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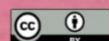
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ABSTRACT: This research examines the motivations and entrepreneurship learning experiences, focusing on a business simulation game implemented in a Blended Intensive Program (BIP) developed by a European higher education consortium, Stars EU. The program involved professors and students and was designed to provide practical business knowledge in a safe, risk-free environment. Within this framework, this study aimed to uncover the participants' motivations and perceptions regarding the knowledge gained from the program. Based on a questionnaire administered to 28 participants, the findings indicate high student motivation to participate in the program and a positive perception of the knowledge acquired upon completion. This research concludes that innovative learning methods, such as business simulations and experiential learning, are crucial for the new generation of students, especially those aspiring to entrepreneurship careers.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurship; Business simulation; Learning by doing; Motivations; Perceptions.

RESUMO: Esta investigação examina as motivações e as experiências de aprendizagem para o empreendedorismo, centrando-se num jogo de simulação empresarial implementado num *Blended Intensive Program* (BIP) desenvolvido por um consórcio europeu de ensino superior, o Stars EU. O programa envolveu professores e alunos e foi concebido para fornecer conhecimentos práticos de negócios num ambiente seguro e sem riscos. Neste contexto, o estudo teve como objetivo identificar as motivações e perceções dos participantes relativamente aos conhecimentos adquiridos com o programa. Com base num questionário administrado a 28 participantes, os resultados indicam um elevado nível de motivação dos estudantes para participarem no programa, bem como uma perceção positiva dos conhecimentos adquiridos após a sua conclusão. Esta investigação conclui que os métodos de aprendizagem inovadores, como as simulações empresariais e a aprendizagem experimental, são cruciais para a nova geração de estudantes, especialmente para aqueles que aspiram a carreiras de empreendedorismo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Empreendedorismo; Simulação empresarial; Aprender a fazer; Motivações; Perceções.

RESUMEN: Esta investigación examina las motivaciones y las experiencias de aprendizaje del espíritu empresarial, centrándose en un juego de simulación empresarial aplicado en un Blended Intensive Program (BIP) desarrollado por un consorcio europeo de enseñanza superior, Stars EU. En el programa participaron profesores y alumnos y se diseñó para proporcionar conocimientos empresariales prácticos en un entorno seguro y sin riesgos. En este marco, el estudio pretendía descubrir las motivaciones y percepciones de los participantes en relación con los conocimientos adquiridos en el programa. Basándose en un cuestionario administrado a 28 participantes, los resultados indican un alto nivel de motivación de los estudiantes para participar en el programa, así como una percepción positiva de los conocimientos adquiridos al finalizarlo. Esta investigación concluye que los métodos de aprendizaje innovadores, como las simulaciones empresariales y

el aprendizaje experimental, son cruciales para la nueva generación de estudiantes, especialmente para aquellos que aspiran a carreras empresariales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Espíritu empresarial; Simulación de empresa; Aprender a hacer; Motivaciones; Percepciones.

1. Introduction

Education levels are complex and multifaceted in contemporary societies. This complexity may be related to the technological era and artificial intelligence, where professors and students are becoming excessively dependent on these tools (Kalnina et al., 2024). In this scenario, innovative learning approaches have emerged to attract students' attention and enhance their knowledge. The entrepreneurship area is one where the innovative learning approach is widely applied, and its applications include learning-by-doing and business simulation (Poeck et al., 2020).

In this context, Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), promoted by Erasmus+, represent an innovative approach to international learning mobility that combines short-term physical mobility with collaborative virtual components. The integration of experiential learning methods has positioned them as a strategic response to the challenges of modern higher education, particularly in entrepreneurship education (Cuzzocrea & Krzaklewska, 2023).

Related to this, learning-by-doing is a method that emphasises that individuals learn most effectively when they are engaged in the learning process (Poeck et al., 2020), allowing for a deeper involvement and a better understanding of some studied themes (Pérez-Rivas et al., 2023), also promoting autonomy and critical reflection (e.g. Borsetto & Saccon, 2023, Pérez-Rivas et al., 2023). This method integrates different educational practices, such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, simulations, role-playing, field trips, laboratory experiences, interactive technologies, and peer teaching (Bruce & Block, 2023).

The simulation tool is widely used in management and entrepreneurship courses, enabling students to simulate business-life situations in a controlled and risk-free environment. Simulations can be conducted through online games, managing a business over a period, always with the possibility of constantly evaluating the results (Scalabrini et al., 2025).

