowing down their production rollout. These variations reflect differences in market attractiveness, product competitiveness, and entrepreneurial experience among the student groups. The inability of *Fresh Bite* and *Dapur Santri* to achieve immediate sales conversion highlights that digital engagement does not automatically equate to transactional conversion. This outcome provided valuable entrepreneurial learning regarding market competition, consumer behavior, and promotional effectiveness, demonstrating that participants were beginning to understand the customer acquisition process and the critical distinction between brand awareness and sales conversion.

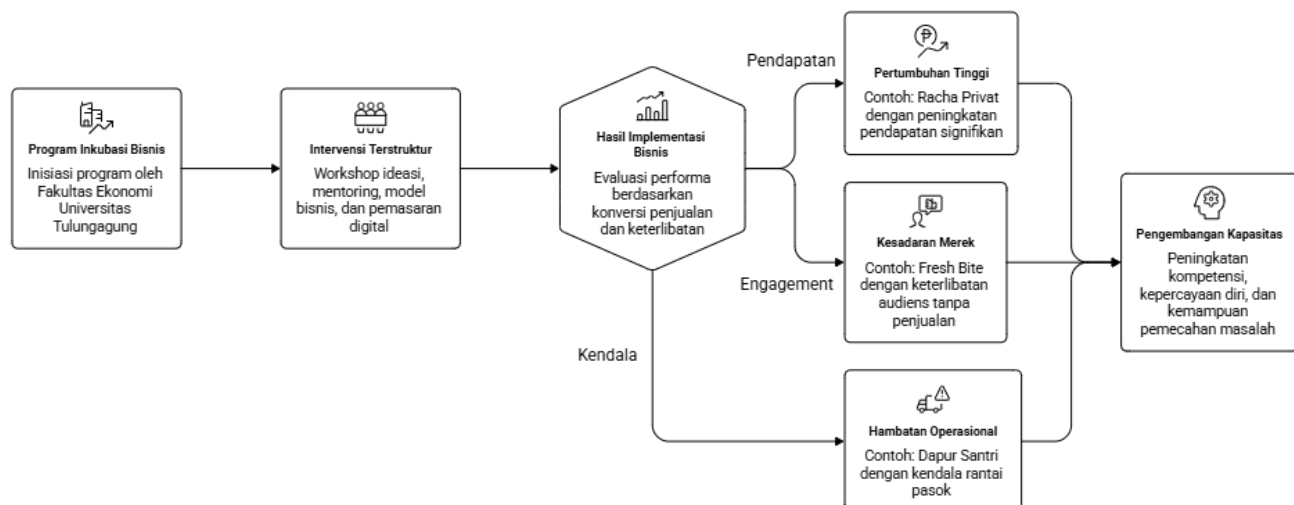


Figure 2. Business Incubation Process in Faculty of Economics, Universitas Tulungagung

The total implementation outcomes indicate that the incubation process generated both tangible and intangible results. Tangible outputs included business ventures, business reports,

digital marketing content, customer testimonials, revenue generation, and documented business operations. Intangible outcomes included improved entrepreneurial confidence, stronger opportunity recognition skills, enhanced business planning capabilities, increased problem-solving capacity, and greater readiness to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Table 2. Output Indicators Generated Through the Incubation Program

Output Category	Evidence Generated	Operational Trajectory & Variance
Student Business Ventures	"Racha Privat, Sakha Sweet, Dapur Santri, Fresh Bite"	Varied conversion rates from high revenue (<i>Racha Privat</i>) to brand awareness (<i>Fresh Bite</i>).
Business Operations	Active business implementation	Operational across all 4 groups with staggered launch dates.
Business Documentation	Weekly business reports	Standardized tracking of cash flow and operational hurdles.
Digital Marketing Activities	Instagram and TikTok campaigns	Active content creation; high engagement but uneven sales impact.
Customer Acquisition	New customers obtained	Concentrated heavily in <i>Racha Privat</i> and <i>Sakha Sweet</i> .
Customer Testimonials	Positive customer feedback	Validation achieved primarily for service quality and taste profiles.
Revenue Generation	Multiple businesses generated income	Partial revenue realization; highlights early-stage financial vulnerability.
Business Evaluation Reports	Reflection and performance analysis	Documented strategic adjustments based on market feedback.

Beyond these immediate outputs, the program also produced broader developmental outcomes associated with entrepreneurial capacity enhancement. Participants demonstrated increasing ability to identify market opportunities, formulate business strategies, communicate value propositions, and evaluate business performance. The mentoring process encouraged students to engage in continuous reflection and business improvement, which are critical

components of entrepreneurial learning. Furthermore, the requirement to submit weekly business reports enabled participants to develop monitoring and evaluation skills that are essential for sustainable business management.

