

# **Inclusive Educational Innovation and Entrepreneurship: a Business Ideas Competition Model for Young People with Specific Learning Disabilities in the EntrÉUth Project**

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## **Abstract**

*The evolution of European education systems requires pedagogical models capable of integrating inclusion, entrepreneurial competence development, and collaboration among educational, institutional, and productive stakeholders. This paper analyses the design and implementation of an inclusive Business Ideas Competition developed within the Erasmus+ project “EntrÉUth – Nurturing the Entrepreneurial Spirit among Young Europeans, with particular attention to students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)”. The study lies at the intersection of entrepreneurship education, inclusive education policies, and pedagogical innovation. The adopted model integrates the European framework EntreComp: the Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and the Italian regulatory framework for SLDs established by Law 170/2010 and related guidelines. A distinctive feature of the project is the transnational collaboration between educational and innovation actors who co-designed a pedagogical framework grounded in experiential learning. The Italian case study tested inclusive assessment procedures through a multidisciplinary jury and a dedicated Business Ideas Competition for young people with SLDs. Findings suggest that competitions designed according to accessibility and personalization principles can support the development of entrepreneurial and transversal competences as well as learners’ self-efficacy.*

*Keywords: inclusive education; specific learning disabilities; entrepreneurship education; Erasmus+ projects; business ideas competition.*

## **Introduction**

### **A. Inclusive education and entrepreneurship education in the European policy framework**

Inclusive education represents one of the key pillars of European and national educational policies aimed at reducing inequalities and valuing cognitive diversity. In this context, Specific

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Learning Disabilities (SLDs) require teaching and assessment models capable of ensuring equal access to learning processes. In Italy, these needs are addressed within the regulatory framework established by Law 170/2010 and its implementing provisions (Ministerial Decree 5669/2011 and the related Guidelines).

At the same time, entrepreneurship education is recognized at the European level as a key competence for lifelong learning, employability, and active citizenship (Council Recommendation 2018/C 189/01). However, the literature highlights that traditional entrepreneurship education models often remain insufficiently accessible to students with specific educational needs.

### **B. The EntrEUth project: European framework and objectives**

The European project EntrEUth was developed to address this challenge by tackling structural barriers that limit access to entrepreneurial opportunities for young people with SLDs. Funded by the Erasmus+ programme, the project promotes innovation, competence development, and empowerment through inclusive strategies and transnational cooperation. EntrEUth is coordinated by the Institute of Entrepreneurship and Career Advancement (IEA, Greece) and implemented with the contribution of partners from several European countries. The project aims to foster the entrepreneurial spirit among young people, with particular attention to those with Specific Learning Disabilities, by addressing barriers to access in entrepreneurship education and self-employment pathways. The project is structured around three interrelated strategic objectives—Innovate, Achieve, and Empower—which guide the design of training activities, educational resources, and events. Within this framework, the project developed an inclusive educational pathway combining digital learning, adapted training materials, mentoring activities, and experiential learning opportunities. One of the key components of this pathway is the **Business Ideas Competition**, conceived as a pedagogical tool to allow participants to apply and consolidate the entrepreneurial competences developed during the training program.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>
Funding programme	Erasmus+ (European Union)
Focus	Promotion of the entrepreneurial spirit among young people, with particular attention to youth with SLDs
Objectives	Innovate; Achieve; Empower
Coordination	Institute of Entrepreneurship and Career Advancement (IEA, Greece)
European scope	Multinational partnership and European-level Business Ideas Competition
Training resources	Multilingual materials, including the FutureMakers courses

