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Perceived economic situation and related policies influence the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students, evidence from China

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Abstract: Vocational college students' entrepreneurship is important for economic growth. Vocational college students who receive higher education are expected to be the main drivers of entrepreneurship. However, in China, only 3% of graduates considered entrepreneurship as a career choice in 2023. Therefore, the factors influencing the intentions of vocational college students need further investigation. The study proposes a structural equation model (SEM) and collects 437 valid data points from five vocational colleges in China. The analysis was conducted using AMOS 28.0 and SPSS 28.0. The results indicate that perceived economic situation ($\beta = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$) and related policies ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$) positively influence entrepreneurial intentions. Additionally, perceived economic situation ($\beta = 0.324$, $p < 0.001$) and related policies ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$) positively influence attitudes toward entrepreneurship. The attitudes toward entrepreneurship partially mediate the relationship between perceived economic situation, related policies, and entrepreneurial intentions among vocational college students. This study advances the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and enriches the application of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory (EET). It also provides implications for entrepreneurship education.

Keywords: *Attitudes toward entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship intentions, Perceived economic situation, Related policies of supporting entrepreneurship.*

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has always been seen as a key contributor and economic engine in every country, as it helps to create new jobs and increase innovation and competitiveness in the labour market [1]. Entrepreneurship also contributed to higher productivity and GDP growth [2, 3]. Entrepreneurial intention of individuals is one of the most important predictors of entrepreneurial activity and behaviour of individuals [4-6]. The focus of various contemporary studies has shifted from entrepreneurship to entrepreneurship intentions (EI) [7]. It is crucial for stimulating entrepreneurial intentions because a country has limited jobs and may not always provide enough jobs for higher education graduates [8].

However, current research on entrepreneurial intentions of college students focused more on the study of psychological intrinsic influences such as personal cognition, beliefs, and attitudes. McClelland [9] and others, considered the father of entrepreneurship research, supported the influence of personal initiative on entrepreneurship [9]. This mainstream of research had been influential to the present day and has led to the identification of intrinsic factors such as self-efficacy, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, personality traits, and expectations as influencing entrepreneurial intentions. Career-related decisions reflect a process in which beliefs, attitudes, and intentions evolve as individuals cognitively process knowledge, beliefs, and experiences [10]. It had even been argued that it

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is difficult to imagine an individual starting a fledgling business solely in response to conditioned responses to stimuli from the external environment [11]. Individual initiative, which gives the individual a self-starting nature, a proactive approach, and perseverance and resilience in overcoming difficulties/obstacles that arise in the pursuit of a goal, plays an active role in the formation of entrepreneurial intentions [12]. Psychological capital is described as a positive interpretation of events, which is based on effort and perseverance to stimulate prosperity and success and has a significant impact on the formation of entrepreneurial intentions [13]. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy played a mediating role in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions [14].

It can be seen that previous studies focused on the attitudes of individuals, including cognition, self-efficacy, and other factors that contribute to the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. But, few scholars moved on step forward to explore what factor promote the attitude of entrepreneurship. This conducted to a current phenomenon that China's current generation of college students are not very willing to consider entrepreneurship as a career choice. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2023, only 3% of university graduates will choose to start a business. Therefore, following some researches Maheshwari, et al. [15] the study will explore the mechanism of perceived economic situation and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship on the attitudes of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial Intentions.

About economic environment, some researchers have noted their impact on students' entrepreneurial intentions, but it is still controversial. Some researchers have argued that economic environment is positive for students' entrepreneurial intentions because students have easy access to start-up capital, market support, and other conditions required for entrepreneurship in a good economic situation [16-18]. The other part of the researchers believed that economic environment negatively affected the entrepreneurial intention of students because students were more likely to find good jobs and did not tend to start their own business in a good economic situation [17, 19]. Maybe, perceived economic situation is beneficial for entrepreneurial intentions.

For the policy environment, researchers have discussed more about its positive influencing role on students' entrepreneurial intentions because of its provision of tax breaks, financial subsidies [16, 18]. Maybe, related policies of supporting entrepreneurship are beneficial for attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

With this in mind, it is essential to understand the mechanism of perceived economic situation and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship on the attitudes of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial Intentions of vocational college students in order to facilitate the development of the entrepreneurial elite in developing countries. Therefore, this study will address 2 research questions.

RQ1: How do perceived economic situation and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship affect vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship and their entrepreneurial intentions?

