

Article

Critical Issues and Trends in Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Higher Education in the Post-COVID-19 Era in China and Spain

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Abstract: In the post-COVID-19 era, where innovation and entrepreneurship as an engine for economic development is a top priority for each country, acquiring various skills through innovation and entrepreneurship education is a trend for higher education students. We focus our analysis on two public universities in China and Spain with some similarities in the implementation of innovation and entrepreneurship education. To obtain our information, we conducted interviews with multiple experts in both universities. The study shows that both countries provide funding and policies to promote innovation and entrepreneurship education as innovation and entrepreneurship education is seen as making the university more visible, both at the national and international levels, and as providing society with employment opportunities. We conclude that although innovation and entrepreneurship education design and definition in both universities are different, their development characteristics and trends are the same. Moreover, both universities face common difficulties, namely financial support, management support, and integration with different disciplines. Finally, innovation and entrepreneurship education promote also internationalization and regional development, which requires both countries to strengthen foreign language education and the provision of more entrepreneurial support services.

Keywords: higher education; innovation and entrepreneurship education; skills; socio-economic development; China; Spain



Citation: Qiu, Y.; García-Aracil, A.; Isusi-Fagoaga, R. Critical Issues and Trends in Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Higher Education in the Post-COVID-19 Era in China and Spain. *Educ. Sci.* **2023**, *13*, 407. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040407>

Academic Editor: Vasiliki Brinia

Received: 8 March 2023

Revised: 5 April 2023

Accepted: 15 April 2023

Published: 17 April 2023



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1. Introduction

Innovation and entrepreneurship are the main drivers of an economy's competitiveness and growth [1]. According to the definitions of the twenty-second edition of the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, entrepreneurship is not only related to the creation of a business; it involves a complex set of actions. Entrepreneurship is related to the “action and effect of undertaking” [2]; undertaking is “to undertake and begin a work, a business, an endeavor, especially if it involves difficulty or danger” [2]. In 2008, the European Commission defined entrepreneurship as the ability to transform ideas into action. On the other hand, innovation is the “action and effect of innovating” [3] as well as the “creation or modification of a product, process or service and its introduction in a market” [3]. Innovation is creating something within a company by transforming an idea or a product into a marketable milestone or service that represents an improvement of the existing offer [4]. According to the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [5,6], in response to the growing need for a more competent and talented workforce, higher education institutions (HEIs) all around the world have started to offer programs in innovation

management and entrepreneurship as a way to promote the integration of innovation and entrepreneurship education. It is seen as a tactic to encourage creativity [7].

Entrepreneurship represents an attitude of not being afraid of effort; it demands perseverance and resistance. That is, if you fall down you can get up again. There is no need to be afraid of failure. Entrepreneurship involves overcoming the fear of failure in order to seek innovation and assuming the risks involved. Entrepreneurs are architects of their own futures [8].

Entrepreneurial elements include the creation of new businesses, risk taking, motivational initiatives, decision making, and having a vision of growth for the future; these can be related to starting an entrepreneurial process involving markets, products, competitors, suppliers, customers, etc. [8].

Innovation is crucial for value creation, growth, and employment, and innovation processes take place at the enterprise, regional, and national levels. Innovation will lead to more new businesses or products, as well as to the increased competitiveness of existing companies.

The review of the literature shows that the capacity to innovate and undertake is associated with national competitive strategies that can enhance many sectors of the economy, as well as generate opportunities and introduce competencies in productivity [9]. Thus, it is necessary to encourage and educate people to be entrepreneurial and innovative [10]. Twenty-first-century education goals for all educational institutions should include a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship in order to produce future workers with the skills to drive regional and national economic health [11]. For this reason, governments, universities, and societies worldwide have steadily adjusted education's focus to innovation and entrepreneurship education [12]. In 1991, the Tokyo International Conference on Education defined "innovation and entrepreneurship education" as cultivating strongly innovative character, including initiative, risk taking, entrepreneurship, the ability to work independently, and technical, social, and management skills [13]. In this context, innovation and entrepreneurship education (hereinafter referred to as IEE) is an active methodology that promotes above all the stimulation of entrepreneurship, not only in an economic but also a social sense. That is, IEE should promote a set of transversal competencies that people may use throughout their lives, not only to create a company or business but also for the purpose of empowering them to become active citizens [14].

For its part, the European Commission indicates that entrepreneurship education consists of students developing the necessary skills and mindset to be able to turn creative ideas into entrepreneurial actions. It is a key competency for all learners, fostering personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion, and employability. It is relevant throughout the lifelong learning process, in all learning disciplines and in all forms of education and training (formal, non-formal, and informal) that contribute to an entrepreneurial spirit or behavior, with or without a commercial aim [15].