*Table 1. Overview of the EntrEUth project*

## Methods

The Business Ideas Competition developed within the EntrEUth project represents the final stage of this inclusive entrepreneurship education pathway and was designed following a design-based research approach, a methodology widely used in educational research to develop and validate innovative pedagogical models through iterative cycles of design, implementation, and evaluation. This approach enabled the integration of pedagogical, regulatory, and operational dimensions, ensuring coherence between learning objectives, methodological tools, and the context of implementation. From a pedagogical perspective, the model incorporated key principles of inclusive education, with particular attention to the adaptation of learning materials, the diversification of learning modalities, and the recognition of different cognitive styles. Within this framework, elements of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) paradigm were adopted to design flexible and accessible learning environments capable of fostering active participation among learners with heterogeneous learning profiles. A further methodological component involved the adaptation of the European entrepreneurship competence framework EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, which served as a reference for defining learning objectives and evaluation criteria. The framework was interpreted through an inclusive lens, identifying competence indicators accessible to students with SLDs, particularly in relation to creativity, opportunity recognition, planning, and entrepreneurial communication. The overall methodological structure was defined according to the guidelines developed within the EntrEUth project and outlined in the *EntrEUth Methodology and Guide*, which provides operational guidance for the implementation of inclusive entrepreneurship education programmes targeting young people with SLDs. Within this framework, the Business Ideas Competition was not conceived as a stand-alone activity but rather as the culminating stage of a structured educational pathway. The programme included a progressive sequence of activities such as online learning modules, cognitively accessible learning materials, practical exercises focused on entrepreneurial idea development, and personalized mentoring sessions. This pathway allowed participants to progressively develop entrepreneurial and transversal competences, which were then applied during the final phase of project presentation and evaluation within the competition.



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the EntrEUth Project

## A. Competition Structure and Regulations

The Business Ideas Competition was organized according to an inclusive structure designed to support participation and competence development throughout the process. The main elements included:

- **Structured phases:** idea submission, selection of finalists, final pitch session, and acceleration support for the winning project.
- **Multimodal presentation formats:** participants could present their ideas through different formats (oral presentation, digital slides, video, or audio), ensuring accessibility for diverse communication styles.
- **Inclusive evaluation criteria:** projects were assessed on creativity, economic feasibility, and social impact, with attention given not only to the final product but also to the learning and development process.
- **Integration with training resources:** online courses, methodological guides, and adapted learning materials ensured continuity between training and practical application, in line with both European project guidelines and the Italian regulatory framework.

Element	Description
Objective	Consolidate entrepreneurial competences in an inclusive learning environment
Participants	Young people with SLDs, individually or in teams

Phases	Idea submission → Evaluation → Final pitch → Acceleration of the winning project
Presentation formats	Oral, digital, video, audio
Evaluation criteria	Creativity, economic feasibility, social impact; attention to the learning process
Support tools	Online courses, methodological guides, adapted materials, mentoring

*Table 2. Business Ideas Competition criteria within the EntrEUth project*

### **A. Italian implementation of the Business Ideas Competition**

The Italian implementation of the EntrEUth project was carried out by EMiT Feltrinelli ETS in partnership with the Carolina Albasio University Institute. The initiative targeted young people with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs) and was based on an inclusive entrepreneurship education approach supported by adapted training activities, experiential learning, and personal success mapping. A central element of the national implementation was the Italian Business Ideas Competition, held on 7 July in Castellanza and hosted by the Carolina Albasio University Institute. The competition represented the final stage of the training pathway and provided participants with the opportunity to present and further develop their entrepreneurial ideas. The national competition resulted in the selection of two winning business ideas, presented by two participants who will represent Italy at the European EntrEUth Business Ideas Competition. The European final event will be organized and hosted by EMiT Feltrinelli ETS, bringing together selected participants from the partner countries to present their projects and engage in a broader transnational exchange on inclusive entrepreneurship.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
National partner	EMiT Feltrinelli ETS (Italy); Carolina Albasio (Italy)
Target group	Young people with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs)
Training approach	Inclusive entrepreneurship education adapted to SLD learning profiles
Methodologies	Personal success mapping; experiential learning; adapted training
National competition	Italian Business Ideas Competition (7 July, Castellanza ) hosted by the partner Carolina Albasio University Institute
Outcome	Selection of the national winner for the European final event