RQ2: How do vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship influence their entrepreneurial intentions?

2. Literature Review

The entrepreneurial ecosystem theory suggested that the development of individuals involves interconnected and interacting stable ecosystems, which can include micro-systems, macro-systems [20]. A growing body of literature emphasized the importance of environmental effects in shaping entrepreneurial activity, the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach [21]. The entrepreneurial ecosystem theory provided a complete framework to understand the factors influencing individuals' behavioural tendencies and enables researchers to understand the impact of the environment on changes in individuals' behavioural tendencies [22]. Many studies found that total entrepreneurial activity is

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positively correlated with the level of economic development of the region, which suggested that policy makers should strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem to improve human development [23-25]. Therefore, the study uses the theory of entrepreneurial ecosystem to construct a research framework for the impact of perceived economic situation, related policies of supporting entrepreneurship on the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions.

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1. Perceived Economic Situation

The number of successful entrepreneurs is significantly higher in more economically developed regions [26]. Some researchers have noticed that the perceived economic situation of the region and the entrepreneurial intentions of individuals change together. In a favourable perceived economic environment, the more pronounced is the entrepreneurial inclinations of individuals, and in a depressed perceived economic environment, the less pronounced is the entrepreneurial inclination of individuals. Within the institutional framework, Gnyawali and Fogel [27] considered five dimensions that determine entrepreneurial activity, which include economic conditions (aspects such as economic growth, diversity of economic activities, unemployment rate, inflation rate, etc.). After that, many scholars also analyzed the impact of macroeconomic conditions on entrepreneurial intentions of college students by developing models based on business opportunities, which incorporated the economic and institutional characteristics into the conceptual framework and found its positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions [16, 28, 29]. The reason is that good perceived economic conditions made it easier for vocational college students to identify new opportunities and for entrepreneurs [30]. Therefor, the study proposes hypothesis 1.

H_1: Perceived economic situation positively affects the entrepreneurship intentions of vocational college students.

3.2. Related Policies of Supporting Entrepreneurship

Related Policies, such as tax breaks, financing help, market help, tended to mobilize individuals in terms of attitude and willingness to start a business. This has been mentioned by some researchers. Leibenstein [31] agreed that policies affect entrepreneurial intentions and suggested that government policies should focus on improving market efficiency and providing an environment that responds to motivated entrepreneurs. A study by Carayannis, et al. [16] also observed that political-legal contextual factors, including the implementation of policies for positive entrepreneurial regimes, had a significant effect on entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. Some studies also suggested that governments should pay attention to entrepreneurs' intentions when designing and implementing policies [32]. Therefor, the study has reason to believe that relevant policies of supporting entrepreneurship have a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. The study proposes Hypothesis 2.

H_2: Related policies of supporting entrepreneurship positively affect the entrepreneurship intentions of vocational college students.

3.3. The Vocational College Students' Attitudes Toward Entrepreneurship

The Theory of Planned Behavior was proposed by Ajzen [33]. It explains that attitudes are influencing factors of behavioral intentions. Many scholars have found that attitudes affect individuals' behavioral intentions in different fields, such as in education [34] tourism [35] and green consumption [36] among others. In the field of entrepreneurship research, many scholars have also discussed the positive impact of entrepreneurial attitudes on entrepreneurial intentions [37-39]. The influence of individuals' attitudes on their behavioral intentions is a well-researched area. Therefore, this study has sufficient reasons to propose Hypothesis 3.

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H_3: The vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship positively influence their intentions of entrepreneurship.

The high level of regional economic development is often accompanied by technological advances, ample capital, and good market demand [40]. Technological advancement stimulates individual entrepreneurial attitudes [41]. Ample capital is helpful resource madding vocational college students to begin entrepreneurship easily, and changing their cognition about entrepreneurship [42]. Good market demand provides a higher success rate for entrepreneurial endeavors of vocational college students, which to some extent enhances their expectations of entrepreneurial success [43-45]. From this, the study finds that perceived economic situation affect vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Hypothesis 4 is proposed.