Focusing on entrepreneurship and new teaching tools that enable students to understand the entrepreneurial essence, this study focuses on the learning-by-doing experience, namely the second edition of a business simulation game in a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) named Startup BIP. The program was developed with support from the STARS EU consortium, a European educational alliance of nine universities. The consortium's main objective is to support educational institutions in introducing new teaching and learning methods. The BIP offer has been a constant in different areas of knowledge, and this study focuses on a programme based on a business simulation game.

The second edition of Startup BIP took place in October and November 2024, including an online phase and an intensive week at La Laguna University, Tenerife, Spain. The programme was designed to provide business students from Portugal, Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands with specialised business knowledge. In this scenario, the present study aimed to examine the motivations and entrepreneurship learning experiences of students through a questionnaire, focusing on a business simulation game implemented in a Blended Intensive Program (BIP).

Despite the growing number of BIPs across Europe, few empirical studies have evaluated their pedagogical impact on entrepreneurial learning. In this sense, this study contributes to this gap by empirically examining students' motivations and learning outcomes from the proposed BIP, thus providing evidence of the educational value of such programmes. Regarding theoretical contributions, this study conducts an empirical analysis of students' motivations and perceptions within a Business Innovation Program (BIP) focused on entrepreneurship. It compares two iterations of the same program, offering a longitudinal understanding of the participants' experiences. Finally, this study demonstrates, from an exploratory perspective, the effectiveness of business simulations as an experiential tool in a complex educational environment.

To achieve this aim, this paper is structured into five sections. The second section explores the key concepts of entrepreneurship and the learning-by-doing approach. The Methodological section outlines the study's design and implementation. The subsequent section presents and analyses the results. Finally, the

theoretical and practical implications, study limitations, and recommendations for future research are discussed in this paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

Given the complexity of education today, it is necessary to use new tools that give students more autonomy in their teaching-learning process and develop critical reflection on the content covered in the classroom. In this sense, the latest teaching methodologies are emerging with technology and artificial intelligence (AI) challenges. One of the most widely studied is learning-by-doing, a form of active learning in which students are actively involved in the learning process rather than passively receiving information (Scalabrini et al., 2025).

The current learning process remains predominantly traditional, often characterised by passive teaching methods (Sablić et al., 2021). This approach presents several challenges for students and educators, necessitating a shift towards more dynamic and effective teaching strategies. One of the primary concerns is the lack of student engagement, which frequently leads to disengaged learning experiences. Additionally, students may struggle with information retention because conventional teaching methods do not always accommodate diverse learning styles. Furthermore, the absence of practical application within the learning process can impede students' ability to comprehend and utilise theoretical concepts in real-world scenarios (Sablić et al., 2021).

This method is widely used in entrepreneurship classes, where learning extends beyond traditional theoretical teaching and incorporates experiential methodologies that promote innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability. This approach emphasises the development of an entrepreneurial mindset by engaging students in hands-on activities such as business simulations, startup incubators, and collaborative projects (Makry, 2024). By immersing learners in real-world entrepreneurial challenges, these methods encourage the practical application of business concepts, strategic thinking and risk assessment (Scalabrini et al., 2025). Furthermore, entrepreneurship education often integrates interdisciplinary perspectives, allowing students to develop essential skills, such as leadership, networking, and resilience. By embracing experiential learning methods, entrepreneurship education enhances knowledge acquisition and cultivates the competencies necessary for success in dynamic and uncertain business environments (O'Dwyer & Rogers, 2024).

The learning-by-doing principle offers a promising solution to these challenges. This approach asserts that individuals learn most effectively when they are actively engaged in the learning process. This method enhances information retention and conceptual understanding by involving students in practical activities and encouraging them to apply their acquired knowledge (Makry, 2024).

Several current teaching methods incorporate the learning-by-doing principle, promoting an active learning environment that enhances student engagement and information retention. Moreover, these methods emphasise the practical application of knowledge, equipping students with the necessary skills to pilot real-world situations. The demand for innovative teaching strategies is evident, given the current limitations of traditional education (Makry, 2024). Consequently, educators are encouraged to integrate learning by doing into their pedagogical practices to improve student engagement, knowledge retention, and practical application of concepts (Smart & Csapo, 2007). From a student perspective, this approach offers several benefits, including improved information retention, enhanced creativity, multisensory engagement, appreciation for teamwork, and development of essential professional skills (Bruce & Block, 2023).

Integrating practical experiences into education can take various forms, such as project-based learning, simulations, field trips, lab experiments, and interactive technologies. Each method provides unique insights and contributes to a comprehensive learning experience (Bruce & Block, 2023).