On the other hand, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [16] considers that entrepreneurship education, in a broad sense, refers to the cultivation of pioneering individuals. It is equally important for salaried people because employers or individuals require employees to be professionals in their careers. In addition to achievements, they increasingly need employees to have initiative, adventurous spirit, entrepreneurial and independent work skills, and technical, social, and managerial skills.

UNESCO points out the need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) education target of significantly increasing the number of young people and adults who have the necessary skills, particularly technical and vocational, to access employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship by 2030 [16]. While IEE is an effective way to realize this SDG target through higher education, IEE should be considered lifelong education, as life is essentially a type of entrepreneurial process; people strive to find their ideal development space, that is, to find a fulfilling career [17]. Thus, IEE is closely linked to the SDG target goal 4: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all [16].

The effects of COVID-19 have altered the outlook for the global economy since the projections published in the April 2021 edition of the World Economic Outlook [18]. A good understanding of the challenges ahead will help us to overcome this crisis in the most rapid, effective, and sustainable manner. It is clear that local strategic capacities are crucial. The speed and effectiveness of responses to the emergency presented clear differences according to the scientific-technological-entrepreneurial capabilities of each country and the level of development of their innovation ecosystems [19].

There is overwhelming evidence that firms do not relocate high-value-added activities if the destined locations do not have an adequate supply of qualified personnel and the capacity for innovation. Consequently, countries of a region that want to take advantage of the opportunities opened up by what has come to be known as “nearshoring” will have to invest in training talent and strengthening local R&D as well as entrepreneurship and innovation capabilities [19].

In China in the last 10 years, IEE has generated many benefits; however, there is a large gap between China and other developed countries. Since 2015, the Chinese Ministry of Education, together with relevant central departments, has promoted innovation and entrepreneurship education for college students by organizing the Internet+ College Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition for College Students in China, which has attracted 6.03 million teams of 25.33 million college students. This project to promote innovation and entrepreneurship has successfully incubated a series of high-quality entrepreneurial and creative projects [20].

The concept of IEE was first implemented in the entrepreneurship design competition organized by Tsinghua University in 1998 to stimulate student creativity. Being a relatively novel endeavor, there are still gaps in execution, such as inadequate teacher training and a lack of integration of IEE into a wide variety of disciplines compared with developed countries [21]. The gap in IEE development can be seen from the data on Chinese graduates' enterprise creation, which is low; students who start their own businesses represent less than 1% of the total number of students. The proportion of college graduates in innovative countries such as the United States who start their own businesses has reached 20–30%. Therefore, compared with the United States and other innovative countries, China lags behind [22]. Another area in need of development is IEE research, which is relatively scarce in China; few Chinese researchers have focused on the dynamic evolution of IEE [23].

Chinese universities need to overcome the influence of a number of unfavorable factors on the development of IEE. If teachers lack the skills and drive to develop student initiative and cannot design courses from the perspective of promoting student self-awareness, it will have a negative impact on the effective development of IEE. Regardless of the type of education, teachers remain the most crucial element for success. If teachers do not have adequate enthusiasm and creativity, education will lack effectiveness. In addition, university rankings have a great impact on university management policies; thus, scientific research investment is sometimes prioritized over teaching investment, leading to a lack of teaching reform and staff training in Chinese universities [17].

As a developed country, Spain has a privileged location, advanced infrastructure, and extensive transportation network, accompanied by several major ports, which inject energy into the economies of both Spain and China [24]. In terms of Spain's research successes, according to the Scopus database from 2019 to 2022, 46 articles were published, ranking it third in the world in the field of education, innovation, and entrepreneurship. There is very limited research including both China and Spain on the topic of IEE in higher education.

It is for this reason that we aim to investigate and compare IEE in Spain and China by identifying the trends of IEE; comparing the investment in the teaching reform, teaching methods, and teaching content of IEE; determining the systems and characteristics of both teaching and research in IEE more comprehensively; and providing references for future research.

This article aims to contribute to our knowledge of IEE in the two countries to find more suitable teaching methods and teaching content for students in the post-COVID-19

era. We hope that, through this article, university administrators will be driven to focus their attention on IEE. We also aim to assess the current forms and content of higher education so students can achieve the competencies (types of knowledge, skills, and attitudes) needed to access employment. Therefore, our research questions are as follows: (i) How are government and universities supporting and stimulating the development of IEE? (ii) What are the obstacles to IEE development? (iii) How is the internationalization of IEE developing? (iv) How is IEE driving local development?

2. Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Higher Education in the Context of China and Spain

2.1. Background of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in China

Xin Changxing, as Deputy Director of Training and Employment of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, initially mentioned the notion of IEE in 2001 and stated that it should be included in the training of skilled employees. The topic was then addressed academically, highlighting many concerns related to the importance of IEE in the context of China. First, cultivating students' knowledge and aptitude in innovation and entrepreneurship was seen as a fundamental step in addressing the problems of the 21st century. Second, IEE was seen as a significant development strategy to boost the country's overall competitiveness. Third, challenges faced by vocational schools in adopting IEE were noted, and solutions to these challenges were proposed [25].