H_4: Perceived economic situation positively affect the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

The relevant policies of supporting entrepreneurship allowed students to engage in effective opportunity identification, thus is conducive to the formation of a positive view of students on entrepreneurship [17]. This positive view can help students develop a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. From another angle, direct financial policies can help students overcome barriers to attain start-up capital [46]. This initial capital is beneficial for business survival, which allows students to no longer be cautious about entrepreneurship [47] leading to a positive attitude. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H_5: Related policies of supporting entrepreneurship positively affect the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

According to the theory of entrepreneurial ecology, a favorable economic environment is a foundation that provides technological advancements, accessible funding, and a broad consumer market. These are all essential resources for entrepreneurship [26]. When college students see that these resources are readily available, it naturally encourages them to adopt a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship [48]. According to the TPB theoretical framework, the positive entrepreneurial attitude of vocational college students naturally contributes to the formation of entrepreneurial intention [49]. Hereby, this study has found strong support for Hypothesis 6.

H_6: The vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship mediate the relationship between perceived economic situation and entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students.

Related policies of supporting entrepreneurship, such as tax cuts and assistance in promoting opportunities, help for cost savings and market access for those who want to start a business [50]. According to the framework of motivational behavior theory, these substantial supports benefit vocational college students in forming a positive entrepreneurial attitude [51]. Moreover, the positive entrepreneurial attitude of vocational college students is conducive to the formation of their entrepreneurial intentions [52]. Indeed, in the age of artificial intelligence, an interesting phenomenon further illustrates this: students in areas of many policies encouraging digital entrepreneurship tend to have a higher prevalence of entrepreneurial activities [53]. In summary, the study finds that related policies of supporting entrepreneurship cultivate vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship, and then result in a propensity for entrepreneurship. Accordingly, the study proposes hypothesis 7.

H_7: The vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship mediate the relationship between related policies of supporting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students.

3.4. Conceptual Model

While, perceived economic situations (Economic) means business environment, macroeconomic factors (GDP, employment rate, inflation) are good for entrepreneurship. Related policies of supporting entrepreneurship (policy) means tax breaks, financing help, market help. The vocational college

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students attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Attitude) means vocational college students' view about entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial intentions (Intention) means a propensity for entrepreneurship [54]. The conceptual mode is as follows.

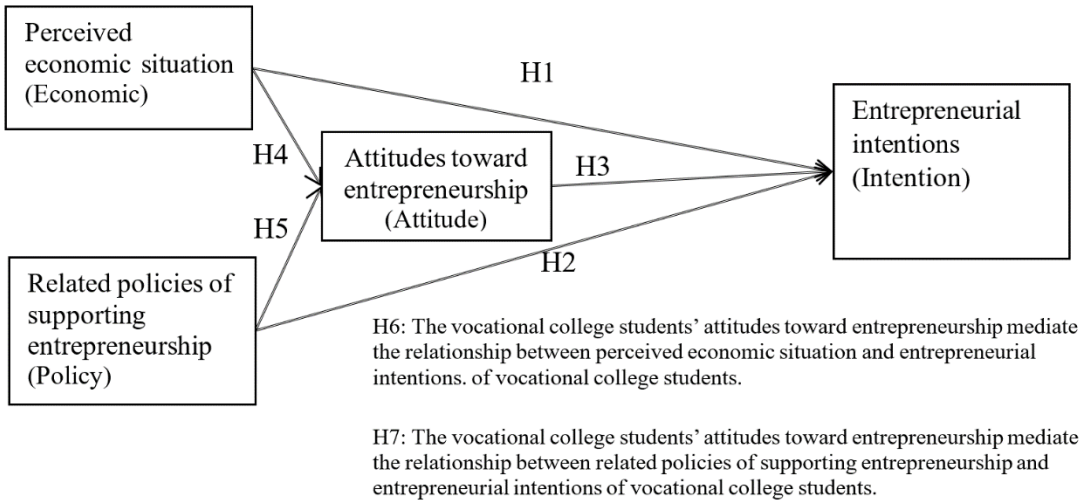

Figure 1.
Conceptual model.

4. Methodology

4.1. Instruments

Based on previous research literature on entrepreneurial intentions, there are 19 items for the above 4 constructs. This study adapted the themes of existing research on entrepreneurial intentions accordingly. A 5-point Likert scale was used in this study to measure the constructs, '1 = Strongly Disagree', '2 = Disagree', '3 = Neutral', '4 = Agree', "5 = Strongly Agree". Prior to the start of the survey, three experts in the field of entrepreneurship research were invited to assess the appropriateness of the measurement questions and suggest improvements. Based on the experts' suggestions and the trial, the scale questionnaire was finally revised to form the scale questionnaire for this study (Appendix 1).

