International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices
IJEMP
EISSN : 2600-8750
Volume 8 Issue 32 (December 2025) PP. 314-326
DOI: 10.35631/IJEMP.832021

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (IJEMP)
www.ijemp.com

THE IMPACT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION ON STUDENT INTENTION: A MEDIATION MODEL INVOLVING SELF-EFFICACY AND SOCIAL PRESSURE IN CHINA PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Mu Zongliang[1], Muhamad Saufi Che Rusuli[2*], Wan Mohd Nazdrol Wan Mohd Nasir[3], Rikinorhakis Ridzwan[4]

[1] Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: muzongliang1802@gmail.com
[2] Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: msaufi@umk.edu.my
[3] Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: nazdrol@umk.edu.my
[4] Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia
Email: rikinorhakis@umk.edu.my
[*] Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:
Received date: 30.10.2025
Revised date: 16.11.2025
Accepted date: 18.12.2025
Published date: 31.12.2025

To cite this document:

Mu, Z., Che Rusuli, M. S., Nasir, W. M. N. W. M., & Ridzwan, R. (2025). The Impact of Entrepreneurship Education on Student Intention: A Mediation Model Involving Self-Efficacy and Social Pressure in China Public Universities. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices, 8* (32), 314-326.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEMP.832021

Abstract:

Entrepreneurship education has been widely promoted as a strategic instrument to cultivate entrepreneurial intention among university students; however, empirical findings regarding its effectiveness remain inconclusive, particularly in economically underdeveloped regions. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977), this study examines the impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention among students in public universities in Guangxi, China, with self-efficacy and social pressure tested as parallel mediators. Entrepreneurship education is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial role models, entrepreneurial AI skills, and entrepreneurial practice. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 482 third- and fourth-year undergraduate students. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed for data analysis. The findings reveal that, except for entrepreneurial knowledge, all dimensions of entrepreneurship education significantly enhance students' self-efficacy, while all five dimensions positively influence perceived social pressure. Self-efficacy exerts a strong positive effect on entrepreneurial intention and serves as the primary mediating mechanism, whereas social pressure demonstrates a weaker and selective mediating effect. The study contributes to entrepreneurship education

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literature by validating a dual-mediation model in an underdeveloped regional context and provides policy-relevant implications for optimising entrepreneurship education in Guangxi and similar regions.

Keywords:

Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Intention, Self-Efficacy, Social Pressure, Guangxi Universities

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a critical engine of economic growth, innovation, and job creation, particularly in the context of rapid technological change and structural economic transformation (Ivanović-Đukić et al., 2022; Ofori-Sasu et al., 2023). As traditional employment opportunities become increasingly constrained, governments around the world have intensified efforts to promote entrepreneurship as a viable and desirable career path for university graduates. Within this agenda, entrepreneurship education has emerged as a central policy instrument aimed at cultivating entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and intentions among students (Liang et al., 2025; Ndou, 2021; OECD, 2022).In China, entrepreneurship education has been elevated to a national strategic level. Since the early 21st century, the Ministry of Education has issued a series of policy directives mandating the integration of innovation and entrepreneurship education into the entire talent cultivation process in higher education institutions. These policies emphasise curriculum reform, experiential learning, industry collaboration, and the establishment of incubation and acceleration platforms (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). As a result, entrepreneurship education has achieved near-universal coverage across Chinese universities.

Despite these substantial policy efforts, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education remains mixed. While some studies report positive effects on entrepreneurial intention, others find weak, insignificant, or even negative outcomes (Hou et al., 2023; Maheshwari et al., 2023). These inconsistencies are particularly pronounced across regions. Universities in economically developed eastern coastal areas benefit from mature entrepreneurial ecosystems, dense industrial networks, and abundant resources, whereas institutions in central and western regions continue to face structural constraints such as limited industrial diversity, weaker innovation capacity, and lower market dynamism (Deng & Wang, 2023; Wu et al., 2022). As an economically underdeveloped region, Guangxi has actively implemented national entrepreneurship education policies, expanding entrepreneurship courses, competitions, and incubation platforms within its public universities. However, despite comparable educational inputs, the entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial activity rates of university graduates remain significantly below the national average (Department of Education of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, 2024). This situation reveals a persistent paradox: the expansion of entrepreneurship education has not translated into proportionate growth in students' entrepreneurial intention.

