



University Students Entrepreneurial Intention: Integrating Personality, Context, and Educational Support

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Abstract

University students represent a critical pool of potential entrepreneurs, yet their likelihood of starting a venture varies widely depending on personal, contextual, and educational factors. Prior research has identified many determinants of entrepreneurial intention, but these factors are often examined in isolation and without considering how they combine into distinct profiles of students. This paper develops an integrative conceptual article that synthesizes evidence on four major groups of determinants personality traits, contextual conditions, motivational drivers, and individual background to propose a typology of student entrepreneurial intention profiles. Drawing on a systematic body of empirical research from 2012–2023, the paper discusses how self-confidence, risk-taking, perceived behavioural control, family background, and supportive educational environments interact to shape intention strength and likelihood of translating intention into action. The proposed typology distinguishes, for example, between “confident opportunity-seekers”, “context-driven necessity planners”, and “supported experimenters” and explains how universities and policy makers can tailor interventions to each profile. The paper contributes by moving from a fragmented list of determinants toward a more holistic, actionable framework for understanding and fostering student entrepreneurial intention.

Keywords: Entrepreneurs, self-confidence, personality, educational support, entrepreneurial intention.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely viewed as a driver of economic growth, job creation, and innovation, and many countries see university students as a central source of future entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial intention, understood as a conscious plan or commitment to start a business in the future, has become a major focus of research because intentions strongly predict later entrepreneurial behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Doanh et al., 2021). Over the last decade there has been a rapid expansion of empirical work examining which factors shape students’ intentions to become entrepreneurs, including personality traits, education, family background, and the broader environment.

A recent systematic review and bibliometric analysis covering 2012–2023 demonstrates that four blocks of determinants appear consistently in the literature: personality-related traits, contextual conditions, motivational factors, and elements of individual background such as family experience and education (Kautonen et al., 2015; Nabi et al., 2017; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2024). However, most empirical studies treat these factors separately or test only a small subset of variables, making it difficult to see how they combine within real students. This paper addresses that gap by synthesizing key findings and advancing a conceptual



typology of “student entrepreneurial intention profiles” that describe recurring combinations of determinants.

The aim is not to re-conduct a systematic review, but to build on existing evidence and offer an integrative, practitioner-oriented lens for understanding which students are most likely to develop strong entrepreneurial intentions and under what conditions those intentions translate into action. By organizing determinants into profiles, the article offers a more nuanced basis for designing entrepreneurship education and targeted support measures.

2. Theoretical background

Entrepreneurial intention is commonly modeled using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which highlights attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) as core predictors (Ajzen, 1991; Kautonen et al., 2015). In the student context, attitudes reflect the perceived attractiveness of self-employment, subjective norms capture perceived support from family and peers, and PBC reflects students’ beliefs about their ability to start and run a business. A large body of work confirms that TPB variables significantly predict intention across countries, disciplines, and genders, although their relative importance varies (Esfandiar et al., 2019; Shinnar et al., 2012).

Beyond these proximal TPB factors, several broader categories of determinants have been highlighted. Personality traits—including risk-taking, self-confidence, innovativeness, need for achievement, and an internal locus of control—shape how students perceive opportunities and evaluate the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship (Do & Dadvari, 2017; Karabulut, 2016). Contextual conditions encompass social, cultural, economic, and political environments that can either encourage or discourage entrepreneurial careers, such as supportive policies, access to finance, or cultural values regarding risk and independence (Elnadi & Gheith, 2021; Shinnar et al., 2012). Motivational factors include income aspirations, search for autonomy, dissatisfaction with salaried employment, and desire for social status or self-realization (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018; Stephan et al., 2015). Individual background factors involve family business exposure, parental occupation, gender, age, prior work experience, and especially entrepreneurship education and training (Küttim et al., 2014; Liñán et al., 2011; Nabi et al., 2017).

Existing reviews show that education and family environment are among the most frequently studied factors, while age and gender effects remain less clear and sometimes contradictory (Maheshwari et al., 2022; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2024). Instead of adding more single-factor studies, the current article argues that a profile perspective can better reflect how real students experience these multiple influences in combination.

3. Methodological approach (conceptual synthesis)

The present paper is conceptual but grounded in results from a recent systematic literature review and bibliometric analysis that screened 802 documents and retained 353 relevant empirical studies on student entrepreneurial intention between 2012 and 2023. From these, forty-three highly cited articles were examined in depth to identify determinants of intention and to classify them into four main categories: personality traits, contextual factors,



motivational factors, and individual background variables (Kautonen et al., 2015; Nabi et al., 2017).

This article uses those categories as a starting point but shifts the focus from “which determinants are most studied” to “which clusters of determinants tend to co-occur and what student profiles they suggest”. The synthesis is interpretive and theory-driven; it draws on TPB, personality models, and research on social and family influences to outline distinct prototypical profiles rather than to estimate effect sizes. The intention is to provide an organizing framework that can guide future empirical tests and help educators design differentiated interventions.

4. Four profiles of student entrepreneurial intention

4.1 Confident opportunity-seekers

The first profile describes students who possess high self-confidence, strong perceived behavioral control, moderate to high risk-taking, and high innovativeness, often coupled with supportive family environments or prior exposure to business activities (Do & Dadvari, 2017; Kautonen et al., 2015). These students typically perceive entrepreneurship as attractive and feasible, and they believe they can mobilize resources and cope with uncertainty. Their attitudes and PBC are strongly positive, and subjective norms are at least neutral, reducing social barriers to action (Esfandiar et al., 2019).