Perceived economic situation have 5 items, which are original from Zvarikova and Kacerauskas [55] with no changes. Related policies of supporting entrepreneurship have 5 measurements, which are original from Huang, et al. [56]. The vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship have 5 items, which are original from Fishbein and Ajzen [57] with a few changes. The entrepreneurial Intentions have 4 items, which are original from Bird [58] and Liñán and Chen [59].

4.2. Data Collection and Sample

The size of China's vocational college student population is very large, exceeding 10 million. The total target population is very large, coupled with China's relatively large geographical area. Considering the ability of the research cost, this study adopted the cluster sampling method. Although the cluster sampling method has a certain degree of error, it covers a wide range of samples and is still a representative sampling method [60]. Thanks to the support of the China Higher Education Society, this study was conducted in five vocational colleges in Henan Province, China, including Huanghe Water Conservancy Vocational and Technical College, Henan Vocational and Technical College, Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College, Henan Agricultural Vocational College, and

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Henan Quality Polytechnic. The reason for choosing vocational colleges in Henan Province is that, according to a report by China.com in 2023, Henan is the region with the most vocational colleges. Among the vocational colleges in Henan, Huanghe Water Conservancy Vocational and Technical College, Henan Vocational and Technical College, Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College, Henan Agricultural Vocational College, and Henan Quality Polytechnic are the most representative.

The questionnaires for the study were delivered through China's internet questionnaire platform (https://www.wjx.cn/), and a total of 437 valid questionnaire data were collected. The research population for the study was chosen to be seniors because they are more representative in the field of entrepreneurship [61]. he data collection was from March 2024 to October 2024. With the help of the local higher education institute, this study contacted the staff of the innovation and entrepreneurship faculty of the target vocational colleges to recruit participants on a voluntary basis. Any students who were already running a business were excluded from the survey as the study was to investigate the factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions. 782 vocational college students received the questionnaires. But only 636 responded voluntarily. Of the 636 questionnaires returned, 188 questionnaires were excluded from the study, which took too long and too short a time to answer. Of the remaining 448 questionnaires, 11 questionnaires with missing key questions were deleted. In the end, 437 valid questionnaires were left for subsequent analysis with a validity rate of 68.7%. The validity rate of the questionnaires in this study is comparable to that of the researcher [62].

4.3. Analysis Technologies

The study used SPSS 28 and Amos 28 to assess and analyse the measurement models. First, before constructing the interrelationships of potential structures in the structural equation models, the study analysed the measurement models accordingly. The study used Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) to assess the reliability of this study (as shown in Table 2). And, convergent validity was assessed in this study using average variance extraction (AVE) and factor loading. Second, the study used SEM to test hypotheses, in which P values, C.R., Standard Path Coefficient will be discussed. Finally, bootstrap method (performing 5000 bootstrap samples resulting in a bias corrected percentile method at the 95 % confidence level) will be used for the mediation effect test.

5. Data Analysis

5.1. Sample Distributions

The percentage of participants in a kinds of distribution is shown in Table 1. Huanghe Water Conservancy Vocational and Technical College accounts for 12.8% (n=56), Henan Vocational and Technical College accounts for 12.4% (n=54), Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College accounts for 18.8% (n=82), Henan Agricultural Vocational College accounts for 22.7% (n=99), Henan Quality Polytechnic accounts for 33.3% (n=146). The distribution of the number of samples in the region conforms to the actual distribution of the number of students. This indicates that the sample is representative.

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Table 1.
Distribution of participants.

Attributes	Distribution	Frequency	%	Attributes	Distribution	Frequency	%
Areas	Huanghe Water Conservancy Vocational and Technical College	56	12.80%	Gender	Male	273	62.50%
	Henan Vocational and Technical College	54	12.40%		Female	164	37.50%
	Zhengzhou Railway Vocational and Technical College	82	18.80%	Major	Business	203	46.50%
	Henan Agricultural Vocational College	99	22.70%		Computer in science	134	30.60%
	Henan Quality Polytechnic	146	33.30%		Art and Design	100	22.90%

Note: N=437.

5.2. Method of Variance Analysis

During the questionnaire research process, respondents expressed their attitudes in a self-stated manner, and the data obtained were susceptible to common method bias [63]. In order to test for common method bias, the study used Harman's one-factor test. The results showed that the unrotated first factor could only explain 37.9% of the total variance, which is less than the critical value of 40%, indicating that there is no significant common method bias in the study data [64].