A critical research problem underlying this paradox lies in the way entrepreneurship education has been conceptualised and empirically examined. First, much of the existing literature treats entrepreneurship education as a unidimensional construct, focusing on overall exposure rather than differentiating between specific educational components such as knowledge acquisition, motivational cultivation, role model exposure, digital and AI skills, and experiential practice

International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices
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(Kassim et al., 2025; Thomas, 2023). This oversimplification obscures the possibility that different dimensions of entrepreneurship education may exert heterogeneous effects on students' psychological and behavioural outcomes. Second, many studies prioritise direct effects of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention, while paying insufficient attention to the mechanisms through which such effects occur. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura,1977), entrepreneurial intention is not formed directly by education alone, but rather through key mediating factors such as perceived behavioural control (self-efficacy) and subjective norms (social pressure). However, empirical findings regarding these mediators particularly social pressure, remain inconsistent and highly context-dependent, especially in collectivist societies such as China (Fu et al., 2022; Niu et al., 2022). Third, emerging technological transformations have fundamentally reshaped the nature of entrepreneurship. Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies increasingly influence opportunity recognition, business model innovation, and entrepreneurial decision-making (Park & Kim, 2025; Csaszar et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, entrepreneurial AI skills remain underexplored in entrepreneurship education research, particularly in underdeveloped regional contexts where digital capability gaps may further constrain entrepreneurial intention (Utama et al.,2025; Idrisa et al., 2025; Xie & Wang, 2025). Taken together, these gaps highlight the need for a more nuanced and mechanism-oriented examination of entrepreneurship education. Specifically, there is a lack of empirical research that (1) conceptualises entrepreneurship education as a multidimensional construct, (2) simultaneously examines psychological and social mediation mechanisms, and (3) situates the analysis within underdeveloped regional contexts such as Guangxi. In response to the above research problems, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

RO1: To examine the influence of entrepreneurship education (Entrepreneurial Knowledge, Entrepreneurial Motivation, Entrepreneurial Role Models, Entrepreneurial AI Skills, and Entrepreneurial Practice) on the Self-Efficacy of universities students in Guangxi.

RO2: To examine the influence of entrepreneurship education (Entrepreneurial Knowledge, Entrepreneurial Motivation, Entrepreneurial Role Models, Entrepreneurial AI Skills, and Entrepreneurial Practice) on the Social Pressure experienced by universities students in Guangxi.

RO3: To examine the effect of Self-Efficacy on the Entrepreneurial Intention of universities students in Guangxi.

RO4: To examine the effect of Social Pressure on the Entrepreneurial Intention of universities students in Guangxi.

RO5: To analyze the mediating effect of Self-Efficacy in the relationship between entrepreneurship education (Entrepreneurial Knowledge, Entrepreneurial Motivation, Entrepreneurial Role Models, Entrepreneurial AI Skills, and Entrepreneurial Practice) and the Entrepreneurial Intention of universities students in Guangxi.

RO6: To analyze the mediating effect of Social Pressure in the relationship between entrepreneurship education (Entrepreneurial Knowledge, Entrepreneurial Motivation, Entrepreneurial Role Models, Entrepreneurial AI Skills, and Entrepreneurial Practice) and the Entrepreneurial Intention of universities students in Guangxi.

