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Examining the relationship between entrepreneurial education activity and entrepreneurship intention among Saudi university students: Academic performance as a mediator

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Abstract: This paper aims at investigating the direct impact of entrepreneurial educational activities on entrepreneurship intention, and academic performance among university students in Saudi Arabia, and the indirect impact between EEA and EI through AC. Data were collected from 488 university students representing 5 public Saudi universities. The structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM V.4) was used to examine the interrelationships between variables and to examine the research hypotheses. The SEM results showed that EEA have a positive direct impact on EI and AC, and proved a full mediating influence of AC on the relationship between EEA and EI among university students. These results may help decision-makers in higher education, in assisting in the formulation and planning of entrepreneurial educational activities, which help to create a flexible and adaptable society capable of meeting the demands of the modern world.

Keywords: Academic performance, Entrepreneurial educational activities, Entrepreneurship intention, University students.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a vital driver of economic development and innovation, particularly in today's fast-paced global economy. Among the key factors influencing the entrepreneurial landscape are educational initiatives that promote entrepreneurship. This essay examines the link between entrepreneurial education activities and the intention to pursue entrepreneurship among university students. It argues that well-structured entrepreneurial education can significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial intentions, preparing them for the challenges of the modern economic environment. Entrepreneurial education refers to programs and curricula designed to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to start and manage their own ventures. According to Nabi et al. (2017), entrepreneurial education encompasses a wide range of activities, from traditional classroom learning to experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, business incubators, and workshops. This multifaceted approach allows students to engage with entrepreneurship in a meaningful way, fostering a greater understanding of the entrepreneurial process.

The impact of entrepreneurial education on students' intentions to start their own businesses has been the subject of extensive research. A study by Wang and Chugh (2014) found that participation in entrepreneurial education activities significantly increased students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship and their self-efficacy in starting a business. The authors argue that when students are exposed to entrepreneurial concepts and success stories, their confidence grows, which in turn heightens their intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This relationship illustrates the importance of providing students with the right tools and environment to cultivate their entrepreneurial intentions.

Moreover, experiential learning—an integral component of entrepreneurial education—plays a crucial role in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions. Activities such as business simulations, pitch competitions, and real-world project involvement allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios. According to Fayolle and Gailly (2015), such experiences enhance not only the

students' skills but also their understanding of the entrepreneurial landscape, thereby bolstering their intentions to pursue entrepreneurship. Students who engage in these hands-on activities often develop a stronger sense of agency and purpose, which are essential motivators for aspiring entrepreneurs. Furthermore, networking opportunities presented through entrepreneurial education programmes can significantly influence students' entrepreneurial intentions. Engaging with successful entrepreneurs, mentors, and like-minded peers enables students to forge valuable connections and gain insights into the entrepreneurial process. As noted by O'Shea et al. (2016), these interactions can inspire students and provide them with role models, thereby increasing their motivation to start their ventures. The social capital built through such networks often serves as a catalyst for entrepreneurial endeavors, reinforcing the importance of community in entrepreneurial education. Notably, the role of culture in shaping students' intentions cannot be overlooked. In different cultural contexts, students may react differently to entrepreneurial education activities based on societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Countries with stronger support for entrepreneurship through policy and societal norms may witness a more pronounced effect of entrepreneurial education on student intentions (Gürol & Atsan, 2006). Thus, while the core principles of entrepreneurial education remain relevant globally, the implementation and outcomes may vary based on cultural influences. Accordingly, this study was designed to explore the direct effects of entrepreneurial educational activities on entrepreneurial intention and academic performance among university students in Saudi Arabia, as well as the indirect influence of these activities on entrepreneurial intention through academic competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Entrepreneurial Education Activities and Academic Performance