One efficient approach is the use of business simulations, which are becoming increasingly popular in higher education. These simulations enable students to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life business scenarios without facing risks. This experiential learning method helps students grasp complex business concepts, strategies and implications within a controlled setting (Petersen, 2024).

Business simulations offer numerous benefits. This technique promotes critical thinking and decision-making skills, encourages teamwork and collaboration, and fosters a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of various business functions. Additionally, students receive immediate feedback, allowing them to reflect on their decisions and learn from their mistakes (Petersen, 2024).

Borsetto and Saccon (2023) explored the motivations and perceptions of students enrolled in double-degree programs. Their findings revealed that students were enthusiastic about participating in these programs because of the opportunities to acquire technical skills, intercultural competencies, and soft skills. Similarly, Costa et al. (2021) investigated the impact of the co-creation process within the Demola Co-Creation approach among 87 Portuguese students and reported high satisfaction levels and a perceived positive effect on skill development.

A study on BIP sought to elucidate the role of universities as mediators or boundary spanners in international collaborations and multi-stakeholder value co-creation by integrating real-world entrepreneurship with international learning (Laine et al., 2025). The findings indicate that the combination of online and in-person formats significantly enhances learning outcomes and facilitates the development of both hard and soft skills. The authors propose that this model equips students to address contemporary corporate challenges and underscores the university's role in inter-regional knowledge transfer.

Furthermore, a study involving 19 participants was conducted in the first edition of Startup BIP. The results indicated that students had a positive experience with the BIP program, both in terms of their motivation and the knowledge they gained from it. Additionally, the learning-by-doing methodology, implemented through a business simulation game, is a practical teaching approach for the younger generation (Scalabrini et al., 2025). To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of this chapter, Table 1 provides a summary of the primary literature approaches relevant to this study.

Table 1
Literature approaches.

<i>Author (Year)</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Educational Context</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Relevance to this study</i>
Scalabrini et al. (2025)	Quantitative	BIP Entrepreneurship	High level of student motivation to participate in the program and a positive perception of the knowledge acquired.	Same programme in different year. Compare the results.
Laine et al. (2024)	Qualitative	BIP Entrepreneurship	The BIP improves student learning outcomes and connects local and international business ecosystems.	Understand how the same object (BIP) is studied in the literature.
Makry (2024)	Quantitative	Marketing	Learning-by-doing teaching method is an effective way of preparing marketing students for the job market, enhancing their hard and soft skills, and fostering innovation and creativity.	Understand learning-by-doing in a literature context.
Petersen (2024)	Quantitative	Information System	Performance expectancy and social influence significantly influenced the intention to use Business Simulation Games.	Understand the business simulation games in a literature context.
Borsetto and Saccon (2023)	Quantitative and Qualitative	Double Degree Programmes	Motivation by the acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as by intercultural competencies and soft skills.	Understand the motivations criterions.

3. Methods

Given the innovative nature of emerging teaching and learning methodologies used in entrepreneurship courses, it is essential to understand students' motivations, perceptions, and satisfaction levels regarding these approaches. Different studies have explored these in other educational settings worldwide. For instance, López-González et al. (2023) conducted interviews and administered a questionnaire to media-related students at a Spanish university who participated in a project-based learning program. Their findings indicated that, despite high satisfaction, students reported negative emotions regarding the final products they developed as part of the project.

Against this scenario, the present study focuses on the second edition of Startup BIP between October and November 2024. The program was structured around a business simulation game, comprising an online phase and an intensive week at La Laguna University, Tenerife, Spain. Designed to equip students with

specialised business knowledge to enhance entrepreneurial success, the program provided participants with a practical, risk-free environment to understand the complexities of managing a startup. The students involved were from universities in Portugal, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands.

The program was divided into three phases: a preparatory stage consisting of four online sessions covering general topics related to business and start-ups; an in-person phase during the intensive week, which included specialised lectures on business models, planning, and finance; and an application phase in which students implemented their learning through strategic decision-making in a virtual company. Throughout this intensive learning experience, students were required to make decisions with economic and financial implications for their virtual enterprises, fostering a learning-by-doing environment for them.

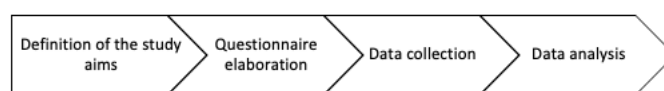
A quantitative research approach was adopted to achieve the study's aim, and a questionnaire comprising two sections was developed for data collection. The first section contained two questions, each of which was assessed using a set of attributes. Drawing upon validated instruments from previous studies (Borsetto & Saccon, 2023; Costa et al., 2021; Culver et al., 2011), the first question examined students' motivations through a set of nine attributes rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). These motivations were categorised into two dimensions: international experience, cultural exchange, and networking (Culver et al., 2011), and the development of professional competencies and skills (Cuzzocrea & Krzaklewska, 2023).

