

Influence of Gender and Prior Entrepreneurial Experience on Entrepreneurial Intention among Vocational Students

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, governments and higher education institutions have increasingly recognized entrepreneurship as a strategic mechanism for addressing graduate unemployment and fostering economic resilience. Entrepreneurship education has consequently become an important component of educational policy in many countries. It extends beyond teaching students how to start a business by developing entrepreneurial knowledge, opportunity recognition, creativity, problem-solving ability, innovation, risk management, and self-confidence. According to Donald F. Kuratko (2005), entrepreneurship education should foster entrepreneurial thinking and prepare individuals to recognize and exploit business opportunities in a dynamic environment. These perspectives suggest that entrepreneurship education serves as a catalyst for developing future entrepreneurs rather than merely transmitting business knowledge.

Vocational education institutions provide a particularly important context for entrepreneurship education. Unlike conventional academic programmes, vocational education emphasizes practical skills, technical competence, and industry readiness, thereby creating favourable conditions for entrepreneurial development. Students enrolled in vocational programmes often possess technical expertise that can be transformed into self-employment or small business opportunities.

Among the demographic variables frequently examined in entrepreneurship research, gender has received considerable attention. For example, Francisco Liñán, Nabi, and Krueger (2013) observed that gender differences in entrepreneurial intention continue to exist in many educational settings despite increasing participation of women in entrepreneurship education. Similarly, Wilson, Kickul, and Marlino (2007) reported that entrepreneurial self-efficacy partly explains gender differences in entrepreneurial aspirations among students. However, more recent studies have suggested that these differences may diminish when male and female students receive comparable entrepreneurial training and educational support, indicating that entrepreneurship education may reduce traditional gender disparities.

Another important determinant examined in entrepreneurship literature is prior entrepreneurial experience. Students who have previously participated in entrepreneurial activities, family businesses, part-time ventures, or self-employment often possess greater familiarity with business operations, which may strengthen entrepreneurial confidence and career aspirations. Most previous studies have focused on comparing students from different academic disciplines or have examined the direct effects of entrepreneurship education without considering whether demographic characteristics such as gender and prior entrepreneurial experience continue to explain differences in entrepreneurial intention after students undergo similar educational experiences. This represents an important gap, particularly in the context of vocational education in India, where entrepreneurship education is increasingly incorporated into skill-oriented programmes aimed at promoting self-employment and innovation.

Here examines whether gender and prior entrepreneurial experience significantly influence entrepreneurial intention among vocational students who have completed entrepreneurship education. By focusing on students exposed to a common educational intervention, the study seeks to determine whether entrepreneurial intention differs according to these demographic characteristics or whether entrepreneurship education contributes to developing comparable entrepreneurial aspirations across different student groups. Furthermore, the results may assist educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in evaluating whether entrepreneurship education provides an inclusive learning environment capable of fostering entrepreneurial intention irrespective of students' personal backgrounds and previous entrepreneurial experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention has become one of the most widely investigated constructs in entrepreneurship research because it represents the cognitive state that precedes the creation of new business ventures. Entrepreneurship is generally viewed as a planned and intentional behaviour rather than a spontaneous action; consequently, entrepreneurial intention is considered the most reliable predictor of future entrepreneurial behaviour. The theoretical foundation for intention-based entrepreneurship research is primarily derived from the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** proposed by Ajzen (1991), which argues that behavioural intention is influenced by three psychological determinants: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control.

The TPB has received extensive empirical support in entrepreneurship research. Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud (2000) compared competing intention models and concluded that the Theory of Planned Behavior provides one of the strongest theoretical explanations of entrepreneurial intention because entrepreneurial decisions are deliberate and involve careful evaluation of opportunities and personal capabilities. Their findings further confirmed that entrepreneurial intention is strongly associated with the TPB constructs, reinforcing the importance of psychological factors in entrepreneurial decision-making.

Gender and Entrepreneurial Intention

Gender has long been recognised as one of the most frequently examined demographic variables in entrepreneurship research. Earlier studies generally suggested that male students exhibit stronger entrepreneurial intentions than female students due to differences in risk-taking behaviour, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, social expectations, and access to entrepreneurial role models. These differences have often been explained by socialisation processes that encourage entrepreneurial behaviour among men while exposing women to greater social and cultural barriers.