5.3. Model's Measurement

The Cronbach's alpha and CR for all constructs in this study (shown in table 2) were greater than 0.7, indicating that reliability and internal consistency were achieved for each latent construct [65]. The AVE values for each construct were greater than 0.5, while the factor loadings for all constructs were greater than 0.6 (as shown in Table 2), indicating that convergent validity was achieved[66]. When unfolding the CFA analyses, the model fit indicators for each construct were at the required level (ChiSq/df = 1.081 < 3, CFI = 0.994 > 0.9, RESEA = 0.014 < 0.08), which suggests a good fit of the items and the measurement model as a whole, and so the construct validity was met.

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Table 2.
Reliability and validity analysis of constructs.

Constructs	Items	Loadings (>0.6)	α (>0.7)	CR (>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
Perceived economic situations	ES1	0.767	0.868	0.868	0.569
	ES2	0.725			
	ES3	0.751			
	ES4	0.756			
	ES5	0.771			
Related policies of helping entrepreneurship	RP1	0.766	0.871	0.872	0.576
	RP2	0.727			
	RP3	0.772			
	RP4	0.737			
	RP5	0.791			
Attitudes toward entrepreneurship	A1	0.803	0.886	0.886	0.608
	A2	0.771			
	A3	0.791			
	A4	0.75			
	A5	0.782			
Entrepreneurial Intentions	I1	0.76	0.834	0.834	0.557
	I2	0.754			
	I3	0.753			
	I4	0.717			

Note: α=Cronbach's alpha; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = construct reliability.

In this study, the discriminant validity of the measurement model was measured using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. As shown in Table 3, all inter-structural correlations were less than the square root of the AVE in the same column (in bold), indicating that discriminant validity was obtained [67].

Table 3.
Fornell-Larcker Criterion of constructs.

Constructs	Perceived economic situations	Related policies	Attitudes toward entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial Intentions
Perceived economic situations	0.754			
Related policies	0.435	0.759		
Attitudes toward entrepreneurship	0.479	0.497	0.78	
Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.496	0.498	0.529	0.746

Note: the bold sections are each construct's square root of the AVE.

5.4. Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a second generation statistical technique developed to analyse the interrelationships between multiple variables in a model [68]. The structural equation modelling in this study had the required model fit (ChiSq/df = 1.038 < 3, CFI = 0.999 > 0.9, RESEA = 0.009 < 0.08) and explained the 5 hypothesized relationships of the structure (as shown in Table 4). In the absence of mediating variables, the perceived economic situation and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship were significantly and positively related to the vocational college students'

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entrepreneurship intentions. The standardised beta estimates for the direct effect of economic situations and related policies on the vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions were 0.345 and 0.348 respectively. The critical ratio (C.R.) values of 4.256 and 4.13 (>1.96), and p-value of less than 0.001 confirmed the significance of the relationship. With the inclusion of the vocational college students' entrepreneurial attitudes in the structural model, the perceived economic situation and related policies of helping entrepreneurship also had a positive and significant effect on the vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions, but the direct effects were weakened, with standardised beta values of 0.252 and 0.246 respectively (as shown in Table 5). The economic situations and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship had a significant and positive effect on the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship, with standardised beta estimates of 0.324 and 0.356 respectively, both with p-values less than 0.001. The results in Table 4 also show that the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship was significantly and positively correlated with the vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions (beta = 0.286, C.R. = 4.664 > 1.96, p<0.001). Therefore, the mediating roles of the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship were established among the effects of perceived economic situations and related policies on the vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions [69].

Table 4.
Testing of hypotheses.

Hypotheses				**S. T. D effects (β)**		**C.R. (>1.96)**	**p-value**	**Decision**
H1	Perceived economic situation	→	Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.252	0.061	4.256	***	Support
H2	Related policies	→	Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.246	0.056	4.130	***	Support
H3	Attitudes toward entrepreneurship	→	Entrepreneurial Intentions	0.286	0.056	4.664	***	Support
H4	Perceived economic situation	→	Attitudes toward entrepreneurship	0.324	0.064	5.763	***	Support
H5	Related policies	→	Attitudes toward entrepreneurship	0.356	0.058	6.314	***	Support

Note: ***=p < 0.001; SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio.