Empirical studies show that self-efficacy and internal locus of control are robust predictors of entrepreneurial intention and partially mediate the effects of education and role models (Fuller et al., 2018; Liñán & Fayolle, 2016). Confident opportunity-seekers tend to benefit most from experiential entrepreneurship education that gives them real projects, incubator access, and early chances to test business ideas, because they already possess the psychological readiness to act. For this group, the main challenge is not generating intention but sustaining it over time and converting it into concrete steps such as opportunity evaluation, resource acquisition, and actual start-up behavior (Meoli et al., 2020).

4.2 Context-driven necessity planners

A second profile consists of students whose entrepreneurial intention is motivated less by opportunity excitement and more by perceived lack of attractive salaried jobs, economic instability, or social mobility constraints (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2012; Ahmed et al., 2020). These students often report moderate PBC but place high weight on increased income, job security, and the need to control their own employment conditions (Mahfud et al., 2020). Their family background may include limited economic resources or self-employment out of necessity, and they may come from regions with weak labor markets. Research on necessity entrepreneurship suggests that these motivations can still lead to viable ventures, but they are associated with different risk perceptions and growth ambitions than opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (Ferreira et al., 2018). For context-driven necessity planners, external supports—such as access to micro-finance, simplified administrative procedures, and mentoring—are crucial for turning intention into action because personal resources and networks may be constrained (Elnadi & Gheith, 2021; Sullivan & Meek, 2012).



Educational programs that combine basic business skills with career counseling and financial literacy may be especially valuable for this group.

4.3 Supported experimenters

The third profile captures students whose intention is moderate but strongly shaped by educational experiences, role models, and institutional support rather than by pronounced personality traits or pressing economic needs (Küttim et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2017). These students may not score very high on risk-taking or need for achievement, but they become interested in entrepreneurship when they attend engaging courses, meet inspiring entrepreneurs, or participate in competitions and incubators (Nowiński & Haddoud, 2019; Iwu et al., 2021). Here, the university context functions as a catalyst that raises subjective norms and PBC by signaling that entrepreneurship is legitimate, attainable, and supported (Koe et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2021).

Evidence shows that entrepreneurship education can significantly enhance intention, especially when it is practice-oriented and tailored to non-business students, although effects differ across disciplines (Maresch et al., 2016; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2022). Supported experimenters benefit from low-stakes opportunities to try out entrepreneurial tasks—such as short projects, simulations, and interdisciplinary team challenges—because these experiences gradually build confidence without requiring immediate full-time commitment. This profile underscores why expanding entrepreneurship education beyond business schools is important.

4.4 Under-supported potentials

The final profile includes students who possess several favorable personal characteristics—such as high creativity, curiosity, or proactivity—but face social or structural barriers that dampen their entrepreneurial intention. These barriers may include lack of family support, cultural norms that discourage risk-taking or self-employment, gender stereotypes, or institutional environments that offer little entrepreneurship exposure (Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2016; Shinnar et al., 2012). For example, female students in some contexts report similar or higher entrepreneurial competence than males but lower intention due to perceived discrimination or limited access to networks (Maes et al., 2014; Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2016).

The literature indicates that subjective norms and perceived social support can significantly moderate the relationship between traits and intention, meaning that capable students may never develop strong intentions if their environment signals that entrepreneurship is inappropriate or unattainable (Verheul et al., 2012; Elnadi & Gheith, 2021). Policy and educational interventions for under-supported potentials need to focus on role models from similar backgrounds, mentoring schemes, and visible institutional backing for diverse forms of entrepreneurship. Reducing structural and cultural barriers may unlock entrepreneurial careers that would otherwise remain unrealized.

5. Implications

For educators, the profile approach suggests that “one-size-fits-all” entrepreneurship courses are unlikely to be optimal. Confident opportunity-seekers may require advanced content, access to networks, and incubation, whereas context-driven necessity planners might benefit



more from basic financial management, legal support, and risk-mitigation tools (Küttim et al., 2014; Ferreira et al., 2018). Supported experimenters need exploratory, low-stakes experiences that can raise self-efficacy, while under-supported potentials require strong signaling and targeted support to overcome social and cultural barriers (Nabi et al., 2017; Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2016).

For policymakers, the findings emphasize the importance of aligning entrepreneurship promotion with broader labor market, education, and social policies. Countries with strong research output in entrepreneurial intention, such as Malaysia, China, and Spain, often combine national policies, university-level initiatives, and funding schemes to encourage student entrepreneurship (Shamsudin et al., 2017; Meoli et al., 2020). Tailored measures—such as grants for student start-ups, simplified registration procedures, and tax incentives for young entrepreneurs—can be designed with different profiles in mind.

6. Conclusion

Research on university students' entrepreneurial intention has moved from descriptive studies to more theory-driven models, yet much of the work still examines determinants in isolation. This conceptual paper proposes a profile-based perspective that integrates personality traits, contextual conditions, motivational drivers, and individual background factors into four prototypical configurations: confident opportunity-seekers, context-driven necessity planners, supported experimenters, and under-supported potentials. These profiles illustrate how similar levels of intention can emerge from different combinations of factors and why targeted interventions are needed to support diverse student groups. Future empirical research can test and refine this typology through longitudinal and cross-cultural studies, thereby contributing to more precise and effective efforts to cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs.

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