The authors argued that differences in confidence and perceived capability partially explain gender variations in entrepreneurial aspirations. Similarly, However, more recent studies have questioned the consistency of gender differences in entrepreneurial intention. Liñán, Nabi, and Krueger (2013) argued that although gender disparities continue to exist in some educational settings, entrepreneurship education has the potential to reduce these differences by providing equal access to entrepreneurial knowledge, practical learning experiences, and business-related competencies. Likewise, Westhead and Solesvik (2016) found that when educational environments offer similar entrepreneurial learning opportunities, the influence of gender on entrepreneurial intention becomes substantially weaker. These findings suggest that entrepreneurship education may function as an equalising mechanism that reduces traditional gender differences in entrepreneurial aspirations.

Despite extensive investigation, empirical findings regarding gender remain inconsistent across countries and educational contexts. While some studies continue to report statistically significant gender differences, others find no significant influence after accounting for educational and psychological variables.

Prior Entrepreneurial Experience and Entrepreneurial Intention

Prior entrepreneurial experience represents another important factor that may influence entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurial experience may include previous self-employment, participation in family

businesses, involvement in entrepreneurial projects, or exposure to business activities. Such experiences provide practical knowledge, increase entrepreneurial

Additional empirical evidence has supported the importance of entrepreneurial experience. Basu and Virick (2008) reported that students with entrepreneurial exposure exhibit stronger entrepreneurial intentions because they perceive entrepreneurship as a more realistic and attainable career option. Likewise, Zapkau et al. (2015) found that entrepreneurial role models and prior exposure indirectly influence entrepreneurial intention by enhancing entrepreneurial learning and self-confidence. These studies collectively suggest that entrepreneurial experience contributes to entrepreneurial intention through increased familiarity with entrepreneurial activities and greater perceived capability.

Nevertheless, the literature also presents contradictory evidence. Some studies indicate that prior entrepreneurial experience does not always translate into stronger entrepreneurial intention once students receive formal entrepreneurship education. Educational programmes may provide similar entrepreneurial knowledge and opportunities to all students, thereby reducing the influence of previous entrepreneurial exposure. Consequently, empirical findings regarding prior entrepreneurial experience remain inconclusive, particularly among vocational students who receive structured entrepreneurship education.

Research Gap

While several researchers have reported significant positive relationships, others have found weak or statistically insignificant effects after considering educational interventions. These inconsistencies indicate that demographic characteristics may not operate uniformly across different educational environments and cultural contexts.

In the Indian vocational education context, empirical evidence remains particularly limited. Vocational institutions increasingly incorporate entrepreneurship education into their curricula with the objective of promoting self-employment and innovation among students. However, little empirical evidence is available regarding whether demographic characteristics continue to influence entrepreneurial intention after students have received entrepreneurship education. Understanding this relationship is important because it helps determine whether entrepreneurship education provides an inclusive learning environment capable of fostering entrepreneurial aspirations irrespective of students' gender or previous entrepreneurial experience.

By focusing on students exposed to a common educational programme, this study contributes by evaluating whether entrepreneurial intention differs according to these demographic characteristics or whether entrepreneurship education helps minimise such differences.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a **quantitative, cross-sectional, empirical research design** to examine whether gender and prior entrepreneurial experience influence entrepreneurial intention among vocational students. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to test hypotheses and examine differences in entrepreneurial intention using statistical techniques.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised vocational studies students enrolled in higher education institutions in Kerala, India, where entrepreneurship education forms part of the curriculum. The respondents were drawn from different vocational programmes and represented various districts of Kerala.

A total of **306 students** participated in the study. The sample was selected using a **convenience sampling technique**. Although convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method, it is widely used in entrepreneurship education research when access to the entire population is limited.

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered directly to vocational students. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and respondents were requested to provide honest responses based on their personal opinions and experiences.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of two sections.