Using the bootstrap method (performing 5000 bootstrap samples resulting in a bias corrected percentile method at the 95 % confidence level) for the mediation effect test, the study found that the indirect effect of the perceived economic situation on entrepreneurial intentions was 0.093 (lower bounds 0.052, upper bounds 0.155) with p-value= 0.001. This indicated that the mediating effect of entrepreneurial attitude between economic situations and vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions was present (as shown in Table 5). Meanwhile, the direct effect of the perceived economic situation on vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions was also significant but slightly attenuated (0.252 < 0.345) after the addition of the mediator vocational college students attitudes toward entrepreneurship, which suggested that the vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship partially mediated between perceived economic situation and vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions [70]. The indirect effect of related policies on vocational college students' entrepreneurial intention was 0.102 (lower bounds 0.059, upper bounds 0.161) with a p-value of 0.001. Meanwhile, after adding the mediator entrepreneurial attitudes of vocational college students, the direct effect of related policies of helping entrepreneurship on entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students was also significant but slightly attenuated (0.246 < 0.348), which suggested

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that related policies had a partial mediating role between related policies of supporting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students.

Table 5.
Test of the mediation.

	Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Result
H6	Perceived economic situations→ Attitudes toward entrepreneurship→ Entrepreneurial intentions	0.252**	0.093**	Support
H7	Related policies→ Attitudes toward entrepreneurship→ Entrepreneurial intentions	0.246**	0.102**	Support

Note: ** = p< 0.01.

The original conceptual mode from AMOS is shown in Figure 2.