In May 2010, the Ministry of Education promulgated the "Opinions on Vigorously Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Higher Education and Independent Entrepreneurship of College Students", which is the first official document to promote the concept of IEE in China. IEE was clearly defined as "a teaching concept and model that suits the needs of economic, social and national development strategies" [26]. Prior to the concept of IEE, there were three distinct concepts in this field: creative education, innovation education, and entrepreneurship education. The new concept achieved a degree of unity under the banner of the development strategies of "enhancing independent innovation ability and building an innovative country" and "promoting employment through entrepreneurship"; this not only highlighted a national strategy but also expressed a value orientation, with a new concept and educational model scientifically leading the reform and development of higher education into a new era [27].

The popularization of IEE in colleges and universities has been established as a long-term national policy orientation. In May 2015, the State Council China promulgated the "Implementation Opinions on Deepening Education Reform for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Higher Education", which continued to promote "innovation and entrepreneurship education" to ensure innovation-driven development, economic efficiency, and job creation. The comprehensive reform of higher education and the promotion of entrepreneurship and higher quality employment of college graduates were the basic principles and general objectives of deepening the reform of IEE in higher education. Reformed tasks and specific measures were proposed, such as designing, improving, and regulating new curricula, new methods of IEE evaluation, and teacher training [28].

The quality of IEE is closely linked to the goals of China's National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan, published in 2019: to create a new joint government-enterprise-university evaluation system to help improve the quality of education, in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship, and the quality of vocational education personnel training [29]. In March 2021, the Chinese government released an amendment to the Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China, stipulating the integration of industry and education, university-enterprise cooperation, and support for the management and promotion of vocational universities [30]. Official promotion of mass IEE supports the in-depth implementation of the innovation-driven development strategy. College students are the new force of entrepreneurship and mass innovation, and it is of great importance to support college students participating in innovation and entrepreneurship activities [31].

The above discussion shows the importance of IEE in general and in the context of China in particular. It can be seen that IEE is a unique educational concept in China that meets the needs of social and economic development and national strategic planning by cultivating students' innovative capacity, entrepreneurship, and abilities. However, although many agree on its importance, the extent to which the new educational approach has met its objectives requires further investigation. Therefore, this article proposes the reform of teaching methods and more appropriate teaching content for IEE in the post-COVID-19 era.

2.2. Background of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Spain

In recent years, there has been intensified legislative activity in the field of entrepreneurship in Spain. This has been motivated by a context of economic crisis, characterized by a low growth rate and a high rate of youth unemployment. As seen in the analysis of the European context, the promotion of entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation in the educational system is a common element in the various proposals to overcome the crisis.

In May 2015, the European Entrepreneurship Education Network was presented. The main objective of this network was to strengthen collaboration between policy makers and experts at the European and national levels, in order to further disseminate outstanding examples of policies, measures, and actions to support entrepreneurship in education as well as to assess their impact.

This initiative represents the most recent milestone in a long history of measures to support the promotion of entrepreneurial culture in European education systems. Since the publication of the Charter for Small Enterprises in 2000, the production of official documents on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education by the Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament has been prolific.

In this section, we elucidate the laws of an economic nature in whose texts appear references to the education–entrepreneurship tandem and then describe and analyze in more detail the references to entrepreneurship in the educational legislation currently in force.

Law 2/2011 of 4 March, on Sustainable Economy, was born with the intention of “encouraging and accelerating the development of a more competitive and innovative economy, capable both of renewing the traditional productive sectors and of opening up to new activities demanding stable and quality jobs”. University education was to respond to the challenge by “incorporating in its curricula skills and abilities oriented towards innovation, the promotion of creativity, and entrepreneurship, in subjects, concepts, transversal competencies, learning and examination methods, and at all levels of education, particularly the doctorate” (Art. 61). In turn, among the objectives was “To encourage and promote the role of Vocational Training in the fields of innovation and entrepreneurship” (Art. 72).

Royal Decree-Law 4/2013 of 22 February, on measures to support entrepreneurs and stimulate growth and job creation, responded to the recommendations made by the European Commission in its communication “Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan”. The support for entrepreneurship, business development, and job creation among young people is the pillar backbone of the set of measures that give shape to the Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment Strategy of 2013–2016, which incorporates this decree-law in its “Title 1. The Strategy”, which, as the result of a process of dialogue with social partners, raises measures aimed at reducing unemployment among young people under 30 years of age, either through labor insertion by employees or through self-employment and entrepreneurship, although it does not raise specific measures in the educational system.

Law 14/2013 of 27 September, on Support for Entrepreneurs and their Internationalization, is a law that devotes attention to the promotion of entrepreneurship in the different stages of the educational system, including at the higher education level, as follows:

- Entrepreneurship in university education.

University entrepreneurship initiatives shall be promoted in order to bring young university students closer to the business world.