Section A collected demographic information, including:

- Gender
- Age
- District
- Vocational programme
- Type of family
- Monthly family income
- Father's occupation
- Mother's occupation
- Prior entrepreneurial experience

For the present study, **gender** and **prior entrepreneurial experience** were selected as the principal independent variables.

Section B measured **Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)** using a multi-item Likert-type scale adapted from the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire developed by Liñán and Chen (2009). The scale consisted of statements relating to respondents' intention to establish a business in the future.

Responses were measured using a **five-point Likert scale**.

Higher scores indicated stronger entrepreneurial intention.

Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the Entrepreneurial Intention scale was evaluated using **Cronbach's alpha**.

The analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha value of **0.769**, indicating acceptable internal consistency and confirming that the items reliably measured entrepreneurial intention among vocational students.

Variables of the Study

Variable	Type	Measurement
Gender	Independent Variable	Male / Female
Prior Entrepreneurial Experience	Independent Variable	Yes / No
Entrepreneurial Intention	Dependent Variable	Mean score of Likert-scale items

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using **Jamovi (Version 2.6)**.

The analysis was conducted in several stages.

Initially, descriptive statistics were generated to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Measures including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated to describe the sample and the level of entrepreneurial intention.

The reliability of the Entrepreneurial Intention scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Relatively large sample size ($N = 306$) justified the application of parametric statistical techniques because the independent-samples t -test is generally robust to moderate violations of normality.

To examine whether entrepreneurial intention differed according to **gender** and **prior entrepreneurial experience**, **independent-samples t -tests** were performed. Levene's test was used to verify the assumption of equal variances between the comparison groups, while **Cohen's d** was reported to evaluate the magnitude of observed group differences.

Considering the departure from normality, **non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis tests** were also conducted to confirm the robustness of the findings.

Statistical significance for all analyses was evaluated at the **5% significance level ($p < .05$)**.

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

As shown in **Table 1**, the scale produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of **0.769**, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics for the Entrepreneurial Intention Scale

Scale	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.769	Acceptable reliability

Descriptive Statistics

As presented in **Table 2**, data were obtained from **306 vocational students**, with no missing observations. The mean entrepreneurial intention score was **27.10** ($SD = 3.96$), indicating a relatively moderate to high level of entrepreneurial intention among the respondents.

The entrepreneurial intention scores ranged from **10** to **35**. The skewness value (-0.749) and kurtosis value (0.886) indicated only slight departures from normality, suggesting an approximately symmetric distribution of entrepreneurial intention scores.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Entrepreneurial Intention

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Entrepreneurial Intention	306	27.10	3.96	10	35	-0.749	0.886

Assessment of Normality

Before conducting inferential analyses, the assumption of normality was evaluated using the Shapiro–Wilk test. As shown in **Table 3**, the Shapiro–Wilk statistic was **0.956** with a significance level of **$p < .001$** , indicating that the entrepreneurial intention scores deviated from a perfectly normal distribution.

Nevertheless, because the sample size was relatively large ($N = 306$), the independent-samples t -test was considered appropriate.

Table 3 Normality Test for Entrepreneurial Intention

Variable	Shapiro–Wilk (W)	p -value	Decision
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.956	<0.001	Normality assumption violated

Gender Differences in Entrepreneurial Intention

As shown in **Table 4**, female students ($M = 27.10$, $SD = 4.04$) and male students ($M = 27.10$, $SD = 3.91$) reported almost identical levels of entrepreneurial intention. The difference between the two groups was not statistically significant, $t(304) = -0.074$, $p = .941$.

Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant ($F = 1.25$, $p = .265$), indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied.

These findings suggest that **gender does not significantly influence entrepreneurial intention among vocational students**. Therefore, **Hypothesis 1 was not supported**.

Table 4 Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing Entrepreneurial Intention by Gender

Variable	Female (n = 129) Mean $\pm$ SD	Male (n = 177) Mean $\pm$ SD	t	df	p
Entrepreneurial Intention	27.10 $\pm$ 4.04	27.10 $\pm$ 3.91	-0.074	304	.941

Influence of Prior Entrepreneurial Experience on Entrepreneurial Intention

The results presented in **Table 5** indicate that students with prior entrepreneurial experience reported a slightly higher entrepreneurial intention ($M = 27.60$, $SD = 3.79$) than students without prior entrepreneurial experience ($M = 26.80$, $SD = 4.02$). However, this difference was **not statistically significant**, $t(304) = 1.72$, $p = .087$.