Several studies have highlighted a positive correlation between entrepreneurial education activities and academic performance. For instance, a study by Hu et al. (2021) found that students engaged in entrepreneurial projects exhibited higher academic achievement compared to their peers who were not involved in such activities. The authors argue that entrepreneurial education helps to enhance critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and resilience, which are all essential for academic success. Moreover, the practical application of knowledge gained through entrepreneurial activities often leads to a deeper understanding of academic subjects. According to Baluku et al. (2020), students who participate in entrepreneurship-focused educational programs reported improved engagement in their coursework and a greater ability to apply theoretical concepts to real-world situations. This hands-on experience is a vital aspect of learning, as it promotes active participation and fosters a sense of agency among students (Kolb, 1984). despite the positive findings regarding the impact of entrepreneurial education on academic performance, several challenges persist. While some studies advocate for the incorporation of entrepreneurial education in all disciplines, others caution that its effectiveness may depend on the context in which it is implemented (Nabi et al., 2017). For instance, the success of these programs can vary significantly between different educational institutions based on their resources, faculty expertise, and student demographics. Moreover, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of how different types of entrepreneurial activities influence academic outcomes. As noted by Wang et al. (2020), while some entrepreneurial experiences may foster creativity and innovation, others may lead to increased stress and anxiety, potentially detracting from academic performance. Hence, these discussions encourage us to hypothesize:

 H_1 : EEA has a positive and direct effect on AC

2.2. Entrepreneurial Education Activities and Entrepreneurship Intention

The relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intention has garnered significant attention in both academic circles and practical applications. Entrepreneurial education can be defined as the process of equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Liñán & Chen, 2009). It encompasses a range of activities, including formal education, training programs, workshops, and experiential learning opportunities. A significant body of research highlights that entrepreneurial education extends beyond merely imparting knowledge; it aims to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and cultivate the skills necessary for business

creation (Souitaris et al., 2007). Entrepreneurial education activities are designed to enhance students' entrepreneurial skills and increase their intention to start a business. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, three primary factors influence entrepreneurial intention: attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Studies have shown that exposure to entrepreneurial education positively influences students' attitudes and enhances their perceived behavioral control over entrepreneurial activities (Kuckertz & Fischer, 2013). For instance, Fayolle and Gailly (2008) conducted a study demonstrating that students who participated in entrepreneurial education programs exhibited significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions than those who did not. The authors emphasized the importance of pedagogical approaches that involve active learning, such as case studies and business simulations, in fostering entrepreneurial intentions. This aligns with the findings of Gedeon (2016), who suggested that innovative teaching methods enhance students' engagement and motivation, further promoting their intention to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Drawing on these prior findings, the hypothesis emerges that EEA plays a pivotal role in enhancing EI among students. thus, we could postulate that:

H₂: EEA has a positive and direct effect on EI

2.3. Academic Performance and Entrepreneurship Intention

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding the relationship between academic performance and entrepreneurial intentions among students. Academic performance is typically measured through grades, GPA, or standardized test scores, which reflect a student's knowledge acquisition and skills (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). High levels of academic performance have been associated with enhanced cognitive competencies and problem-solving abilities (Kirkpatrick et al., 2008). In the context of entrepreneurship, these skills are crucial as they enable prospective entrepreneurs to navigate complex market challenges and develop viable business strategies. Research indicates a positive relationship between academic performance and entrepreneurial intention. According to Souitaris et al. (2007), students who perform well academically tend to have higher entrepreneurial intentions. The rationale behind this correlation may stem from the confidence that successful academic experiences instill in students. High academic achievers are often perceived as more capable of succeeding in entrepreneurial ventures due to their disciplined approach to learning and resource management (Rae, 2006). Moreover, academic performance may influence entrepreneurial intention through the development of critical thinking and risk assessment skills. Entrepreneurship demands risk-taking and innovation, which are competencies that can be nurtured through rigorous academic engagement (Mathews & Muir, 2009). Students with good academic records are often more equipped to analyze business environments and identify opportunities, thus enhancing their intention to pursue entrepreneurship. thus, we could postulate that:

 H_3 : AC has a positive and direct effect on EI H_4 : AC mediates the relationship between EEA and EI



Study theoretical model.