The universities shall encourage the initiation of business projects, providing information and assistance to students, as well as promoting meetings with entrepreneurs.

- Teacher training in entrepreneurship.

1. The teaching staff that teaches the teachings that make up the educational system shall acquire the competences and skills related to entrepreneurship, equal opportunities in the business environment, and the creation and development of companies, through initial training or ongoing training of the teaching staff.

2. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport, in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities, shall promote the inclusion of content related to entrepreneurship and the creation and development of companies in the ongoing teacher training programs.

3. Methodology

As indicated above, the development and implementation of IEE are conditioned by its contextualization and by the legal framework of its environment. Under this context, it is relevant to consider the relationship of IEE to the educational policy that surrounds it, funding support models, and institutional contexts, both national and regional/local, including tangible ones, such as regulatory frameworks, and intangible ones, such as networks, rootedness, and soft infrastructure, as well as teaching methods and teaching content of IEE that are suitable to foster local development, among other factors.

We consider such contextualization through the selection of two public universities, Nankai University, Nan Jing, (Nankai, China) and the Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia (UPV, Spain). These universities have approximately the same QS 2022 Ranking (Nankai at 358 and UPV at 371) and student-faculty ratio, Nankai at 11 and UPV at 8, allowing us to study institutions comparable in size and located in different environments with different regulatory frameworks.

To obtain the data, a personal interview guide was prepared with experts in the area of IEE at each of the universities. We used triangulation methodology through a survey with different sections, considering the experience that the institution has with IEE, the services and financial support dedicated to the promotion of IEE, and the familiarization of professors with IEE and its promotion through its inclusion in the curricula, among other topics. The questionnaire has 28 questions grouped in parts as shown in Table 1 (for more detail, see questionnaire in Appendix A).

Table 1. Elements of the questionnaire.

Parts	Questions	Total
Identification	1–6	6
Government and University support for IEE	7–15	9
How IEE is included in the syllabus for each course	16–27	11
Obstacles to developing IEE	28–30	3
List of professors and research associated with IEE	31–33	3
Total		28

We identified the experts in IEE by interviewing the heads of the IEE department of each university. In Nankai, we interviewed five people, including a Distinguished Professor of Changjiang Scholars, a Professor of Business Administration at Nankai University of China, the Dean of the Nankai Business School, and the Director of the Entrepreneurship Management Research Center of Nankai. In UPV, we interviewed five people from research centers in the innovation and entrepreneurship field.

The information was collected and codified to find similarities and differences between the trends of IEE in both universities located in different settings (as it is explained below). In addition, we interviewed some heads of the IEE department in each university to confirm some of our findings.

3.1. Nankai

Nankai University was co-founded by famous Chinese educators Yan Xiu and Zhang Boling in the modern era, starting with the Nankai School (set up in 1904) and, later, Nankai School University Division (set up in 1919). It was based on the mission of “literature to govern the country; science to strengthen the country; and business to enrich the country”, so addressing three disciplines: literature, science, and business.

Nankai is in Tian Jin City, which is one of the four municipalities under central state management (Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, and Tianjin) of the People's Republic of China. It is located in the northern region of the country, next to the Bohai Sea. To the west, it borders the capital Beijing, while to the north and south, it borders the province of Hebei. It is the fifth most populous city in China, with 15,618,300 inhabitants, and occupies an area of 12,000 km².

Nankai is a comprehensive and research-oriented university with a full range of disciplines. Nankai places equal emphasis on arts and science, offers a broad-based curriculum, and promotes both applied and innovation education. The university has 27 professional faculties, with disciplines covering literature, history, philosophy, economics, business management, law, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, education, and the arts. It is a key comprehensive research university under Project 985, Project 211, and the Ministry of Education of China and has been shortlisted as one of the top universities in the world.

3.2. UPV

The Universitat Politècnica de València is a public, dynamic, and innovative institution dedicated to research and teaching. While maintaining strong links with the social environment in which it is located, it also opts for a strong presence abroad. On 11 March 1971, according to Decree 495/1971, the Instituto Politécnico Superior became the Universitat Politècnica de València. In addition to a new name, this change meant total integration into the university system, with effects on the organization and regulation of teaching centers, degrees, access to teaching staff, etc.

UPV is made up of nearly 28,000 students, 2500 teaching and research staff, and 1500 administrative and service professionals, distributed among its three campuses located in Alcoy, Gandia, and Valencia. UPV has 13 university centers, of which 9 are higher technical schools, 2 are faculties, and 2 are higher polytechnic schools. In addition, it has a Doctoral School and three affiliated private centers (Florida Universitaria, Berklee College of Music, and EDEM Escuela de Empresarios).