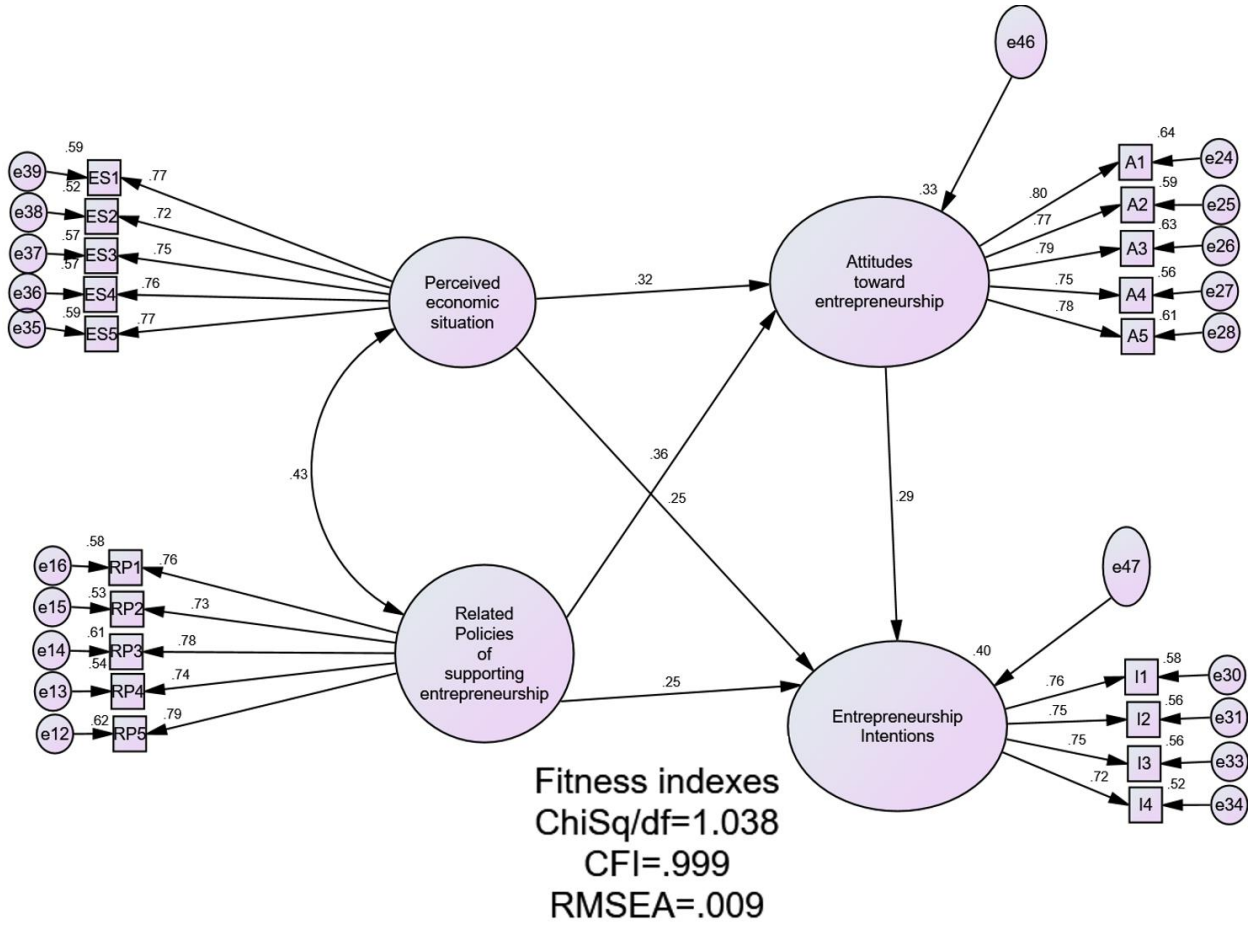

Figure 2.
Conceptual model from AMOS.

The structural equation model with standardised beta metric and its path relationship diagram are shown in Figure 3.

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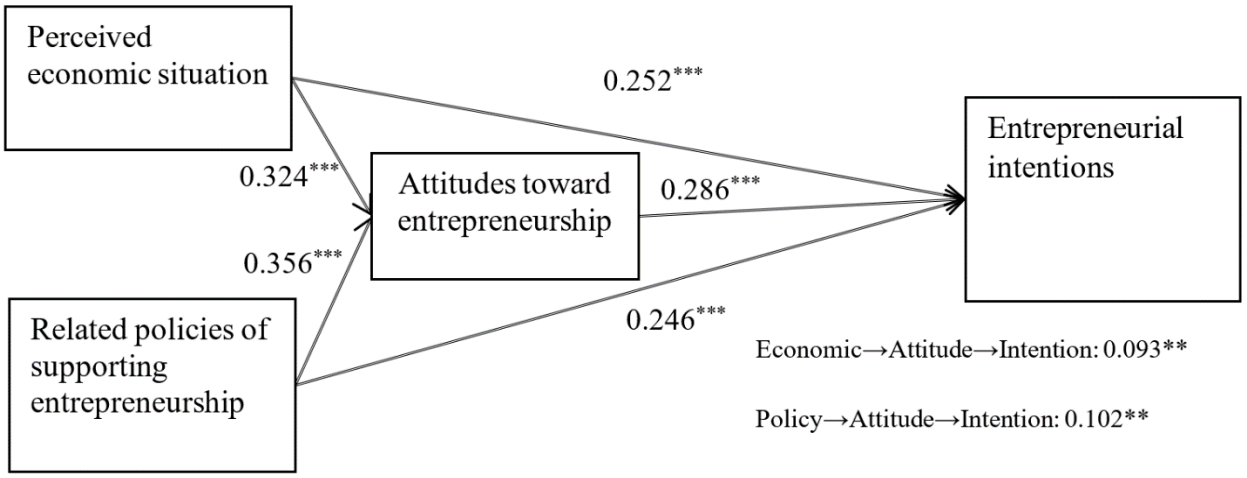

Figure 3.
Structural equation model results.
Note: **=p < .01; ***=p < .001.

6. Discussion

6.1. Finding

This study explored the effects of perceived economic situation and policies to help entrepreneurship on entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students through the mediating role of entrepreneurial attitudes of vocational college students. The results of H1 showed that perceived economic situation had a positive effect on vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions. However, this is different from the findings of some researchers [71-73]. These researchers had argued the negative effect of economic situations on individual entrepreneurial intentions. The reason for this difference is due to the entrepreneurial ecology theory of digital entrepreneurial tendencies in the AI era, where good perceived economic conditions are more likely to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem that encourages students to start digital entrepreneurship [74]. This also explained well why it is the Hangzhou region (one of the economically developed regions in China) that had given birth to digital entrepreneurial technology companies such as Alibaba, Deepseek (AI company), and Yushu Technology (robotics company).

The results of H2 show that the policies related to helping entrepreneurship positively affected the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. This is consistent with previous research [75, 76]. From the perspective of the ecological theory of entrepreneurship, policies related of helping entrepreneurship prompted individuals' entrepreneurial attitudes and intensify their entrepreneurial inclinations at the external level [77, 78] . For example, special funds or guidance funds set up by the government, as well as various capital subsidy mechanisms such as loan discounts, project subsidies, and post incentives, can effectively stimulate vocational college students to start businesses.

The results of H3 showed that vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship positively affected the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. This is consistent with previous research [37, 52]. The TPB theory has strongly supported that students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship can positively influence students' entrepreneurial intentions.