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Literature Review

Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention refers to an individual's conscious and deliberate state of mind that directs attention and action toward starting a new venture(Krueger et al., 2000; Bird, 1988). Extensive empirical research confirms that entrepreneurial intention is a robust predictor of subsequent entrepreneurial behaviour, particularly among university students (Chen et al., 2022; Tsou et al., 2023). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) posits that intention is shaped by attitude toward behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In entrepreneurship research, perceived behavioural control is closely associated with entrepreneurial self-efficacy, while subjective norms reflect perceived social pressure from significant others (Bae et al., 2024). In the university student group, a number of longitudinal or systematic studies have further confirmed that high-level intentions are more likely to be transformed into "entrepreneurial launch" at the practical level, but factors such as commitment, internal control point, and family support will affect the efficiency of this transformation (Lyu et al., 2023; Mei et al., 2022; Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024). For example, studies based on university samples have found that students' entrepreneurial commitment and internal control tendency can significantly strengthen the path between intention and actual action", while the courses, extracurricular practice and incubation support provided by universities can help transform intention into early entrepreneurial behaviour (Lyu et al., 2023; Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024).

From the perspective of the function of higher education, one of the core goals of entrepreneurship education in universities is to cultivate and improve students' entrepreneurial intention and promote "learning to create" by improving self-efficacy, opportunity identification and implementation intention (De Sousa et al., 2022; Y. Liu et al., 2022). Empirical studies on universities in China and other regions in recent years have also shown that systematic entrepreneurship courses and practices can significantly improve students' entrepreneurial intentions, and the impact on different groups (such as gender, urban and rural areas, school types and poverty status) is different. Therefore, experiential/project-based teaching and ecological support (mentors, competitions, incubators) are needed to enhance the continuous effect (Deng & Wang, 2023; Lyu et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurship Education and Its Dimensions

Entrepreneurship education is commonly defined as a structured educational intervention aimed at developing entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours (Fayolle & Gailly, 2004; Ndou, 2021). Meta-analytical studies indicate that entrepreneurship education has a generally positive but heterogeneous effect on entrepreneurial intention, depending on content, pedagogy, and context(Hou et al., 2023; Martínez-Gregorio et al., 2021). Recent studies emphasise the importance of a multidimensional perspective. Entrepreneurial knowledge provides foundational understanding of business concepts but may not be sufficient to stimulate intention on its own (Gao & Qin, 2022). Entrepreneurial motivation focuses on cultivating values, aspirations, and attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Sun et al., 2017; Johannisson, 1991). Entrepreneurial role models influence intention through observational learning and social comparison (Abbasianchavari & Moritz, 2021). Entrepreneurial AI skills reflect the growing role of digital technologies in opportunity identification and decision-making (Csaszar et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial practice emphasises experiential learning and "learning by doing," which has been shown to strengthen entrepreneurial cognition and confidence (Pérez-Macías et al., 2023; Mei et al., 2022).

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For example, in the context of the development and challenges of entrepreneurship education in Guangxi universities, “what to teach” has become a key question for explaining differences in educational effectiveness. Entrepreneurship education is the product of the mutual penetration of entrepreneurship and education, so "what to teach" is always the core issue in this field. Different scholars have proposed a variety of classification methods from the perspectives of content level, educated objects, and teaching objectives, and the overall presentation shows an evolutionary logic from macro framework to contextualised landing.

Self-Efficacy as a Mediator

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual’s belief in their capability to perform specific tasks, is a core construct in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has consistently been identified as a key predictor of entrepreneurial intention (Wardana et al., 2024). Entrepreneurship education enhances self-efficacy by providing mastery experiences, role model exposure, and practical engagement, thereby mediating the relationship between education and intention (Ferreira-Neto et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Situational and individual differences can affect the strength of the mediation. The degree of perfection of university support and the entrepreneurial ecosystem significantly increases self-efficacy and its transmission to intention by enhancing the signal of "available resources - visible role models - recognisable" (Elnadi & Gheith, 2021). Different majors or training focusses can also lead to path differences: for example, training that focusses on opportunity identification and market proximity is more likely to be transformed into intention through self-efficacy (Otache et al., 2024), while project-based learning, internship practice or entrepreneurship competitions strengthen the intermediary chain this mediator through the mastery experience of "learning by doing" (Gao & Qin, 2022; Nwosu et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). Based on the discussion, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H13: Entrepreneurial Knowledge (ENK) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Self-Efficacy (SEE).
H14: Entrepreneurial Motivation (ENM) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Self-Efficacy (SEE).
H15: Entrepreneurial Role Models (ERM) have a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Self-Efficacy (SEE).
H16: Entrepreneurial AI Skills (EAS) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Self-Efficacy (SEE).
H17: Entrepreneurial Practice (ENP) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Self-Efficacy (SEE).