4. Results

4.1. Nankai IEE

According to interviews with Nankai researchers and teachers, in 2022 in Nankai, 517 projects were set up, with the funding of CNY 4,326,000 and with 2119 students involved. IEE in Nankai has been present since the university was established, as one of three primary mandates: promoting business to enrich the country. The objective of Nankai's IEE is to establish and improve innovative education specific to Nankai's characteristics, including teaching, independent research study, and innovation and entrepreneurship practice. The implementation of Plan “Gong Neng” (公能), which focuses on quality education with IEE as the theme, seeks to accomplish the following: (1) build a platform for innovation and entrepreneurship training for undergraduates; (2) establish a new system to adapt to IEE; (3) promote new education and teaching models; (4) fully explore students' innovation and entrepreneurship potential; (5) cultivate students' innovative spirit, entrepreneurial awareness, and leadership ability; (6) improve the quality of talent training; (7) create an atmosphere of innovation and entrepreneurship; and (8) build an innovation and entrepreneurship culture with the characteristics of Nankai. Plan “Gong Neng” is based on the idea of “Gong” meaning understanding China and studying to serve China, and “Neng” means the ability to serve society and having the proper skills, particularly

technical and professional skills, according to the explanation of the Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee and Vice Dean of the Nankai School of Finance.

According to Nankai's Rector, the goal of IEE in universities is not to make money but to educate people and to encourage students to participate in business internships to cultivate a new generation with an innovative spirit. In the case of Nankai students' practical experience, many of them have been exposed to practical problems in the process of entrepreneurship and have been able to put into practice the knowledge they have learned, which is not necessarily taught in the curriculum. Entrepreneurial practice allows students to diverge from the usual rote-learning mode and leads to new ideas of educational reform, with the aim of raising "a generation of people who are liberated in their thinking, have a creative and adventurous spirit, and possess the courage to question rationally, which is fundamental to build an innovative nation in the future" [32].

In addition, in 2019, ByteDance company owner Zhang Yiming donated RMB 100 million to Nankai, which set up the "Nankai University Innovation Fund" for startup investments. These one-time investments are limited to RMB 3 million and are mainly for Nankai students, teachers, and graduates. In addition, Zhang Yiming also donated RMB 10 million to the Nankai Talent Construction Fund for the promotion of the operation funding model following the Cambridge Innovation model. The Tianjin Municipal Government and Shenzhen Municipal Government have also provided assistance and funds to Nankai University in the transfer of intellectual property rights, the transformation of scientific and technological achievements, and the definition of individual property rights and shares.

However, as noted by the Changjiang Scholars Distinguished Professor, Professor of Business Administration at Nankai University China, and Dean of Nankai Business School and Director of Nankai Entrepreneurship Management Research Center, the integration of IEE into different disciplines is still a difficult task, as the disciplines remain dominated by the content of their specialties, and the integration of entrepreneurship into curricula is complex. The interviewees considered the following skills as important to include in the curricula: problem solving, entrepreneurship, innovation, and diversification. On the other hand, Chinese perceptions about innovation and entrepreneurship can be limiting as (i) the concepts of entrepreneurship and employment are opposite (entrepreneurship is only new enterprise creation and does not facilitate job seeking), and (ii) in a study by the Renmin University of China on the different conceptions of entrepreneurship between the United States and China, it was found that in the United States, entrepreneurship is seen as vital, while in China, educational success is considered more important. These are notable obstacles to developing IEE in China. To address this, Nankai is setting up an IEE research center, offering additional IEE training courses to teachers, and creating IEE seminars.

As a member of the China-US Young Maker Competition Center, in 2018, Nankai entered a new phase of IEE internationalization to promote IEE reform, build more coworking spaces, promote the exchange and practice of innovation and entrepreneurship, organize faculty training in innovation and entrepreneurship, and create a university culture of innovation and entrepreneurship integrated with US culture. Due to COVID-19, this international cooperation in the development of IEE could not take place in person. In the context of economic globalization, international cooperation is an important action plan in the post-COVID-19 era, as heterogeneity is an important feature of entrepreneurship, with differences between team members in terms of demographic characteristics, education, skills, experience, cognitive concepts, values, etc. [33].

Due to the specific history and objectives of Nankai, the interviewees considered the IEE of Nankai to be different from that developed in other universities, with an essential focus on the characteristics and needs related to the local regional development. The majority of students originate from Tian Jin City, and a report on NKU Employment Quality indicated that in 2021, 15.63% of graduates worked in Tian Jin [34]. On the subject of company training in Tian Jin, Nankai offers executive development programs for companies and entrepreneurs. In addition, Nankai and Tianjin Binhai New Area signed a framework agreement to deepen strategic cooperation, which will further deepen the strategic rela-

ationship in terms of innovation, the joint establishment of advantageous disciplines, the development of talents and intelligence, the transformation of scientific and technological achievements, the construction of university science parks, innovation alliances and internet entrepreneurship, education cooperation, and resource sharing among alumni. This has already provided R&D in energy projects and industrialization support for the development of emerging strategic industries such as drones, high-speed rail, smart equipment, and the aerospace industry in Tian Jin.