The second question assessed students' perceptions of the knowledge acquired and the extent to which participation in the program contributed to their personal and professional development. This question included 15 attributes, which were also evaluated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Based on previous research in this domain, three dimensions were identified: the enhancement of entrepreneurship and management-related skills (Borsetto & Saccon, 2023; Costa et al., 2021; López-González et al., 2023), cultural awareness and networking (Borsetto & Saccon, 2023; Costa et al., 2021), and an overall assessment of their participation (López-González et al., 2023). To establish participants' demographic profiles, the second section of the questionnaire included five questions concerning age, gender, nationality, university, and academic program. This questionnaire was previously applied in the first edition of the BIP (Scalabrini et al., 2025).

An anonymous, Internet-based questionnaire was administered to the participants on the last day of the program in November 2024. In this sense, all the participants (n = 28) answered the questionnaire, which was subsequently analysed using descriptive statistical methods. Figure 1 illustrates the sequence of the study method, including the preparatory and application phases of the BIP, followed by data collection and analyses.

Figure 1

Methodological flowchart.



4. Results and discussion

The first step was to analyse and identify the participants' motivations in StartupBIP (Table 2). A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to determine this. As previously explained, the motivations were based on studies conducted on international activities similar to the BIP, and the statements related to the motivations were divided into two groups. The first group, composed of three statements, was the “international experience, contact with different cultures and networking”, with an overall mean of 4.31 (± 0.819). In this case, gaining international exposure presented the highest mean (4.43 ± 0.728), and the opportunity to network with like-minded individuals was the lowest (4.14 ± 0.833). The participants' results of the first edition differed from these results as they placed more importance on the fact that the BIP presented an opportunity for a new experience (Scalabrini et al., 2025).

For the second group, improving professional skills and abilities (4.29 ± 0.753), the indicator with the highest mean value was the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting (4.61 ± 0.488). This is the same result as the first edition participants (Scalabrini et al., 2025) and is closely tied to one of the

characteristics of business simulation (Petersen, 2024), which represents the possibility of applying concepts in a risk-free environment. Corroborating the previous study, learning through business simulation was the second motivation appointed by the participants (4.48 ± 0.687).

In contrast, the motivation with the least mean was understanding the foreign market (3.89 ± 1.047). One explanation could be that business simulation involves a specific market and does not work with the cultural differences in the business of each participating country.

Table 2

Students' motivations.

Item	$\bar{X} \pm s$
International experience, contact with different cultures and networking	
Gaining international exposure	4.43 \pm 0.728
Opportunity to network with like-minded individuals	4.14 \pm 0.833
Opportunity to experience a new culture	4.36 \pm 0.895
Improving professional skills and abilities	
Enhancing my entrepreneurial skills	4.25 \pm 0.785
Understand foreign markets	3.89 \pm 1.047
Chance to learn from successful entrepreneurs	4.25 \pm 0.738
Opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical setting	4.61 \pm 0.488
The prospect of enhancing my CV	4.43 \pm 0.776
Learning through a business simulation	4.48 \pm 0.687

Note: \bar{X} = mean; s = standard deviation

It is worth mentioning that the motivation means identified by the participants in the second edition were lower than those in the first edition (Scalabrini et al., 2025). The reasons for this have not been identified and could be better explored in future studies. However, the mean score for Startup BIP was still higher than in other studies on which the questionnaire was based (Petersen, 2024), where students rated their experiences with mean scores below four and expressed more negative motivation scores.

Regarding students' perceptions (Table 3), the statements were categorised into three groups. A total of ten statements were grouped under 'contribution to improving skills related to entrepreneurship and management' (4.06 ± 0.656). Among these, the highest mean was associated with the statement 'it contributed to the development of initiative and project management capacity' (4.29 ± 0.647). This favourable perception may be attributed to the dynamics of the BIP, where students were required to manage their enterprise within the business simulation. Conversely, it is essential to note that this group included statements with means below 4, as observed in similar studies (Costa et al., 2021). Notably, the statement 'it has enhanced my leadership skills' received the lowest mean (3.82 ± 0.758), likely because participants did not perceive a clear connection between the simulation and leadership development. When comparing these results to those of participants in the first edition (Scalabrini et al., 2025), it is evident that the second edition participants held a more negative perception of these points, as indicated by the lower means.