Social Pressure as a Mediator

Social pressure, conceptualised as subjective norms in TPB, refers to perceived expectations from family members, peers, and educators regarding entrepreneurial behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In collectivist cultures such as China, social pressure plays a particularly salient role in career decision-making (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nwosu et al., 2022). However, empirical findings on its mediating role remain mixed, suggesting strong contextual dependency (Fu et al., 2022; Tchokoté et al., 2025).Besides, empirical analysis of cross-campus entrepreneurship education practices shows that projects that integrate curriculum and diverse practical activities not only directly improve students' entrepreneurial intentions, but also indirectly strengthen entrepreneurial intentions by improving their subjective perception of the entrepreneurial support atmosphere in universities (Dodescu et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship education not only affects the cognitive and ability dimensions of individuals, but also deeply reconstructs the

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social expectations and norms perceived by students. In fact, at this level of the mediating mechanism, some large-sample studies based on structural equation models have clearly verified the mediating role of subjective norms in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention. However, Liu (2022) found that perceived support from universities significantly increased students' entrepreneurial intention by improving their subjective norms and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. The indirect effect through subjective norms was especially strong, showing that when students felt that 'schools and society encourage entrepreneurship,' their intention to start a business was higher. According to Acuña-Duran et al. (2021), subjective social support from the academic community did not mainly affect entrepreneurial intention through direct paths, but indirectly improved entrepreneurial intention by improving entrepreneurial attitudes and perceived behavioural control, emphasising that a good social environment plays a role through subjective norms and other social psychological processes.

Furthermore, Nessel et al. (2024) pointed out that the influence of subjective norms on entrepreneurial intention is more manifested as an indirect effect through attitude and perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms play a bridging role between the social environment in which students are located and entrepreneurial intention. This evidence jointly indicate that social pressure is a key intermediary node connecting entrepreneurship education, psychological perception and entrepreneurial intention. Based on the discussion, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H18: Entrepreneurial Knowledge (ENK) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Social Pressure (SOP).
H19: Entrepreneurial Motivation (ENM) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Social Pressure (SOP).
H20: Entrepreneurial Role Models (ERM) have a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Social Pressure (SOP).
H21: Entrepreneurial AI Skills (EAS) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Social Pressure (SOP).
H22: Entrepreneurial Practice (ENP) has a positive indirect effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (ENI) through Social Pressure (SOP).

Methods

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design (Creswell, 2014). The target population consists of the third and the fourth year undergraduate students from five public universities in Guangxi who have participated in entrepreneurship education. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from established scales (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1977) and self-administrated. Entrepreneurship education was operationalised as five dimensions: entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial motivation, entrepreneurial role models, entrepreneurial AI skills, and entrepreneurial practice. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale and a total of 482 valid responses were obtained. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 29.0 and SmartPLS 4.0. Measurement model reliability and validity were assessed using composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity criteria (Hair et al., 2019).Mediation effects were tested using bootstrapping procedures.

Analysis

Referring to the results of mediation in Figure 1 and Table 1, the findings provide insights into the indirect effects of entrepreneurial antecedents on entrepreneurial intention through self-

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efficacy and social pressure. First, the results from this study found that self-efficacy acts as a strong and more consistent mediator compared to social pressure. Specifically, entrepreneurial motivation (β = 0.074, t = 2.841, CI = [0.031, 0.134]), entrepreneurial role models (β = 0.282, t = 8.541, CI = [0.221, 0.351]), entrepreneurial AI skills (β = 0.102, t = 3.439, CI = [0.045, 0.163]), and entrepreneurial practice (β = 0.252, t = 4.690, CI = [0.135, 0.318]) were found significant and positive influence entrepreneurial intention via self-efficacy. These results indicate that when individuals perceive themselves as capable and confident in entrepreneurial tasks, the influence of motivation, role models, digital competencies, and practice experiences is amplified, thereby strengthening entrepreneurial intention. Conversely, entrepreneurial knowledge did not significantly mediate intention through self-efficacy (β = 0.027, t = 0.648, CI = [-0.046, 0.121]), suggesting that knowledge alone may not be sufficient to build confidence in pursuing entrepreneurial activities.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing of Mediation