*Table 3. Italian implementation of Business Ideas Competition*

## **Results**

The implementation of the inclusive Business Ideas Competition within the EntrEUth project generated relevant outcomes in terms of entrepreneurial competence development, learner engagement, and inclusive participation. The results observed during the Italian implementation suggest that the competition model functioned effectively as an experiential learning environment in which participants could apply the competences developed throughout the training pathway. From a competence development perspective, participants demonstrated strengthened abilities in idea generation, opportunity recognition, planning, and problem-solving. These competences correspond to key dimensions identified in the EntreComp framework, particularly within the areas of “Ideas and Opportunities” and “Into Action”. During the preparation and presentation phases of the competition, participants were required to transform initial concepts into structured entrepreneurial proposals, which stimulated processes of reflection, creativity, and strategic thinking. The experiential nature of the activity encouraged active involvement and collaboration among participants, who worked individually or in small teams to refine their business ideas. Mentoring activities and preparatory sessions further supported participants in organizing their ideas, structuring presentations, and strengthening their confidence in communicating entrepreneurial concepts. From an inclusion perspective, the design of the competition proved particularly effective in reducing barriers typically associated with traditional competitive formats. The adoption of multimodal presentation formats allowed participants to express their ideas through different communication channels, including oral presentations, digital slides, video, and audio materials. This flexibility supported learners with diverse cognitive profiles and communication preferences, in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning. Furthermore, the evaluation criteria adopted by the multidisciplinary jury did not focus exclusively on the final quality of the business proposal but also considered the learning process, creativity, and the potential social impact of the proposed ideas. This approach contributed to creating an assessment environment that valued participants’ efforts, learning trajectories, and individual progress. Overall, the results indicate that inclusive competition-based learning environments can represent an effective pedagogical strategy for supporting the development of entrepreneurial and transversal competences among young people with Specific Learning Disabilities, while simultaneously promoting self-efficacy, participation, and a positive learning experience.

## **Discussion**

The EntrEUth experience confirms the effectiveness of approaches that integrate entrepreneurship education and inclusive strategies. The Business Ideas Competition, designed according to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), emerges as an experiential learning device capable of combining methodological rigor, accessibility, and pedagogical

innovation (CAST, 2018; 2024). The model highlights the relevance of inclusive design in educational and training contexts, particularly within vocational education and lifelong learning environments. It shows how entrepreneurship education can be re-designed to better support diverse learning profiles and specific educational needs, fostering participation, competence development, and equitable learning opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The EntrEUth project demonstrates that the integration of entrepreneurship education and inclusive strategies can effectively support the development of transversal competences among young people with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs). The inclusive Business Ideas Competition promoted active learning, creativity, and learners' sense of agency, contributing to more equitable and accessible educational pathways. The experience developed within the project highlights the potential of pedagogical models that combine experiential learning, accessibility principles, and competence-based frameworks such as EntreComp. In particular, the competition format created opportunities for students with SLDs to transform ideas into concrete entrepreneurial proposals while working collaboratively and receiving feedback from multidisciplinary stakeholders. Beyond the competition itself, the project generated a set of practical outcomes that can support the replication of inclusive entrepreneurship education practices. These include a Methodology Guide for leveraging SLDs in entrepreneurship learning, an adapted EntreComp Starter Pack, a Learning by Doing digital environment, and a structured model for Business Ideas Competition and incubation activities, designed to be accessible and adaptable across educational contexts. Overall, the EntrEUth model contributes to the research on inclusive educational innovation by combining empirical experimentation, pedagogical reflection, and European policy frameworks. It also suggests that entrepreneurship education, when designed according to principles of accessibility and personalization, can become a powerful tool for empowerment, participation, and social inclusion of learners with diverse learning profiles.

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