
Factors Influencing the Entrepreneurial Intention of Vocational School Students—A Case Study of Henan Province

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Abstract: *This study investigates the entrepreneurial intentions of secondary vocational students in Henan Province, China, by integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Vocational education plays a critical role in fostering entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth and innovation. However, a significant gap exists between students' entrepreneurial intentions and their actual engagement in entrepreneurial activities. The research addresses this issue by exploring the interplay of key factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions, including attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and family support. The study adopts a positivist research philosophy and employs quantitative methods, utilizing structured questionnaires and advanced statistical modelling via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). This integrated framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological, social, and contextual determinants of entrepreneurial intentions. The findings are expected to bridge gaps in entrepreneurial education and inform policymakers, educators, and vocational institutions on strategies to cultivate entrepreneurial aspirations effectively. By focusing on secondary vocational students, a group often overlooked in entrepreneurship research, this study contributes to theoretical advancements and offers practical recommendations for fostering a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem in China.*

Keywords: *attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, family support, entrepreneurial intentions*

1. Introduction

The introduction sets the scene with a critical exploration of entrepreneurial intentions among secondary vocational college students in China at the of 15 years old, by identifying the importance of developing entrepreneurship skill as the driver of economic growth and innovation, particularly within an entrepreneurship education context. Despite large efforts by the Chinese government to promote entrepreneurial activities through policies and educational reforms, there exists a wide gap between the students' entrepreneurial intent and their actual involvement in entrepreneurial ventures. For that reason, this chapter introduces the background, problem statement, objectives, and research questions to provide guidance in investigating the disparity between entrepreneurial intentions and actual entrepreneurial activity for students. This study applied Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) in gaining further insight and in predicting entrepreneurial intention. This chapter addresses the practical and theoretical significance of the study, laying the ground for subsequent discussions and analyses.

2. Literature review

The literature review chapter survives for an extended view of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings related to the study of entrepreneurial intentions among Chinese secondary vocational college students. This chapter focusing on entrepreneurial educations starts by giving a brief history and present situation of China's secondary vocational education. This is followed by an examination of key constructs impacting entrepreneurial intentions, such as attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and family support. The paper will also examine the theoretical underpinnings for TPB and SCCT that offer elements making up the proposed research conceptual framework. This review is carried out with regard to the literature identified in this area and the background required to be furnished on how these factors shape entrepreneurial intentions within the context of Chinese vocational education.

2.1 Literature Review on DV: Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention is a cognitive state considered to be a predecessor of the final decision entailing the practice of entrepreneurial activities (Youssef et al., 2021). It refers to that critical element before real entrepreneurial behaviour and forms the basis whether someone will eventually start a new venture (Anjum et al., 2020). Scholars defined entrepreneurial intention from several perspectives, thus capturing its multi-dimensional nature (Mei, Lee & Xian, 2020). For example, Bird defined it in 1988 as a state of mind orienting people's attention toward self-employment rather than organizational employment. Al-Mamary & Alraja (2022) further described entrepreneurial intention as that state of mind that consciously directs an individual's attention, experience, and actions toward entrepreneurial behaviour. The above definitions

emphasize the psychological and motivational elements that underscore the role of entrepreneurial intention as part of the entrepreneurial process.

2.2 Literature Review on IV1: Attitudes

Attitudes toward entrepreneurship refers to a person's positive or bad perception of engaging in entrepreneurial activities, thus his general propensity to start and run a business. There are various definitions of the multifaceted construct provided by different scholars. For example, Saeed et al (2018) defined attitudes towards entrepreneurship as the degree to which someone has either a positive or negative predisposition towards becoming an entrepreneur. Similarly, Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (1991) suggests attitude toward behaviour as one of the most prominent predictors of intention, where the more positive attitude toward entrepreneurship significantly increases the likelihood of starting entrepreneurial activities. Among these roles are motivational factors that drive people toward entrepreneurship. These attitudes are shaped by personal experiences, education, social influences, and exposure to entrepreneurial environments (Sussman & Gifford, 2019). Individuals with a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship have high propensities because they influence perceptions about how desirable and feasible entrepreneurship is in comparison to other career options. This is very important in educational settings, where positive attitude development has an important effect on students' entrepreneurial intentions.