Relationship		Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	Confidence Interval (BC)		Decision
					LL	UL	
H13	Entrepreneurial Knowledge -> Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.027	0.042	0.648	-0.046	0.121	Not Supported
H14	Entrepreneurial Motivation -> Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.074	0.026	2.841	0.031	0.134	Supported
H15	Entrepreneurial Role Models -> Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.282	0.033	8.541	0.221	0.351	Supported
H16	Entrepreneurial AI Skills -> Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.102	0.030	3.439	0.045	0.163	Supported
H17	Entrepreneurial Practice -> Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.252	0.054	4.690	0.135	0.318	Supported
H18	Entrepreneurial Knowledge -> Social Pressure -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.067	0.026	2.573	-0.019	0.095	Supported
H19	Entrepreneurial Motivation -> Social Pressure -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.044	0.023	1.872	0.007	0.095	Not Supported
H20	Entrepreneurial Role Models -> Social	0.066	0.020	3.233	0.025	0.107	Supported

International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices
IJEMP
EISSN : 2600-8750
Volume 8 Issue 32 (December 2025) PP. 314-326
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	Pressure -> Entrepreneurial Intention						
H21	Entrepreneurial AI Skills -> Social Pressure -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.057	0.023	2.484	0.017	0.109	Supported
H22	Entrepreneurial Practice -> Social Pressure -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.048	0.031	1.565	0.013	0.143	Not Supported

Secondly, the mediation through social pressure produced moderate and less consistent effects. Entrepreneurial role models (β = 0.066, t = 3.233, CI = [0.025, 0.107]) and entrepreneurial AI skills (β = 0.057, t = 2.484, CI = [0.017, 0.109]) significantly influenced intention through social pressure, indicating that exposure to role models and digital competencies can create normative expectations from significant others that encourage entrepreneurial choices. Interestingly, entrepreneurial knowledge (β = 0.067, t = 2.573, CI = [-0.019, 0.095]) showed a borderline effect, with the confidence interval slightly overlapping zero, raising caution in its interpretation. Entrepreneurial motivation (β = 0.044, t = 1.872, CI = [0.007, 0.095]) and entrepreneurial practice (β = 0.048, t = 1.565, CI = [0.013, 0.143]) did not display significant mediation through social pressure, suggesting that normative influence may not fully translate these factors into intentions.