3. Methodology: (Materials and Methods)

3.1. The Scale and the Study Constructs:

To ensure that the variables of the current study are measured properly, a number of scales whose validity has been proven through literature reviews were adopted. The entrepreneurial educational activity was measured by 10 items, derived from Arranz's et al. (2017), Which refers to all educational entrepreneurial activities such as clubs, competitions, internship, meeting with an entrepreneur, conferences or workshops, business simulators, incubation project, resourcing or networking activities, transmitted spirit and values by the university. Regarding entrepreneurship intention, it was measured by 6 items, derived from Chen et al. (1998) and Liñán & Chen (2009), which focus on the intention of students to become an entrepreneur and to create a firm in the future. For academic performance, it was measured by 3 items, derived from McGuire (2014), which are: Engaging in entrepreneurial educational activities has led to a better learning experience in my study, and engaging in entrepreneurial educational activities has contributed to my better grasp of the subject matter. It is worth noting that, all variables' scale showed a high reliability value above 0.850.

3.2. Population and Sample Size

University students in Saudi Arabia are the target population for the study. Based on Veal's recommendations for large or indefinite populations, the sample size for the study is calculated with an assumed population of 20,000 people (Veal, 2006). Stephen Sampson's formula was used to determine the suitable sample size (Ayad et al., 2024; Ayad, 2022; and Ayad, 2017). Yielding 372 replies.

3.3. Data Collection

To collect primary data for this study from university students in Saudi Arabia, a quantitative approach was adopted using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested, reviewed and modified by a group of university professors, and the questionnaire was directed to 500 university students, during the months of September 2024. The final result of the number of completed and statistically analyzed questionnaires was 488, with a response rate of 97.6%. The questionnaire consists of four parts, the first part was devoted to demographic data, while the remaining three parts were for the three variables of this study, which are entrepreneurial educational activities, entrepreneurship intention, and academic performance. Survey participants were asked to rate all items of each variable on a 5-point Likert scale.

3.4. Analysis Techniques

The statistical package SPSSvs24 and Excel Sheet 2010 were utilized to analyze the descriptive data and explore the demographic features of the sample of the study. Moreover, the structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM V.4) was used to examine the interrelationships between all variables and to test the research hypotheses.

4. Analysis and Results

Table 1.

4.1. The Respondents' Characteristics

The majority of participants in this study were male (%58.4), %63.5 of the sample aged between 16 years old and below 20 years old. The universities in which the questionnaire was distributed cover all geographical regions of the Kingdom, and the number of students represented by each university is almost equal, as the university with the highest representation of its students was King Faisal University with a percentage of 22.3%, and the least represented university was Tabuk University with a percentage of 17.8%, which are very close percentages. See Table 1.

Respondents' dem	ographic features.			
Profile		N	Frequencies	Percent
Condor	Male	1.99	285	%58.4
Gender	Female	400	203	%41.6
	(Below 16-Years)		94	%19.3
Age	(16-Years - below 20-Years)	488	310	% 63.5
	(20-Years and above)		84	%17.2
	King Faisal University		109	%22.3
University	King Abdulaziz University		102	%20.9
	King Saud University	488	99	%20.3
	Taibah University] [91	%18.7
	University of Tabuk		87	%17.8

4.2. Measurement Model (Outer Model)

4.2.1. Convergent Validity:

To ensure the model's construct reliability and validity, the convergent validity was tested, and the results of all items' reliability were above 0.7, which meet the cut-off point proved by Hair et al. (2017). In the same context, results of composite reliability (CR) for all the study variables were also above 0.7, and also meet the advised cut-off point of Bryman and Cramer (2011) and Hair et al. (2017). In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) results for all variables exceeded 0.5, which recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Briefly and directly, the results show that the model is reliable and valid. See Table 1.