2.3 Literature Review on IV2: Subjective Norms

The role of subjective norms in the study of entrepreneurial intentions is utmost important, grounded in the development by Ajzen (1991) the Theory of Planned Behaviour. In general, subjective norms are viewed as pressure that exists within a person to act out or not act out a certain behaviour, for example, founding a business. These norms are a result of beliefs and expectations from various people whose opinions matter most to the individual, such as family members, friends, mentors, and society at large (Al-Jubari, 2019). Other researchers have also pointed out that subjective norms play a very important role in forming these intentions, specifying that social expectations and approval play a huge role in an individual's decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Vamvaka et al., 2020; Gorgievski et al., 2018). Subjective norms powerfully influence the intention to become an entrepreneur because individuals often turn their eyes toward society for validation and support whenever they make vital career decisions (Sussman & Gifford, 2019). Provided one feels that important others in a person's life are supportive and hold a positive attitude about entrepreneurs, he or she will be more likely to develop and act upon entrepreneurial intentions (Linggappa, Shah & Mathew, 2020). In the event that individuals perceive an unsupportive social environment or one that condemned entrepreneurship, then they may not be encouraged to do so despite their attitude or perceived behavioural control.

2.4 Literature Review on IV3: Perceived Behavioural Control

Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) is one of the critical constructs in the Theory of Planned Behaviour by Ajzen, 1991. According to him, through PBC, much variation in entrepreneurial intention is explained. PBC identifies the perceived degree of ease or difficulty involved in performing a given behaviour, in this case, setting up and running a business. It is the individual's beliefs in his abilities to perform the entrepreneurial behaviour and perception of control over, with factor exogeny that either facilitates or hinders an entrepreneurial process (Liu et al., 2019). Among others, the PBC definition and interpretations present a multilevel nature: internal capabilities in relation to external conditions influencing entrepreneurial intentions. According to Ajzen, 1991, PBC refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. It reflects past experiences as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles. He gave this definition to support the importance of both self-efficacy and controllability in determining an individual's confidence in his capability to undertake entrepreneurial activities (Kautonen et al., 2013). Self-efficacy is a term introduced by Bandura (1997), it is an individual's belief in his/her capability to execute specific tasks. On the contrary, controllability refers to the extent people feel they can control factors that are external in nature but affect their entrepreneurial activities.

2.5 Literature Review on IV4: Self-Efficacy

Bandura defined self-efficacy in 1977 as "an individual's belief in his capability to execute the behaviours necessary to produce specified performance attainments." It is a belief that affects how human beings think, feel, and act. It plays a very significant role in their motivation and ability to perform certain tasks. In an entrepreneurial aspect, self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their capacity to start a business and run it effectively (Naneh, 2022). It becomes a key factor in determining entrepreneurial intentions, often mediating the effects of other constructs within the Theory of Planned Behaviour on entrepreneurial intentions (Asimakopoulos et al., 2019; Chien-Chi et al., 2020; Soomro & Shah, 2022). In its core, TPB posits the existence of three main constructs impacting behavioural intentions: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Self-efficacy is relatedly close to PBC, since both have to do with beliefs about control over performing a behaviour. The difference between the two is that self-efficacy is tightly focused on personal capability, whereas PBC incorporates the concepts of both self-efficacy and control over external factors (Yousaf et al., 2021).

2.6 Literature Review on IV5: Outcome Expectation

Outcome expectations are a part of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, describing the expected results from performing a particular behaviour (Udayanan, 2019). In entrepreneurship, outcome expectations portray personal beliefs about potential rewards and benefits to be derived from business start-ups, such as economic gain, personal satisfaction, and social recognition (Ip et al., 2021). They have immense effects on entrepreneurial intention by their received influence on individuals' motivation and willingness to engage in entrepreneurship. In particular, one should understand how outcome expectations mediate the relations between

the different constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and entrepreneurial intention so that educational and policy interventions may be adequately developed.

2.7 Literature Review on Moderating Variable: Family Support

Of all the factors influencing the development of entrepreneurial intentions, family support is paramount, as it contributes immensely to the emotional, financial, and practical help needed by the entrepreneur (Cardella et al., 2020). Family support has been defined in different ways by various scholars to underline the many facets that exist. For example, Georgescu and Herman (2020) define it as the resources and encouragement provided by family members that help individuals pursue entrepreneurial activities. This may take the form of financial investment, emotional encouragement, advice, or networking opportunities. Similarly, Chang et al. (2009) describe family support as the emotional and instrumental assistance that family members provide to entrepreneurs at large and hence having a major effect on their entrepreneurial success and intentions. Family support in developing entrepreneurial intentions cannot be emphasized enough. Families are usually the first social context in which individuals either experience or are exposed to entrepreneurially oriented values, attitudes, and behaviors (Saoula et al., 2023). Those families that support and encourage their members have more self-confidence and stronger intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, families can provide the crucial financial resources and other practical assistance that may reduce the perceived risks and challenges of venture creation (Ahmed, Islam & Usman, 2021). This could especially be critical support to a young entrepreneur or someone just starting an entrepreneurial career.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Building on former chapter's review of literature, in which theoretical frameworks and empirical studies regarding entrepreneurial intentions in Chinese vocational students have been discussed, in this chapter, discussion regarding adopted methodological framework for this study is discussed in detail. On the basis of review of literature, key constructs that have an impact on entrepreneurial intentionality, such as attitude, subjective norm, perceived behaviour control, efficacy, outcome expectation, and family support, form the basis for formulating a conceptual model for this study. To validate hypotheses and evaluate these relationships, in this chapter, discussion regarding adopted research design, approach, and method is discussed in detail. It continues with determining target population, sampling method and technique, instrumentation, and method for collecting data. In addition, discussion regarding analysis techniques, such as descriptive statistics, measurement model evaluation, and evaluation of a structural model with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), is discussed in detail. Lastly, discussion regarding ethical concerns, such that the study conforms to academic integrity and research ethics.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study serves as a foundational basis for understanding the relationships among the key variables under investigation, grounded in established theories that clarify how these variables influence entrepreneurial intentions. A theoretical framework functions as the analytical lens through which the research problem is examined, thereby establishing a linkage between the study's objectives and the broader academic discourses. This research develops its theoretical framework through the synthesis of diverse educational, psychological, and organisational theories. The aforementioned theories provide a comprehensive understanding of how various components, including Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Cognitive Career Theory Impact Entrepreneurship Intention. Furthermore, the family support as a moderating factor within this intricate relationship.