Levene's test confirmed that the assumption of equal variances was satisfied ($F = 0.132$, $p = .717$). The observed effect size was **small** (Cohen's $d = 0.206$), indicating that prior entrepreneurial experience had only a limited practical influence on entrepreneurial intention.

Accordingly, **Hypothesis 2 was not supported**. Although students with previous entrepreneurial experience demonstrated marginally higher entrepreneurial intention, the observed difference was insufficient to reach statistical significance at the 5% level.

Table 5 Independent-Samples t-Test Comparing Entrepreneurial Intention by Prior Entrepreneurial Experience

Variable	Prior Experience (n = 106) Mean $\pm$ SD	No Prior Experience (n = 200) Mean $\pm$ SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Entrepreneurial Intention	27.60 $\pm$ 3.79	26.80 $\pm$ 4.02	1.72	304	.087	0.206

Robustness Analysis

To verify the stability of the findings, non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis tests were also conducted. The entrepreneurial intention were observed based on gender ($\chi^2 = 0.062$, $p = .804$) or prior entrepreneurial experience ($\chi^2 = 3.40$, $p = .065$). These results provide additional support for the conclusion that entrepreneurial intention did not differ significantly across the comparison groups.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Gender significantly influences entrepreneurial intention among vocational students.	Not Supported
H2	Prior entrepreneurial experience significantly influences entrepreneurial intention among vocational students.	Not Supported

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that vocational students demonstrated a moderate level of entrepreneurial intention. The Entrepreneurial Intention scale exhibited acceptable internal consistency, supporting the reliability of the measurement instrument. Independent-samples *t*-tests revealed that neither gender nor prior entrepreneurial experience produced statistically significant differences in entrepreneurial intention. Although students with prior entrepreneurial experience reported marginally higher entrepreneurial intention scores than those without such experience. Results suggest that entrepreneurial intention among vocational students appears to be relatively consistent across gender and prior entrepreneurial experience groups within the present sample.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether gender and prior entrepreneurial experience influence entrepreneurial intention among vocational students who had undertaken entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurial intention was measured using a reliable instrument (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.769$), and the findings demonstrated that neither gender nor prior entrepreneurial experience had a statistically significant influence on entrepreneurial intention. These findings provide valuable insights into entrepreneurship education within vocational institutions and contribute to the growing body of literature on entrepreneurial intention. One possible explanation is that entrepreneurship education provides equal opportunities for both male and female students to acquire entrepreneurial knowledge, practical skills, and confidence, thereby reducing traditional gender disparities.

Liñán, Nabi, and Krueger (2013) argued that entrepreneurship education can reduce gender-based differences by providing equal access to entrepreneurial learning and opportunity recognition. Likewise, Westhead and Solesvik (2016) reported that educational environments offering comparable entrepreneurial training reduce differences in entrepreneurial intention between male and female students. The present findings therefore support the view that structured entrepreneurship education may contribute to creating a more equitable entrepreneurial mindset among vocational students.

Although students with prior entrepreneurial experience reported slightly higher entrepreneurial intention scores than those without such experience, the observed difference was not statistically significant. These findings indicate that previous entrepreneurial exposure alone may not be sufficient to produce meaningful differences in entrepreneurial intention among students who have already completed entrepreneurship education.

Similarly, Carr and Sequeira (2007) demonstrated that prior exposure through family businesses or entrepreneurial activities positively influences entrepreneurial intention by providing entrepreneurial role models and practical business knowledge. Basu and Virick (2008) also found that entrepreneurial exposure enhances students' confidence in pursuing entrepreneurial careers.

However, the findings of the present study suggest that the influence of prior entrepreneurial experience may diminish when all students are exposed to a common entrepreneurship education programme. Entrepreneurship education equips students with entrepreneurial knowledge, opportunity recognition skills, business planning competencies, and problem-solving abilities that may compensate for differences in previous entrepreneurial exposure. Consequently, students without prior entrepreneurial experience may develop entrepreneurial intentions comparable to those who had earlier entrepreneurial exposure.