The results of H4 and H5 showed that perceived economic situation and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship had a positive effect on vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurial. This is something that previous research has overlooked. Indeed, good economic situations and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship can favour students' easier access to start-

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up capital and the convenience of finding a target customer market [47, 75]. Especially in the age of artificial intelligence, the high demand for AI applications in regions with good economic conditions and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship provide a good basis for digital entrepreneurship among students.

The results of H6 and H7 showed that students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship played a mediating role between perceived economic situation and policies related of supporting entrepreneurship with vocational college students' entrepreneurial intentions. These are new findings. The perceived economic situation and related policies supporting entrepreneurship can make it easier for students to start a business from the aspects of funding preparation, technology preparation, and market preparation, and adjust their expectations [79]. The ease of meeting these expectations further influences students' self-efficacy [79] and leads them to adopt a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. This positive attitude toward entrepreneurship stimulates corresponding entrepreneurial behavior through the TPB theoretical framework [33]. Therefore, it is a reasonable mechanism that the perceived economic situation and related policies supporting entrepreneurship positively impact students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship, thereby positively influencing their entrepreneurial intentions.

6.2. Theoretical Contribution

Based on the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory, this study investigated the effects of perceived economic situations and policies of supporting entrepreneurship on the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. The theoretical significance of this research is that it advances the existing TPB theoretical framework by deriving the antecedent influencing factors of entrepreneurial attitude, forward expanding the TPB theory in the field of entrepreneurship research. Previous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of entrepreneurial attitude on entrepreneurial intention based on the TPB theory. However, these studies lack further explanation of what leads individuals to have a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship. This research fills this gap by deducing the positive impact of perceived economic situations and policies supporting entrepreneurship on individuals' attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Additionally, the results of this study further enrich the Entrepreneurship Ecology Theory and explain the mechanism by which perceived economic situations and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship influence entrepreneurial intention, showcasing that perceived economic situations and related policies of supporting entrepreneurship affect individuals' entrepreneurial intention through the mediating effect of attitude toward entrepreneurship.

6.3. Practical Implication

The practical significance of this research is that the findings provided a reference for vocational college students' entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education should not ignore the combined impact of the perceived economic situation and related policies, as they can influence students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. For government agencies, when guiding vocational college students in entrepreneurship, it is essential to provide supporting policies, such as financial support, market expansion, and tax reductions, while also considering local economic development conditions and highlighting beneficial aspects to help students perceive a favorable economic situation. For vocational colleges, when implementing entrepreneurship education, there needs to be a focus on explaining entrepreneurship support policies and strengthening students' understanding of them, thereby fostering a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. The concurrent implementation of the above measures will be conducive to the formation of students' entrepreneurial intentions.

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6.4. Limitations and Future Research

The limitations of the study include two aspects. Firstly, students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship was only partially mediated the influence of perceived economic situation and related policies of helping entrepreneurship on entrepreneurship intention of students. The bootstrap analysis suggested that there may be other mediating factors. Secondly, the study only examined 5 vocational college students in China. The sample size is slightly insufficient for a wide range of vocational colleges in the world. Therefore, future researchers can explore more mediating factors on students' entrepreneurship intention and collect data from other countries or regions to validate and support the findings.

7. Conclusion

The study constructed a research framework for the relationship between perceived economic situation, related policies of supporting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship intentions, and revealed the mechanisms by which the aforementioned variables worked. On the theoretical and empirical findings of previous research literature, the study proposed 7 hypotheses. The results of data testing of these 7 hypotheses answered the 2 research questions well. The results of H1 and H2 showed that there was a positive relationship between the perceived economic situation, policies related of supporting entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. The results of H4 and H5 showed that perceived economic situations, policies related of supporting entrepreneurship positively influence vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship. This answers research question 1. The results of hypotheses H3, H6, and H7 showed that the attitudes toward entrepreneurship of vocational college students positively affected their entrepreneurial intentions, and vocational college students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship partially mediated the influence of perceived economic situation and policies of supporting entrepreneurship on the entrepreneurial intentions of vocational college students. This answers research question 2. The findings of the study answered the formation mechanism of the positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention in relation to external economic and policy factors, providing corresponding insights for entrepreneurship education from the perspective of the external environment.

Institutional Review Board Statement:

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Henan Quality Polytechnic on 25 February 2024, no. HQI-LW-2024-02-011.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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