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study seeks to clarify the theoretical relationships among the key variables being investigated and to explain how these variables interact to influence the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational school students. A conceptual framework functions as a structured representation of the primary focus of the study, guiding the research process by creating a linkage between the research problem and the theoretical foundations that support it. This research introduces a comprehensive framework that methodically incorporates independent variables such as the attitudes towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, in relation to the dependent variable of entrepreneurship intention. Moreover, it integrates the family support as a moderating variable that significantly impacts these relationships.

4. Results and discussion

The first problem statement is the persistent gap between the entrepreneurial intentions of secondary vocational college students and their actual entrepreneurial engagement. Despite policies such as "Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation," which aim to promote entrepreneurial activities among all students, vocational students in China display significantly lower rates of entrepreneurship compared to university students (Su, Zhou, & Pan, 2021). This disparity suggests that the existing policies may not fully address the unique challenges faced by vocational students, such as their limited exposure to entrepreneurial practices and opportunities for real-world application (Ling, Chung, & Wang, 2023). Moreover, research indicates that vocational students are less confident in their entrepreneurial abilities, which further discourages their participation in entrepreneurial ventures (Su, Zhou, & Pan, 2021). This gap between intention and action not only undermines the government's efforts to foster widespread entrepreneurship but also limits the role of vocational education as a driver of economic growth. This study will identify factors that significantly influence secondary vocational college students' entrepreneurial intention in China

The second problem statement is that vocational education curricula in China remain outdated, focusing heavily on technical skills while neglecting entrepreneurial competencies such as the relationship attitudes and entrepreneurship, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control

and entrepreneurial intention. Essential skills like creativity, innovation, and risk-taking—crucial for entrepreneurial success—are underdeveloped due to traditional rote-based teaching methods (Qiping & White, 2023). Current programs are often theoretical and lack practical, hands-on training that is vital for preparing students to start and manage their own ventures (Guo & Wang, 2020). As a result, students graduate without the entrepreneurial mindset or problem-solving skills needed to navigate the challenges of starting and sustaining a business (Qiping & White, 2023). This educational gap not only affects individual entrepreneurial outcomes but also hinders the broader goal of fostering an entrepreneurial culture within vocational education. This study examines self-efficacy as a mediator in the relationship attitudes and entrepreneurship, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and entrepreneurial intention among secondary vocational college students

The third problem statement is the insufficient collaboration between vocational institutions and industries, which creates a misalignment between the skills provided by vocational education and the demands of the labour market. The expectations outcomes are very crucial to mediate the students' entrepreneur intentions. Without these critical connections, many vocational graduates struggle to transition from education to entrepreneurship This will While industries require employees with a combination of technical expertise and entrepreneurial capabilities, vocational schools often lack the partnerships necessary to provide students with practical exposure to real-world entrepreneurial environments (Ling, Chung, & Wang, 2023). This disconnect results in students being ill-equipped to meet market needs or pursue independent business ventures (Liu, Pan, & Wang, 2019). Additionally, the absence of industry engagement deprives students of opportunities to develop networks, secure mentorship, or gain insights into market dynamics (Ling, Chung, & Wang, 2023) This study will examine outcome expectation as a mediator in the relationships between attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and entrepreneurial intention among secondary vocational college students. Another objective of this study that relates to the above issue is analysing the relationship between outcome expectation and entrepreneurial intention among secondary vocational college students.