Table 3. Outcome Indicators of Entrepreneurial Capacity Development

Outcome Dimension	Evidence of Achievement	Systematic Field Observations
Opportunity Recognition	Identification of viable business opportunities	Shift from broad conceptual ideas to localized niche markets.
Entrepreneurial Confidence	Independent operation of business activities	Increased autonomy in executing real financial transactions.
Business Planning	Development of structured business strategies	Evolution of BMC components based on practical field validation.
Marketing Competence	Utilization of digital marketing platforms	Mastery of short-form video metrics on TikTok and Instagram.
Customer Relationship Management	Acquisition and retention of customers	Development of customer service protocols and parent engagement.
Problem-Solving Skills	Adaptation to market and operational challenges	Ability to pivot promotional tactics when initial sales stalled.
Startup Readiness	Operational business ventures established	Registration within the faculty incubator database for continuity.
Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Participation	Engagement with mentors and incubator support	Active continuous advisory loops with academic and practitioner experts.

The success of the program was influenced by several supporting factors, including strong institutional commitment from the Faculty of Economics and the Business Incubator, active involvement of mentors, high student motivation, and the availability of digital technologies. Nevertheless, several challenges were encountered during program implementation. Limited

startup capital, academic workload, and restricted market access emerged as common constraints across all teams. However, these challenges should not be viewed solely as obstacles; rather, they constitute valuable entrepreneurial learning experiences that contribute to the development of resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking among participants.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that a community development approach integrated with a university-based business incubator can effectively strengthen entrepreneurial capacity among students. The combination of business ideation, mentoring, digital marketing training, and practical business implementation enabled participants to experience entrepreneurship as a real-world process rather than merely an academic concept. Consequently, the program contributes not only to student entrepreneurial development but also to the broader discourse on entrepreneurial ecosystem development in higher education institutions, providing empirical support for the proposition that entrepreneurial capacity is strengthened most effectively when embedded within a holistic, experiential ecosystem.

4. CONCLUSION

The community engagement program implemented through the Business Incubator of the Faculty of Economics, Universitas Tulungagung successfully strengthened students' entrepreneurial capacity by integrating structured business ideation, entrepreneurial training, mentoring, and business incubation within an 8-week university-based entrepreneurial ecosystem framework. The program effectively transformed entrepreneurial intentions into entrepreneurial actions, supported by empirical quantitative gains across all core competency dimensions most notably in digital marketing capabilities and demonstrated through the operational deployment of student-led ventures during the incubation period. The findings confirm that entrepreneurial development among university students becomes profoundly more effective when standard entrepreneurship education is systematically combined with experiential learning and continuous, structured incubation support.

Beyond improving theoretical entrepreneurial knowledge, the program enabled participants to develop critical, practical competencies in opportunity recognition, business planning, customer engagement, digital marketing, and real-time business management (Eldon & Waskita, 2024). The emergence of functional business ventures and measurable operational performance indicates that the structured incubation model successfully bridged the gap between entrepreneurial theory and entrepreneurial practice. However, a key academic insight generated from this program is that short-term incubation models must be evaluated with strict objectivity. While certain ventures like *Racha Privat* achieved rapid revenue growth, their financial milestones were intertwined with seasonal market demands, such as academic examination periods. Furthermore, the uneven traction across the cohorts where some teams excelled in early commercialization while others, like *Fresh Bite* and *Dapur Santri*, faced strategic friction in sales conversion and supply chain logistics underscores that digital promotion does not automatically translate into market transactions.

Consequently, university business incubators must serve not only as baseline entrepreneurship support facilities but as dynamic, long-term community development platforms that connect students, academic mentors, practitioners, and local stakeholders within a transparent and collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem. This integrated approach creates a more realistic and resilient pathway for venture creation than conventional, short-term entrepreneurship training alone.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the established ventures and mitigate post-program collapse, future community engagement programs must strengthen longitudinal post-incubation support. Higher education institutions should expand access to seed capital financing, build institutional market networks, and implement advanced, targeted mentoring services tailored to the specific operational frictions identified during the incubation phase. Continuous longitudinal monitoring is strongly recommended to evaluate venture survival rates and growth beyond the active reporting period. Ultimately, the Community Development-Based Business Incubation Model refined through this program offers a highly accountable, practical, and replicable framework for other higher education institutions seeking to accelerate the transition from nascent student intentions to sustainable, market-ready entrepreneurial actions.

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