The interviewees told us that additional work and practice are needed in this area and that more measures need to be taken to convince university administrators to invest in IEE research. Other obstacles to IEE research include the following issues: to date, China has no formal IEE quality evaluation system, and there is no dedicated IEE scientific research funding. As mentioned in China's program for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for the construction of the Innovation Demonstration Zone for Sustainable Development, safeguard measures and enhanced policy support have been established to coordinate the use of contributions from enterprises, social capital, and financial funds to support the construction of scientific research infrastructure, technology innovation platforms, and innovation and entrepreneurship service institutions.

4.2. UPV IEE

The UPV is an entrepreneurial and innovative university, which practices effective mechanisms of scientific and technological dissemination and excels in the training of researchers and in the creation of technology-based companies. The UPV is recognized as a university that contributes to the innovation of companies and other entities in society. With this purpose, the institution trains people with an innovative and entrepreneurial spirit in its teaching centers and generates knowledge and technology that it transfers to society and the socioeconomic environment from its research units. As the rector of the UPV said during the 10th-anniversary ceremony of StartUPV, the incubation and acceleration program of the Universitat Politècnica de València, "As a public university, we have the duty to give back to society everything it offers us. And the way to do this is through entrepreneurship and the generation of good ideas". The Vice Rector for Students and Entrepreneurship has stated that "we must not lose the vision and commitment to talent and innovation, which are our hallmarks", and reiterated the willingness of the UPV to increase the female presence in the classrooms of the academic institution and, by extension, in the startups that are promoted by StartUPV. Regarding the UPV ecosystem, it differs from other ecosystems in Valencia in that the startups are mainly technology-based, innovative companies that have a significant impact. These are key for society and the economy in general and to promote Valencia as a technology hub in particular.

The interviewee, a professor in the field of Quality at the UPV, told us that the Innovation Research Transfer I2T at the UPV has a catalogue entitled Sources of Funding, with a summary table and timeline, so that students and alumni can find the funding that best suits their needs. For example, the "Tech Transfer UPV, F.C.R." Technology Transfer Fund, with a volume of EUR 3.9 million (second closing 2022), provides funding for UPV researchers and entrepreneurs who promote technology transfer projects prior to reaching the market. The UPV not only offers funding and support but also collaborates with government departments such as ENISA and IVACE ICO. The Director of CQI-Valencia Innovation Experience remarked that to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, the UPV is developing the Red CQI-Innovation Experience Network for the promotion and development of innovation ecosystems through training and support to SMEs, universities, and governing bodies. Red CQI will collaborate with the City Councils of several Chinese cities to provide funding for UPV students, teachers, and researchers to carry out their projects of innovation and entrepreneurship to promote IEE in the UPV. With regard to scientific communication, several journals are in development, including the *Euroasian Journal of Innovation and Change Management* at the UPV.

The first obstacle to IEE is that most professors are unaware of the policies and funding in the field of IEE. One interviewee remarked that while most instructors understand the vision of the UPV, the IEE curriculum is insufficiently integrated into fields other than business; the UPV has focused on IEE integration into the curriculum as an initiative of the Academic Direction of the Degree of Business Administration and Management of the Polytechnic School of Alcoy under the program “Petits Grans Emprenedors”. In addition, in education for entrepreneurship, it is necessary that the methods evolve to become more dynamic and practical, despite the efforts made to change methodologies and adapt them to the new reality and social demands. Relevance is still assigned to the theoretical approach, that is, to the acquisition of specific and specialized knowledge through unidirectional education of simple transmission rather than simulation. The promotion of IEE in the UPV requires teachers to be sufficiently qualified, committed, and motivated, as this is a prerequisite for students to become interested in starting their own business and having a favorable opinion toward entrepreneurship; currently, there is little training in the field of IEE at the UPV. Another element to consider is that the UPV is a polytechnic university with a higher percentage of men than women; the participation of women in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) careers should be encouraged, as this will stimulate women to participate in IEE at the UPV. In 2021, in order to promote the startup model based on UPV knowledge and technology transfer, UPV INNOVATION launched the Spin-UPV program to promote and finance new UPV Spin-Offs.

In the case of international cooperation, the interviewees reported that the UPV launched the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program in collaboration with different countries and universities (for example, the VIII edition of the “University Junior International Entrepreneurs” Program, promoted and funded by the Generalitat Valenciana through the Consellería de Economía Sostenible, Sectores Productivos, Comercio y Trabajo, in order to increase entrepreneurial and transversal skills, as well as to motivate students and recent graduates of the UPV toward entrepreneurship). In 2022, China–Spain Innovation and Ventures organized the fourth edition of the China (Shenzhen) International Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition in Spain. IEE international cooperation is seen as making the UPV more visible, and it positions the university as a leading institution in supporting entrepreneurship not only nationally but also internationally. The UPV faces an additional challenge of internationalization—promoting the study of English.

