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Do entrepreneurship programmes raise entrepreneurial intention of science and engineering students? The effect of learning, inspiration and resources

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Abstract

Drawing on the theory of planned behaviour, this study tests the effect of entrepreneurship programmes on the entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions of science and engineering students. This is necessary in order to confirm (or disconfirm) conventional wisdom that entrepreneurship education increases the intention to start a business. The results show that the programmes raise some attitudes and the overall entrepreneurial intention and that inspiration (a construct with an emotional element) is the programmes' most influential benefit. The findings contribute to the theories of planned behaviour and education and have wider implications for a theory of entrepreneurial emotions and also for the practice of teaching entrepreneurship.

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1. Executive summary

This study tests the effect of entrepreneurship programmes on entrepreneurial attitudes and intention of science and engineering students, in order to confirm (or disconfirm) conventional wisdom that entrepreneurship education increases the intention to start a business. We address two research questions: Do entrepreneurship education programmes raise entrepreneurial attitudes and intention of students? And, which programme-derived benefits raise entrepreneurial attitudes and intention? We test the effect of three proposed programme-derived benefits for students: learning, inspiration and resource-utilisation.

We used a pretest–post-test quasi-experimental design. Data were collected before and after an entrepreneurship programme in two universities (London and Grenoble), from 250 science and engineering students (124 taking the programme and 126 in a control group). The results showed that:

- (a) Students in the ‘programme’ group increased their subjective norm and intention towards self-employment, whereas students in the control group did not. Therefore, the programme raised entrepreneurial attitudes and intention.
- (b) Intention towards self-employment was not related to nascency at the end of the programme (probably due to the time lag between intention and action, especially in the case of young students). Longitudinal studies are the only way to test the intention–action link.
- (c) Inspiration (and not learning or resource-utilisation) was the programme’s benefit related to the increase of subjective norm and intention towards self-employment. The implication for programme developers is that whereas knowledge and resources might increase the likelihood of success for those who are going to start a new venture, it is the inspiration that raises attitudes and intention and increases the chances that students will actually attempt an entrepreneurial career at some point in their lives. Therefore, if the target is to increase the number of entrepreneurs in the student population, then the inspirational part of the programmes has to be designed purposefully and instructors should be trained not only to teach the entrepreneurship curriculum, but also to change ‘hearts and minds’.

At a broader level, the study contributes to both the theory of planned behaviour (entrepreneurship programmes had not been empirically linked with change in attitude and intention towards self-employment) and the literature of entrepreneurship education itself, by revealing the effect of specific benefits for the students derived from the entrepreneurship ‘programme’. Also, it is an illustration of the role of emotions in entrepreneurship, as inspiration is a construct with an emotional element.

2. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to test the impact of entrepreneurship education on attitudes and intention of science and engineering students, applying empirically the theory of planned behaviour. Although the alleged benefits of entrepreneurship education have been much extolled by researchers and educators, the impact of entrepreneurship

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