The fourth problem statement is the negative societal perception of vocational education, which significantly affects students' entrepreneurial aspirations. Family support is one of the main aspects which will moderate the relationship between attitudes, subject norms, and entrepreneurial intention. In China, vocational education is often stigmatized as a less prestigious alternative to academic pathways, leading to reduced interest and motivation among students (Hayhoe, 2019). This societal bias discourages vocational students from considering entrepreneurship as a viable career option, as they may perceive themselves as less capable or respected than their university-educated peers (Qiping & White, 2023). Furthermore, structural barriers, such as limited mobility between vocational and academic education tracks, exacerbate this issue by restricting students' opportunities for further education or career advancement (Hayhoe, 2019). These perceptions and barriers not only diminish the confidence of vocational students but also hinder the development of an entrepreneurial culture within this educational stream. This study will investigate family support as a moderator in the relationship between attitudes, subject norms, and entrepreneurial intention.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

First and foremost, this study makes valuable contribution to the policymakers and educational authorities in that it provides critical insight into bettering the entrepreneurial landscape among secondary vocational college students in China. If the Chinese government desires to begin entrepreneurship as an ongoing driver of economic growth through endless reforms in policy, knowing student factors that impact entrepreneurial intentions can help fine-tune and implement these policies more effectively. Determinants such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and family support can benefit from policy interventions and educational efforts targeted specifically at improving a strong entrepreneurial orientation towards the public. This means endowment of not just technical skills but also infusing vocational education with such types of entrepreneurial competencies which can lead to successful entrepreneurship in modern economies.

The study also offers practical implications that could potentially transform teaching methodologies and curriculum design for educators and vocational training institutions. If one is aware of the fact that many influences shape entrepreneurial intentions beyond mere technical knowledge, it would enable a holistic approach to teaching, with possibilities of experiential learning opportunities in classrooms through mentorship programs and entrepreneurship projects. Such initiatives might instill in the student's practical experience and a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial process, thus enhancing their confidence and intention to become involved in entrepreneurship. In case educators wish to formulate an environment encouraging creativity, innovation, and risk-taking, then they would be doing a great deal for the formation of future entrepreneurs.

The research also highlights the importance of family support in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. This insight has been considered especially useful for developing out-of-classroom support systems. Institutes can involve students' families through workshops and seminars on creating awareness about entrepreneurship and the role of the family in encouraging this process. Vocational colleges would also ensure an enriched entrepreneurial ecosystem by developing a network that includes family members, among others, to morally and emotionally prepare the will and desires of students for entrepreneurship. Being such a comprehensive support system, such efforts can help in linking the gap between the expressed entrepreneurial intentions of the students and their actual entrepreneurial activities.

SCCT also acknowledges the role played by contextual factors, including social support and environmental influences. The social support from family, friends, mentors, or even professional networks exerts a significant effect on increasing individuals' self-efficacy and outcome expectations, hence leading to the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. The supportive environment provides resources, encouragement, and reinforcement for pursuing entrepreneurial goals. Such research by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) underlines that a supportive social environment enhances self-efficacy and outcome expectations, hence increasing the formation of strong entrepreneurial intentions.

Another major feature of SCCT is the mediating role that self-efficacy plays in the relationship between outcome expectations and entrepreneurial intentions. High self-efficacy will amplify the positive effect that the more favourable the outcome expectations, the more positive effect on entrepreneurial intentions. Those people who have confidence in their own abilities to be entrepreneurial are likely to translate positive outcome expectations into concrete measures of entrepreneurial intention. For example, the work of Liu et al (2019) established that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between outcome expectations and entrepreneurial intentions. This illustrates the important implication of that enhancing self-efficacy strengthens the impact of positive outcome expectations on entrepreneurial behaviour. SCCT also sets a personal-contextual interplay at the forefront in the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. In other words, the theory assumes that personal attributes like personality traits and previous experiences are converted into career-related behaviours in view of environmental factors such as social supports and access to resources. This interaction stamps a clear sign on the consideration of individual and contextual influences when understanding entrepreneurial intentions. For example, research done by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) demonstrated how interactions between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and prescribed environmental supports were affecting career decision-making and the processes of goal setting, that is an important contribution to the understanding of what forms entrepreneurial intentions.

The inclusion of TPB within research in entrepreneurship has added a more elaborate understanding of the cognitive processes underlying entrepreneurial intentions. It is through this interplay that attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC detail how one is driven to contemplate an entrepreneurial career and carry it out at will. Given this theoretical framework, important determinants of entrepreneurial intention could be identified, and interventions increasing entrepreneurship were designed. Some explicit studies have been conducted on the mediating and moderating roles of TPB constructs in entrepreneurial intentions. Self-efficacy, for example, often mediates the link between attitude towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention. So, individuals possessing positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship will be more likely to exhibit high levels of entrepreneurial intentions in cases where they also possess high self-efficacy. Zhao, Seibert, and Hills (2005) showed that self-efficacy mediated the relation between attitude toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention; in other words, it proffers that an increase in self-efficacy strengthens the influence of positive attitude on-like power.

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