From Classroom to Startup: Understanding Entrepreneurial Intention and Attitude Across Academic Disciplines in Undergraduate Education

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Abstract:

This study investigates the entrepreneurial intention (EI) and entrepreneurial attitude (EA) among undergraduate students across four major academic disciplines: Arts, Commerce, Management, and Engineering. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the research examines how attitude, perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and demographic factors influence students' intention to become entrepreneurs. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 450 undergraduate students from various universities in India using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, ANOVA, and multiple regression. Findings reveal that students from Commerce and Management exhibit significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions compared to their counterparts in Arts and Engineering. Attitude and perceived behavioral control emerged as the strongest predictors of entrepreneurial intention, while gender, family background, and prior exposure to entrepreneurship education significantly moderate these relationships. The study highlights the need for discipline-specific entrepreneurship education and institutional support systems to nurture entrepreneurial mindsets. The paper concludes with policy implications for educators and university administrators aiming to foster a culture of innovation and self-employment among youth.

1. Introduction:

In an era marked by rapid technological change, economic uncertainty, and rising youth unemployment, entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical driver of innovation, job creation, and sustainable development. Governments and educational institutions worldwide are increasingly emphasizing the importance of cultivating an entrepreneurial culture among students, particularly at the undergraduate level. In India, where over 3.7 crore students are enrolled in higher education, nurturing entrepreneurial intention among youth is not just a policy goal but a national imperative (All India Survey on Higher Education, 2023).

Entrepreneurial intention refers to a student's conscious plan or readiness to start a new business in the future (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). It serves as a strong predictor of actual entrepreneurial behavior. Attitude toward entrepreneurship—defined as a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of starting a business—plays a central role in shaping this intention. While previous research has explored entrepreneurial intention in business and engineering students, there remains a significant gap in comparative studies across diverse academic streams such as Arts, Commerce, Management, and Engineering.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the level and determinants of entrepreneurial intention and attitude among undergraduate students across these four

disciplines. The research is guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that behavioral intention is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. The findings are expected to inform curriculum design, institutional policies, and government initiatives aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship in India.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the most widely used theoretical model in entrepreneurial intention research (Ajzen, 1991). According to TPB, an individual's intention to engage in a behavior is determined by three components: (1) Attitude the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior; (2) Subjective Norms perceived social pressure from significant others; and (3) Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, closely linked to self-efficacy.

Numerous studies have validated the predictive power of TPB in the context of student entrepreneurship (Fayolle et al., 2006; Liñán & Chen, 2009). For instance, Liñán and Fayolle (2015) found that attitude and PBC are the most consistent predictors of EI across different cultural contexts.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Intention Across Disciplines

Research indicates significant variation in entrepreneurial intention based on academic discipline. Students in Commerce and Management generally exhibit higher EI due to exposure to business concepts, market dynamics, and entrepreneurship courses (Nabi et al., 2017). A study by Souitaris et al. (2007) found that business students showed greater entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention than non-business students.

In contrast, Engineering students, despite possessing technical skills, often report lower entrepreneurial intention. This paradox has been attributed to a lack of entrepreneurial mindset, risk aversion, and insufficient exposure to business planning (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). However, recent studies suggest that when engineering students are exposed to innovation-based curricula, their EI increases significantly (Walter & Block, 2016).

Students in Arts and Humanities are often overlooked in entrepreneurship research. However, their creative skills and critical thinking abilities make them well-suited for social and cultural entrepreneurship (Neergaard et al., 2009). Yet, they often lack confidence and perceive entrepreneurship as financially risky (Jones & Iredale, 2010).

2.3 Role of Attitude, Self-Efficacy, and Social Norms

Attitude toward entrepreneurship is a strong antecedent of intention. Students who perceive entrepreneurship as prestigious, rewarding, and aligned with personal values are more

likely to intend to start a venture (Fayolle et al., 2006). Similarly, entrepreneurial self-efficacy the belief in one's ability to start and run a business is a critical mediator between education and intention (Chen et al., 1998).

Subjective norms, including family support and peer influence, also play a role. Students with entrepreneurial parents or friends are more likely to consider entrepreneurship (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). However, in collectivist cultures like India, family pressure to pursue stable careers (e.g., government jobs) may suppress entrepreneurial aspirations.

2.4 Gaps in Literature

While several studies have examined EI in specific disciplines, few have conducted comparative analyses across Arts, Commerce, Management, and Engineering. Moreover, most Indian studies focus on urban business schools, neglecting the diversity of academic streams and regional contexts. This study addresses these gaps by providing a holistic, multi-disciplinary perspective on student entrepreneurial intention in the Indian higher education landscape.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine entrepreneurial intention and attitude among undergraduate students. The research is descriptive and explanatory in nature, aiming to compare EI across disciplines and identify key influencing factors.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consists of undergraduate students enrolled in Arts, Commerce, Management, and Engineering programs across universities in India. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed:

- Stage 1: Selection of five universities (public and private) from different regions (North, South, East, West, and Central India).
- Stage 2: Stratified random sampling within each university to select 90 students from each discipline (Arts, Commerce, Management, Engineering), resulting in a total sample size of 450 students.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from prior research:

- Entrepreneurial Intention (EI): Measured using the 6-item scale by Liñán and Chen (2009) (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$).
- Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA): Assessed using a 5-item scale ($\alpha = 0.82$).

- Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC): 4-item scale (α = 0.85).
- Subjective Norms (SN): 4-item scale (α = 0.79).
- Demographic Variables: Gender, age, family income, parental occupation, prior entrepreneurship education.

The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms, with a response rate of 92%.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (v26). The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Descriptive statistics (mean, SD)
- Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha)
- One-way ANOVA to compare EI across disciplines
- Pearson correlation to examine relationships between variables
- Multiple regression to identify predictors of entrepreneurial intention

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile

Of the 450 respondents:

- Gender: 52% male, 48% female

- Age: Mean = 20.3 years (SD = 1.4)

- Family Income: 38% from middle-income families (₹3–8 lakh/year)

- Parental Entrepreneurship: 22% had at least one parent who was an entrepreneur

- Exposure to EE: 41% had taken an entrepreneurship course

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)	3.68	0.72
Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA)	3.81	0.68
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	3.54	0.75
Subjective Norms (SN)	3.22	0.81

Overall, students showed a moderately positive attitude toward entrepreneurship, but intention levels were moderate, indicating a gap between attitude and action.

4.3 Comparison of EI Across Disciplines (ANOVA)

Discipline	Mean EI	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value
Arts	3.21	0.69	18.74	<0.001
Commerce	3.85	0.63		
Management	3.92	0.58		
Engineering	3.48	0.71		

ANOVA results revealed a statistically significant difference in EI across disciplines ($F = 18.74$, $p < 0.001$). Post-hoc Tukey tests showed that Management and Commerce students

had significantly higher EI than Arts and Engineering students ($p < 0.01$). Engineering students scored higher than Arts students but lower than Commerce/Management.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation revealed significant positive relationships:

- EI and EA: $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$
- EI and PBC: $r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$
- EI and SN: $r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$
- EA and PBC: $r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$

These findings support the TPB model, indicating that favorable attitudes and perceived control are strongly linked to entrepreneurial intention.

4.5 Regression Analysis: Predictors of Entrepreneurial Intention

A multiple regression model was used to predict EI ($R^2 = 0.63$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.62$, $F = 189.34$, $p < 0.001$):

Predictor	β (Beta)	t-value	p-value
Entrepreneurial Attitude	0.42	9.87	<0.001
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.51	12.03	<0.001
Subjective Norms	0.18	4.12	<0.001
Gender (Male = 1)	0.15	3.45	0.001
Parental Entrepreneurship	0.12	2.78	0.006
Entrepreneurship Education	0.1	2.34	0.02

The model explains 63% of the variance in EI. PBC and EA are the strongest predictors, followed by gender and family background.

4.6 Discussion

The findings confirm that Commerce and Management students are more entrepreneurially inclined, likely due to curriculum exposure, career orientation, and peer influence. Their higher EI aligns with prior studies (Nabi et al., 2017).

Engineering students, despite technical skills, show lower intention, echoing the "intention-action gap" observed in STEM fields (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). This suggests a need for integrating entrepreneurial thinking into technical education.

Arts students exhibit the lowest EI, possibly due to perceived financial insecurity and lack of business training. However, their creativity could be harnessed through social entrepreneurship programs.

The strong predictive power of attitude and perceived behavioral control underscores the importance of building confidence and positive perceptions through experiential learning. The significant role of family background and gender highlights socio-cultural influences, with male students and those from entrepreneurial families more likely to pursue entrepreneurship.

5. Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence of significant differences in entrepreneurial intention and attitude among undergraduate students across Arts, Commerce, Management, and Engineering disciplines. While Commerce and Management students lead in entrepreneurial readiness, Arts and Engineering students require targeted interventions to bridge the gap between interest and intention.

The findings validate the Theory of Planned Behavior, with attitude and perceived behavioral control emerging as the most influential factors. Institutional support, entrepreneurship education, and family influence also play crucial roles.

5.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

- Curriculum Integration: Universities should embed entrepreneurship modules across all disciplines, not just business schools.
- Experiential Learning: Incubators, startup labs, and industry collaborations should be promoted, especially in Engineering and Arts.
- Mentorship Programs: Pairing students with successful entrepreneurs can enhance self-efficacy and reduce perceived risks.
- Gender-Inclusive Initiatives: Special programs for female students can help overcome socio-cultural barriers.
- Government Support: Policies should incentivize student startups through funding, tax benefits, and recognition.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to Indian universities and relies on self-reported data. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs, include qualitative interviews, and expand to postgraduate students or vocational institutions.

Nonetheless, this research contributes to a growing understanding of how academic discipline shapes entrepreneurial aspirations and provides a foundation for equitable, inclusive entrepreneurship education in higher education.

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