The second group, named 'cultural aspects and networking' (4.18 ± 0.697), composed of two statements, evidenced a higher perception, meaning they 'contributed to improving the ability to work in a multidisciplinary and multicultural team' (4.36 ± 0.549). This result corroborates the previous study from the first edition and aligns with BIP's proposal to allow interaction between students from different countries, thereby enabling cultural interaction.

Finally, in the last group, called ‘overall assessment of your participation’ (4.57 ± 0.597), the perception with the highest mean corroborates with the BIP’s proposal, once the students pointed a mean of 4.86 (± 0.350) was ‘I liked the fact that different universities were part of the same activity’. This was also the statement with the most positive perception of all the statements, and it was the same result as in the first edition.

Table 3
Students’ perceptions.

Item	$\bar{X} \pm s$
Contribution to improving skills related to entrepreneurship and management	
It has increased my interest in entrepreneurship and the emergence of new business ideas	4.07 \pm 0.703
Contributed to the development of initiative and project management capacity	4.29 \pm 0.647
It has improved my understanding of starting a new business/startup	4.25 \pm 0.575
Contributed to the development of entrepreneurial skills	4.18 \pm 0.601
Contributed to the development of practical skills for starting a business	4.25 \pm 0.634
It has enhanced my leadership skills	3.82 \pm 0.758
It has improved my problem-solving skills	3.93 \pm 0.703
It has increased my understanding of the startup ecosystem abroad	3.96 \pm 0.626
It has increased my confidence in becoming an entrepreneur	3.86 \pm 0.639
It has inspired me to create innovative solutions for business challenges	4.04 \pm 0.680
Cultural aspects and networking	
Contributed to improving the ability to work in a multidisciplinary and multicultural team	4.36 \pm 0.549
It provided me with valuable networking opportunities	4.00 \pm 0.845
Overall assessment of your participation	
I am proud of the final result delivered by my team	4.39 \pm 0.817
I liked the fact that different universities were part of the same activity	4.86 \pm 0.350
I consider that having participated in BIP changed my attitude towards new challenges in business management subjects	4.46 \pm 0.626

Note: \bar{X} = mean; s = standard deviation

The findings indicate that BIP participants had a favourable perception of the program, particularly concerning the development of management skills, cultural interactions, networking opportunities, and the benefits of collaboration among various universities. While some aspects, such as leadership development, received less emphasis, the overall evaluation was quite positive, suggesting that the BIP effectively fulfilled its objectives of facilitating learning through business simulations in an international setting. Notably, participants from the second edition had a less favourable perception than those from the first, highlighting an area for further investigation in future studies.

5. Considerations

Considering the study’s aim, the findings indicate that students were highly motivated to participate in the BIP programme, as reflected in their mean score. The methodology employed in the program

acknowledges the necessity of integrating innovative teaching methods that align with the learning preferences and characteristics of newer generations of students.

Using business simulation as a pedagogical approach proved particularly effective, as students familiar with gaming environments demonstrated high motivation levels when engaging with this method of learning. Another key strength of the program was the practical application of theoretical knowledge. By actively applying their learning within a business simulation, students can transform abstract concepts into tangible experiences. This hands-on learning approach within an entrepreneurial setting emerged as the main motivation for most students to join the program.

Moreover, the programme's international component significantly enriched students' CVs. Participants highly valued collaborating with peers from different universities, as working in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams enhanced their interpersonal and professional skills. The results highlight the importance of using different methodologies to teach entrepreneurship, emphasising their benefits for students.

Nevertheless, acknowledging the limitations of this study, particularly the small sample size, is essential. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect the experiences of the specific group studied and may not be fully generalisable to a broader population. Therefore, caution should be exercised when extrapolating these results beyond this context.

One point to highlight is that the participants in the second edition had a less positive perception than those in the first. The reasons for this cannot be determined. Although the program and teachers were the same, the results may be associated with context or cohort-related factors, such as differences in students' prior knowledge, group dynamics, or expectations. Future qualitative research could explore these aspects more deeply to understand how individual and contextual variables influence learning experiences in BIP settings.

It is important to emphasise that this study should be regarded as an initial exploratory step in assessing the pedagogical potential of business simulations within BIP contexts, providing preliminary evidence rather than definitive conclusions.

Contribution

E. SCALABRINI: conceptualisation; data curation; data analysis; writing. S. FORM: conceptualisation; data curation; data analysis; N. MOUTINHO: conceptualisation; data curation; data analysis; writing.

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