According to the Department of Business Organization, in the last year, the university had 55 researchers, EUR 116,864 of grants, and EUR 9905 of recruitment. It has several lines of I + d + i; for example, the Cluster Innovation Group has managed project design, implemented studies and innovation plans, and sought inter-entrepreneurship (corporate entrepreneurship) with companies. The interviewees reported that they normally seek research grants through the UPV R&D&I Management Service, which aims to support and enhance the coordination and implementation of the research, innovation, and knowledge transfer activity of the UPV. For example, due to the health crisis caused by the global pandemic, EIT CLIMATE-KIC was launched on 11 May 2020, including the “Extraordinary Post COVID-19 Regeneration Call 2020” to search for innovation activities that can enhance economic growth, job creation, and welfare to benefit EIT RIS countries. The UPV’s future innovation and entrepreneurship work aims to reach out to more countries and regions, such as the CQI Network of Quality and Innovation Management Center project, which will be carried out in China, Spanish-speaking countries, and other areas around the world to help SMEs turn trends and drivers into innovation challenges whose resolution generates added value to their key stakeholders, as cited by the director of CQI-UPV. Ciudad Politécnica de la Innovación (CPI) of the UPV is a part of *La Red de Parques Científicos Valencianos* (rePCV) as an accelerator for innovation and entrepreneurship, offering space, a laboratory, training, and funding, where collaboration between all Valencian science parks can foster local development.

4.3. Integrative and Interpretative Synthesis of IEE Situations in Nankai and UPV

Table 2 outlines the current status of IEE at the two institutions Nankai and the UPV. From the information in Table 2, although the two institutions have very different cultures and policies, in IEE they share many critical points and common trends. Both consider the training of IEE teachers as the most important action and believe that international cooperation can help to develop IEE. Moreover, both institutions are pushing university administrators to invest more in IEE and follow the opinion that IEE contributes to local development.

Table 2. Integrative and Interpretative Synthesis of IEE at Nankai and UPV.

	Stimulation	Obstacle	Internationalization	Local Development
Nankai	○ Donation from alumni.	○ Integration of IEE with different disciplines is still a difficult task.	○ Lack of internationalization due to pandemic.	○ It is essential to focus on the characteristics and needs related to the local regional development of Tian Jin.
	○ Support from city government.	○ Awareness of the concept of entrepreneurship and employment.	○ It is important due to the characteristic heterogeneity for equipment and economic globalization.	○ More graduates are working in Tian Jin.
	○ Sustainable policy of Chinese Government to support the development of IEE to stimulate business creation and employment.	○ Form of evaluation of students with good grades.		
		○ Lack of more support by management in IEE.		
		○ Funding for IEE scientific research includes no dedicated funds.		
UPV	○ Well-prepared from the nations on funding for innovation and entrepreneurship.	○ Lack of information and training on IEE for professors.	○ The study of English needs to be strengthened.	○ It not only benefits Valencia but also benefits the whole world through its programs, such as Red CQI.
	○ UPV Technology Transfer Fund has a fund for UPV researchers and entrepreneurs.	○ Insufficient integration of IEE with non-business majors.	○ More international competitions are needed.	○ Due to the research topic, it can also benefit other European countries with specialized funds.
	○ R&D&I management service supports research.	○ Encouraging women's participation in STEAM careers.	○ Support service for entrepreneurship not only at the national level but also at the international level.	
		○ More funding to be found.		

5. Conclusions

This study compared the relevance of the implementation of IEE in two universities located in China (Nankai) and Spain (UPV). In order to better understand the development and practice of IEE, the legislative and policy frameworks at regional, national, and international levels in China and Spain were also analyzed. In both cases, at the institutional level, Nankai and the UPV refine national policies, especially to further support and assist the development needs of IEE, particularly in terms of interdisciplinarity and the types of activities they undertake, including teaching and international cooperation. Overall, the findings reveal that the development of IEE in the two universities is diverse; however, they show common characteristics and trends for the future development of IEE: it is relevant for improving both entrepreneurship and employability. Moreover, both institutions highlighted that IEE is part of an SDG target, which involved significantly increasing the number of youth and adults who have the necessary competencies, particularly technical and vocational ones, to access employment and decent work and increase entrepreneurship [12].

The cases of Nankai and the UPV demonstrate that the development of IEE is also necessary for the development of training and activities in universities. In addition, IEE initiatives are developed by researchers who are usually young and locally oriented, as evidenced by Zhang's testimony, and few Chinese researchers have given their attention

to the dynamic evolution of IEE [25]. The source of funding is an important stimulation of the development of IEE (including funds from national/local government and own-institutional funds). However, it is found that there is a lack of funding, which is an obstacle for the support and promotion of IEE. Therefore, researchers from both universities are looking for additional revenues to fund IEE development. The task of seeking funding is complicated, and there is a lack of support from management, motivation, and recognition. So the development of IEE is in a vicious circle. Another obstacle is gender, because most of the topics and subjects related to IEE are dominated by men. Therefore, increasing incentives for women to participate in IEE is also relevant.