Gender and prior entrepreneurial experience may influence entrepreneurial intention indirectly through these psychological mechanisms rather than exerting direct effects. Because all participants in the present study had undertaken entrepreneurship education, the educational intervention may have contributed to developing similar entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions across different demographic groups, thereby reducing differences in entrepreneurial intention.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that entrepreneurship education offered within vocational programmes has the potential to promote entrepreneurial intention in an inclusive manner. This is particularly relevant for vocational institutions seeking to encourage entrepreneurship as a career pathway irrespective of students' personal backgrounds.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Implications

While previous studies have frequently reported demographic differences in entrepreneurial intention, the findings of this study suggest that such differences may become less prominent within educational environments that provide students with comparable entrepreneurial learning experiences.

The study also contributes to entrepreneurship education research by extending empirical evidence from the Indian vocational education context, an area that remains comparatively underrepresented in the international literature. By demonstrating that entrepreneurship education may help minimise demographic differences in entrepreneurial intention, the study broadens current understanding of how educational programmes influence entrepreneurial career aspirations among vocational students.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for educators, higher education institutions, curriculum developers, and policymakers responsible for promoting entrepreneurship education.

First, the absence of significant gender differences suggests that entrepreneurship education offered within vocational institutions is capable of providing an equitable learning environment for both male and female students. Consequently, educational institutions should continue to ensure equal access to entrepreneurship courses, business incubation activities, mentoring opportunities, and entrepreneurial competitions without differentiating programmes based on gender.

Second, the finding that prior entrepreneurial experience did not significantly influence entrepreneurial intention indicates that entrepreneurship education can effectively support students regardless of their previous entrepreneurial exposure. Students without entrepreneurial backgrounds appear capable of developing entrepreneurial aspirations comparable to those who possess earlier business experience. This finding reinforces the importance of structured entrepreneurship education in creating opportunities for first-generation entrepreneurs.

Third, vocational institutions should continue strengthening experiential learning approaches, including business simulations, project-based learning, industry collaborations, internships, business plan competitions, and interaction with successful entrepreneurs. Such activities can enhance entrepreneurial competencies and provide practical exposure for all students, irrespective of their demographic backgrounds.

Fourth, policymakers responsible for entrepreneurship promotion may consider expanding entrepreneurship education across vocational programmes, particularly in regions where graduate unemployment remains a challenge. The findings suggest that entrepreneurship education can serve as an inclusive policy instrument for developing entrepreneurial aspirations among diverse student populations rather than benefiting only students with favourable demographic characteristics or previous entrepreneurial experience.

Overall, the findings indicate that entrepreneurship education has the potential to create a supportive and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in vocational institutions by fostering entrepreneurial intention among students irrespective of gender or previous entrepreneurial experience.

CONCLUSION

The study makes an important contribution to entrepreneurship education research by demonstrating that entrepreneurship education may reduce demographic disparities traditionally associated with entrepreneurial intention. While earlier studies frequently reported significant differences based on gender or entrepreneurial exposure, the present findings indicate that structured entrepreneurship education may provide an inclusive learning environment capable of fostering entrepreneurial intention across diverse student groups. This finding is particularly relevant for vocational education, where practical learning experiences and entrepreneurial skill development are central components of the curriculum.

The study also contributes to the growing body of entrepreneurship research within the Indian context, where empirical evidence focusing on vocational students remains limited. By examining demographic influences within a relatively homogeneous educational setting, the research provides additional insight into how entrepreneurship education may shape entrepreneurial aspirations independently of students' personal characteristics.

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of entrepreneurship education as a mechanism for promoting entrepreneurial aspirations among vocational students. Rather than demographic characteristics determining entrepreneurial intention, the results suggest that well-designed entrepreneurship education programmes may help create an equitable and supportive environment in which students develop entrepreneurial ambitions irrespective of gender or prior entrepreneurial experience. Consequently, strengthening entrepreneurship education within vocational institutions may represent an effective strategy for developing future entrepreneurs and supporting sustainable economic development.

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