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
	EEA-1	0.917		
	EEA-2	0.916		
	EEA-3	0.747	0.675	0.966
Entrepreneurial educational activities	EEA-4	0.912		
"EEA"	EEA-5	0.756		
(Arranz's et al., 2017)	EEA-6	0.724		
	EEA-7	0.882		
	EEA-8	0.729		
	EEA-9	0.922		
	EEA-10	0.916		
	EI-1	0.781		
Entrepreneurship intention	EI-2	0.724	0.613	0.907
"EI"	EI-3	0.894		
(Chen et al., 1998 and Liñán & Chen, 2009)	EI-4	0.903		
	EI-5	0.966		
	EI-6	0.724		
Academic performance	AC-1	0.980		
"AC"	AC-2	0.980	0.779	0.956
(McGuire (2014)	AC-3	0.980		

Table 2.	
Results of measurement model - convergent validity.	

4.2.2. Discriminant Validity:

To support the level of confidence in the results and conclusions of the model, it was verified that all variables that make up the model differ from each other, proving the discriminant validity of the model. (Kock, 2020). For that reason, the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings approaches were applied. See Tables 3 and Figure 2.

Table 3.						
Latent variables correlations (Fornell-Larcker criterion).						
Construct	EEA	EI	AC			
EEA	0.822					
EI	0.622	0.783				
AC	0.572	0.612	0.883			
Campan * Than	1		L AVE	1		

Source: * The values in bold are the square root of AVE.

All results in table 3 demonstrate that each variable explains the variance of its components better than the other variables that make up the model, which confirms the discriminant validity of the model as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2017). Also results confirmed that all items load more strongly on their own constructs, and greater than its loading on all other variables constructs of the model, which confirms the discriminant validity of the model, as approved by Chin (1998).



5. Structural Model (Inner Model)

5.1. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) :

To measure the model's ability to predict the variance ratio occurring in the dependent variable by the independent variable, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used. Table 4 shows that the variance occurring by the independent variable on the dependent variables are high, and exceed the cut-off point which recommended by Chin (1998), as both results were over 0.67.

Table 4. R ² of the endogenous latent variables.				
Constructs	R-square	Results		
EI	0.940	High		
AC	0.712	High		

5.2. Effect Size (f^2) :

In order to measure the individual impact of each exogenous latent variable on the endogenous latent variable, the assessment of effect size (f^2) was used. Results at table 5 show that the effects size of EEA as an exogenous latent variable of the model on EI and AC as endogenous latent variables of the model, are medium and large effect respectively, according to the recommendations of Cohen (1988). While, the effect size of AC as an exogenous latent variable of the model on EI as an endogenous latent variable of the model on EI as an endogenous latent variable of the model on EI as an endogenous latent variable of the model on EI as an endogenous latent variable of the model, is medium effect.

Table 5.					
Assessment of effect size (f ²).					
Constructs	EI	AC			
EEA	0.216 (Medium)	0.477 (Large)			
AC	0.205 (Medium)				

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5.3. Goodness of Fit of the Model (GoF):

In order to ensure that the proposed model of this study is considered as a global fit measure model, at level of measurement, structural, and the overall performance of the model, goodness of fit of the model test was applied, according (Chin, 2010):

$GoF = \sqrt{R^2 x AVE}$

GoF = 0.754

According to the criteria of Wetzels et al. (2009) and the result of GoF test, It can be concluded that the goodness of fit of the model of this study is large enough to be considered sufficiently valid for a global PLS model.



The final proposed structural equation model.

5.4. Hypotheses Assessment (Significance of path coefficients):

In order to determine the extent of consistency between the proposed theoretical model and the collected data (primary data), the path coefficients significance test was conducted. All hypothesis testing results are summarized below. See Table 6.

Path coefficient of the study hypotheses.						
		Std.	Std.	Т	Р	
Hypothesis (Paths)	Effect	beta	error	value	values	Results
H1: EEA -> AC	Direct	0.844	0.009	89.405	0.000	Supported**
H2: EEA -> EI	Direct	0.036	0.008	4.5	0.000	Supported**
H3: AC -> EI	Direct	0.939	0.032	29.253	0.000	Supported**
H4: EEA -> AC -> EI	Indirect	0.792	0.032	24.893	0.000	Supported**

Table 0.		
Path coefficient	of the stud	y hypotheses.

Source: Significant at $P^{**} = < 0.01$.