IEE is important through the visions and missions of both universities and the SDG targeted. Both universities aim in their strategic plan for students to be able to obtain the necessary competencies (types of knowledge, skills, and attitudes) of employment and entrepreneurship. Regarding the competencies associated with IEE, the most highlighted are “innovation capacity”, “problem solving”, “entrepreneurship”, and “critical thinking” as they are considered by the interviewed experts to be more fruitful. However, the integration of IEE with different disciplines is still a difficult task, as it is the development of a method of students’ evaluation under the rubric of innovation and entrepreneurship competencies. Furthermore, it is difficult to integrate the concept of IEE with new teaching practices that include specific or complementary materials with other areas to stimulate students to learn important competencies integrating innovation and entrepreneurship items.

In addition, our results also reveal that the promotion of internationalization and regional development through IEE could be good for the local development in both countries. Although the IEE internationalization process was affected during the pandemic, China and Spain have been looking for more opportunities post-COVID-19. This requires both countries to pay increased attention to language education, which is the foundation of IEE internationalization, and offer more entrepreneurship support services not only domestically but also internationally.

Therefore, our research could attract the attention of universities, governments, and other stakeholders to promote and change the current IEE, as well as increase financial and political support. University students can acquire competencies to ensure employment, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and researchers could find additional sources of innovation to integrate innovation and entrepreneurship issues. These measures will support that universities could truly serve their students to achieve the SDG 2030 target to significantly increase the number of youth and adults who have the necessary competencies, particularly technical and vocational, to access employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship [16].

Our research has several limitations, especially during the years influenced by COVID-19, which significantly impacted education development. For example, under China’s “Zero-COVID” Policy, many works cannot be carried out for universities. Internationalization is stagnant, and the survey of this study was carried out on a relatively small sample of interviewees, which makes this study lack depth. Further studies are needed for a larger sample of interviews and comparisons with different universities. In particular, studies are needed that follow the development of IEE of universities after the announcement of the end of COVID-19 by the World Health Organization.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F.; data curation, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F.; formal analysis, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F.; funding acquisition, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F.; methodology, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F.; project administration, A.G.-A.; resources, Y.Q.; writing—original draft, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F.; writing—review & editing, Y.Q., A.G.-A. and R.I.-F. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded in part by Cátedra CQI—Valencia Innovation Experience de Universitat Politècnica de València. grant number CON2022-101401-R-CQI, Red CQI Promotion. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily the views of that organization.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not Applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Survey and Interview Appendix

To facilitate interviews, we used the Spanish language in Spain and the Chinese language in China and then translated the complete interviews into English.

Questions for university experts:

1. Expert's personal data
 - a. University:
 - b. Position: Vice-rectorate/Department/Other
 - c. Level of Studies Reached:
 - d. Year:
 - e. Knowledge Area:
 - f. Gender: Male/Female
2. Government and University Support for the IEE
 - a. Mission and objective of the IEE of UPV or Nankai
 - b. Funding
 - c. Policy
 - d. University service and infrastructure
 - e. Teacher training
 - f. Dissemination and culture (e.g., awards, recognitions, etc.)
 - g. Consortia and agreements with social agents from different socioeconomic sectors (as an incubator).
 - h. University Ranking Indicators
 - i. Others (Special)
3. How the IEE includes the syllabus of each subject.
 - a. What skills can students acquire in the course?
 - b. In the teaching process, if teachers help students to implement the preconceptions of the subject? Yes/No, how can it help?
 - c. Can the course contents help students apply what they have learned in college to work and real life? Yes/No, how can it help?
 - d. Does the course content enable students to understand its principles? Yes/No, how do students understand the principles?
 - e. How does the course content balance abstraction and contextualization?
 - f. Do these courses develop students' ability to think critically and read? Yes/No, how?
 - g. Are these courses able to develop students' ability to express their opinions clearly and powerfully? Yes/No, how?
 - h. Are these courses able to develop students' ability to solve complex problems? Yes/No, how?
 - i. Are these courses able to develop divergent thinking? Yes/No, How?
 - j. What course content on IEE would you like to add? How?
 - k. Assessment following skills included in the curricula for students to achieve.
4. Obstacles to developing the IEE
 - a. Insufficient integration of the IEE with the careers.
 - b. The innovation and entrepreneurship education ecosystem needs to be improved.
 - c. International cooperation in the development of IEE.
5. Relationship between TEACHER and RESEARCH in IEE.
 - a. Whether there is a university evaluation system for IEE.
 - b. Whether it has funding from research funds for IEE.

- c. How IEE can promote sustainable development of education and regional economic development.

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