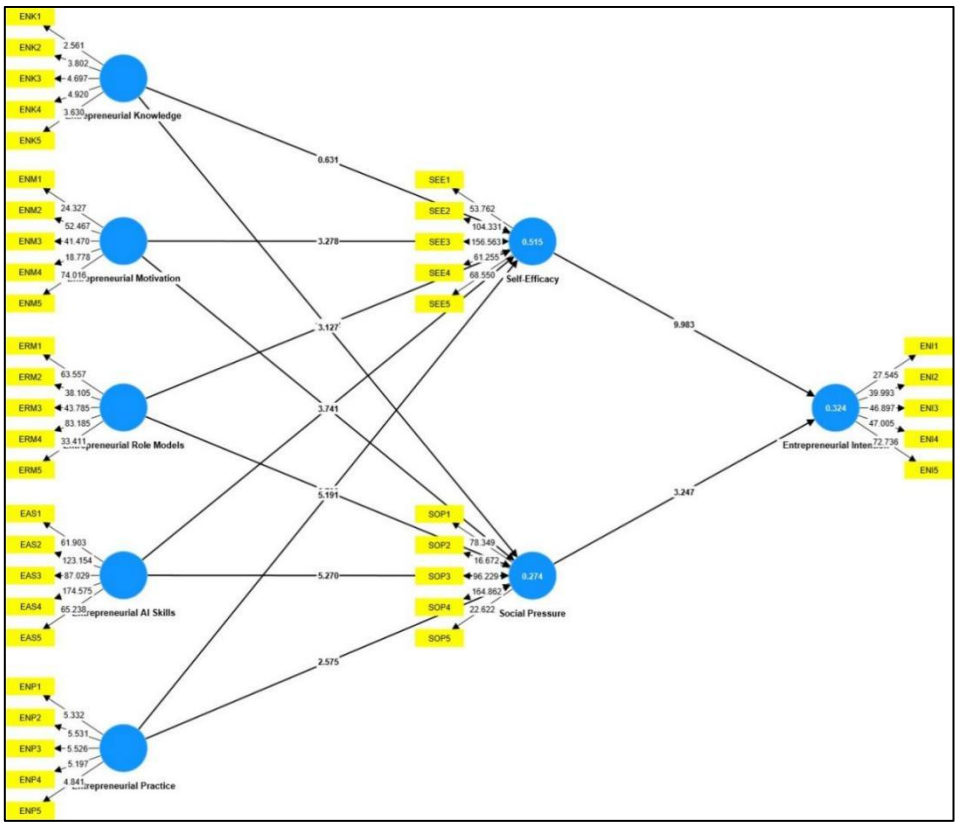

Figure 1. Results Of the Mediation

As such, these findings highlight the importance of self-efficacy in explaining how entrepreneurial determinants translate into entrepreneurial intention, in line with previous research emphasizing the role of confidence in entrepreneurial decision-making. Social pressure, while relevant in certain contexts such as role models and AI skills, appears to play

International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Practices
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an important role compared to self-efficacy. The findings of this study also show the importance of fostering self-efficacy through entrepreneurial practice, entrepreneurial digital skills, and exposure to entrepreneurial role models as effective strategies for strengthening entrepreneurial intentions.

Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of how entrepreneurship education shapes entrepreneurial intention by examining the mediating roles of self-efficacy and social pressure within an underdeveloped regional context. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Cognitive Theory, the findings demonstrate that entrepreneurship education has a significant influence on students' entrepreneurial intentions. By conceptualising entrepreneurship education as a multidimensional construct, this research moves beyond a unidimensional perspective and provides a more nuanced explanation of why entrepreneurship education outcomes differ across contexts. Empirically, the results reveal that entrepreneurial motivation, role models, AI skills, and entrepreneurial practice significantly strengthen students' entrepreneurial intention via self-efficacy, underscoring the central role of confidence, perceived capability, and mastery experience in entrepreneurial decision-making. In contrast, entrepreneurial knowledge alone is insufficient to translate into intention unless it is accompanied by experiential and capability-enhancing components. Although all dimensions of entrepreneurship education positively influence perceived social pressure, only role models and AI skills demonstrate meaningful indirect effects through this pathway, suggesting that normative influence is context-dependent and secondary to internal cognitive mechanisms. Theoretically, this study enriches entrepreneurship education research by validating a dual-mediation model in an economically underdeveloped region, thereby extending the applicability of TPB and Social Cognitive Theory beyond developed entrepreneurial ecosystems. Practically, the findings suggest that universities and policymakers should shift from an overemphasis on knowledge transmission toward educational designs that prioritise experiential learning (e.g. Project-Based Learning (PBL), Work-Integrated Learning (WML), etc.), exposure to entrepreneurial role models (e.g. Successful entrepreneurs, Peer roles models, Celebrity, etc.), digital and AI skill development (e.g. Data literacy and analytical skills), and sustained practical engagement. Such targeted interventions are essential for addressing the persistent "entrepreneurship education paradox" observed in Guangxi, where expanded educational provision has not yielded proportional increases in entrepreneurial intention.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express his gratitude to all the authors involved in his study. Many thanks are also extended to the publisher who published this article as additional reference material for other researchers.

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Volume 8 Issue 32 (December 2025) PP. 314-326
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