This study suggested 3 direct hypotheses and 1 indirect hypothesis (Figure 1), the structure equation model results (Tables 5 & 6. Figure 3 & 4) showed that EEA has a positive and significant impact on AC (Effect size= 0.477, Std. Beta = 0.844, P = 0.000), and it has a positive and significant

Table 6

impact on EI (Effect size= 0.216, Std. Beta = 0.036, P = 0.000), so hypotheses H1 and H2 were supported. On the same context, AC has a positive and significant impact on EI (Effect size= 0.205, Std. Beta = 0.939, P = 0.000), so hypothesis H3 was supported. In addition, the SEM results proved the mediation impact of AC in the relationships between EEA and EI (Std. Beta = 0.792, P = 0.000), and the lower and upper level of bootstrapped confidence interval were both greater than zero, which means that zero did not fall in-between the two values, and P value was = 0.000, as recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), which support the mediating impact of academic performance, so hypothesis H4 was supported.



Significance of path coefficients.

6. Discussion and Implications

This study was established to investigate the direct impact of entrepreneurial educational activities on entrepreneurship intention, and academic performance among university students in Saudi Arabia, and the indirect impact between EEA and EI through AC. The interrelationships among variables were examined.

The results showed that EEA has a positive and significant impact on AC among university students in Saudi Arabia, which is largely in line with Hu et al. (2021), who found that students engaged in entrepreneurial projects exhibited higher academic achievement compared to their peers who were not involved in such activities. Moreover, the results showed that EEA has a positive and significant impact on EI among university students in Saudi Arabia, which is consists with Gedeon (2016), who declared that who suggested that innovative teaching methods enhance students' engagement and motivation, further promoting their intention to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. In addition, the results showed that AC has a positive and significant impact on EI among university students in Saudi Arabia, which is largely consistent with what addressed by Souitaris et al. (2007), who declared that students who perform well academically tend to have higher entrepreneurial intentions. Furthermore, the results emphasis the indirect impact between EEA and EI among university students in Saudi Arabia, through AC, which confirm the mediating role of AC between the two variables. According to

the data and available references to the authors, this is the first proof of the existence of a direct positive significant impact between the two variables.

The study reached a number of results that have an impact and importance on the theoretical and practical aspects of the hospitality industry. It contributed to supporting the shortcomings in the literature on the role of academic performance in the entrepreneurship intention among university students in Saudi Arabia, as well as contributes to the limited literature on the mediating role of academic performance in the relationship between entrepreneurial educational activities and entrepreneurship intention among university students in Saudi Arabia. Also, this means that academic performance has the potential to change the effect of entrepreneurial educational activities on entrepreneurship intention among university students. Moreover, these findings have implications on education sector, as this finding is of vital importance to decision-makers in higher education, in assisting in the formulation and planning of entrepreneurial educational activities, to provide students with the skills, mindsets and opportunities necessary to succeed in a complex and rapidly changing world, thus contributing to preparing students for future careers.

7. Conclusion

This paper aims at investigating the direct impact of entrepreneurial educational activities on entrepreneurship intention, and academic performance among university students in Saudi Arabia, and the indirect impact between EEA and EI through AC. Data were collected from 488 university students representing 5 public Saudi universities. The statistical package SPSSvs24 and Excel Sheet 2010 were used to analyse the descriptive data and explore the demographic features of the respondents, additionally, the structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM V.4) was utilized to examine the direct and indirect impacts between variables and to test the research hypotheses. The SEM results showed that entrepreneurial educational activities have a positive and significant impact on entrepreneurship intention and academic performance among university students. Moreover, the SEM results proved a mediating effect of academic performance on the link between entrepreneurial educational activities and entrepreneurship intention, which means that academic performance of university students can play an important role in improving university student's entrepreneurship intention and support the impact of university entrepreneurial educational activities. These results may help decision-makers in higher education, in assisting in the formulation and planning of entrepreneurial educational activities, by integrating entrepreneurial education into school curricula, which foster creativity, prepare students for future careers. Moreover, these activities help to create a flexible and adaptable society capable of meeting the demands of the modern world.

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