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Examining the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intentions at universities of technology in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

High unemployment levels means that graduates are now encouraged to consider entrepreneurship as a career, and it is necessary to understand how entrepreneurship education influences their career choices. We investigated the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intentions of business management students at selected Universities of Technology (UoT) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. We used quantitative research questionnaire to survey the entrepreneurial intentions and skills of students of 224 students enrolled in business courses and had completed a module in entrepreneurship at undergraduate level. Regression analysis of entrepreneurial education variables and entrepreneurial intention was conducted. The findings of this study indicated that Entrepreneurial intention is positively affected by entrepreneurial skills, creativity, leadership, and business experience but negatively by financial knowledge. These results show that higher levels of financial knowledge have a negative impact on entrepreneurial intention of business students. Therefore, the university curriculum must cultivate traits like resourcefulness, leadership, and ambition which encourages beneficial outcomes of entrepreneurial intention amongst students.

Introduction

Graduate employment patterns seem to have changed worldwide (Kwiek 2018). Ramchander (2021) indicated that job seekers with both bachelor's and non-bachelor's degrees must compete for employment simultaneously with limited employment, leading to unemployment. Graduate unemployment may be affected by the number of graduates looking for jobs together with those who have not attended higher education altogether. Graduates find themselves seeking jobs rather than creating them themselves (Okolie et al., 2019). The desire to create more jobs has led many governments to invest in entrepreneurship education. Some developing countries in Africa are encouraging more students to consider entrepreneurship as a career option (Iwu et al., 2021). Researchers have examined the relationships between entrepreneurial education and several variables, such as entrepreneurial intention (Ndofirepi, 2020). However, Vaicekauskaite and Valackiene (2018) reported that there is a lack of consistent findings on the influence of entrepreneurship courses on students' willingness to engage in entrepreneurship.

Bejinaru (2018) highlighted the cooperation between diverse institutions, colleges/universities, and employers in the labour market with the aim of developing a curriculum that meets the needs of employers. However, the component of entrepreneurship as a factor of production may need to be assessed and improved to ensure economic growth, as it may help to unlock the value of the other three factors of production. Foss et al., (2019) refer to entrepreneurs as those who combine other factors of production (land, labour and capital) to generate profits. Mehmood at el., (2019) reported that South African youth are disadvantaged in the labour market because their unemployment rates are above the national average. The figures reported by the Department of Labour (2022) show that in

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2022, the national unemployment rate was 34.5%, whereas the youth unemployment rate was 63.9%, as stated in the forum (South Africa, Department of Statistics, 2022). In addition, the 2023 unemployment rate was 31.9% from July to September of 2023 (South Africa, Department of Statistics, 2023).

Iwu *et al*. (2021) state that one of the main challenges that affects higher education in South Africa is graduate unemployment, which is a major concern for many educational institutions, businesses and the government. The focus of South African higher education has been on the creation of student cohorts that become employees upon completing their studies (Ndofirepi, 2020). Carpenter and Wilson (2022) noted that public and private organisations have an interest in increasing entrepreneurialism through the entrepreneurial education provided by universities. Despite the suitability of entrepreneurship as an alternative to traditional employment, entrepreneurial activity is currently low in South Africa. A global study revealed that 9.0% of graduates intend to be entrepreneurs directly after studies (Sieger et el., 2018). Furthermore, the GEM report (2018) noted that the level of entrepreneurial activity as a percentage of the population in South Africa is roughly half that of countries with a similar GDP and level of economic activity. Although entrepreneurship education ranks high on policy agendas in many countries, Chimucheka (2014) states that little research has assessed its influence on students' ability to become career entrepreneurs. More recently, Ramchander (2019) asserts that the South African higher education system has not sufficiently produced entrepreneurs in relation to the number of entrepreneurial programmes that it offers. Ngcobo and Khumalo (2022) noted that the challenges that entrepreneurs face in South Africa include training and skills. Students who prefer experiential learning and wish to acquire technical skills that are immediately applicable in the job are often drawn to technology universities. These students frequently place greater value on real-world experience and workforce readiness than just academic goals do. Teaching strategies at technological universities are frequently immersive, emphasizing projects, labs, workshops, and simulations. Unlike traditional institutions, which place more emphasis on lectures and tests, assessments usually consist of practical exams, industry-related projects, and assessments based on hands-on competencies. It can therefore be argued that the nature and quality of entrepreneurial education offered at universities of technology is different from the entrepreneurial education offered at traditional universities because of the teaching focus and approach.

Given the uncertainty regarding the learning transfer of entrepreneurial education, an investigation of the relationship between entrepreneurial education and its ability to help develop entrepreneurial intentions among university students provides useful data to universities of technology (UoTs) and other institutions. Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding the effect of entrepreneurial education has been echoed in more recent studies (Carpenter and Wilson 2022), and our goal is to provide further insight into the effect of entrepreneurial education from a South African perspective. The study examines the entrepreneurial intentions of students enrolled in business courses. The study also selects universities of technology only, which have a strong focus on innovation and solving real-world technical or industrial issues, as opposed to traditional universities. We investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intentions at the Universities of Technology (UoT) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, unlike other studies that focused on all graduates, our focus is only business students who have also performed an entrepreneurship module. In contrast to generic abilities acquired through degrees, our study thoroughly examines what kind of information and skills taught during the entrepreneurship education learning process increase a student's entrepreneurial intent. The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 Background, Section 2 Literature Review, Section 3 Methodology, Section 4 Data Analysis, Section 5 Discussion and Section 6 Conclusion.

Literature Review

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Questions have been raised on the extent to which university-level entrepreneurship education influences students' entrepreneurial intentions. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is a framework for understanding actions that are somewhat within an individual's control (Rauch and Hulsink, 2015). According to this model, intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Pruett, 2012). The TPB extends the theory of reasoned action (Fayolle and Gailly, 2008; Jabeen *et al.*, 2017), emphasising that the primary factor driving behaviour is the individual's intention to engage in it (Rauch and Hulsink, 2015). This intention is determined by one's attitude towards the behaviour, the influence of subjective norms, and the degree of perceived behavioural control.

The theory of planned behaviour seems to provide the basis for our understanding of the formulation of intentions. Ajzen (1991), cited in Bosnjak *et al*., (2020), suggested that the theory of planned behaviour has been extensively applied in recent decades to study individuals' entrepreneurial intentions. The theory of planned behaviour has been a key predictor of behaviour and intention. The theory of planned behaviour focuses on individual motivational factors as determinants of the likelihood of performing a specific behaviour (Kruse *et al*., 2019). The theory of planned behaviour is an important framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human social behaviour (Ajzen, 2020). On the basis of this theory, it has been established that personal attitudes, that is, an individual's positive or negative evaluations of a particular behaviour, affect his or her intentions towards that behaviour. Moreover, if an indicator's options are positive, this will affect their attitudes favourably.

Research has shown that attitudes are generally predictive of an individual's behavioural intentions (Gieure *et al*., 2020). According to theory, intentions are the immediate antecedent of behaviour. Furthermore, this provides support for the use of Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (1991) as a model to provide an understanding of the development of entrepreneurial intentions (Bosnjak *et al*.,

2020). The theory provides an understanding of entrepreneurial education as a motivating factor in the development of entrepreneurial intent.

Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship Education

Ncube and Lekhanya (2021) assert that entrepreneurship is not only crucial for initiating businesses but also serves to boost employment and foster economic growth, particularly in developing nations such as South Africa. Ndofirepi (2020) noted that several factors drive students to pursue entrepreneurship studies at South African universities, including the desire to establish their own businesses due to limited job opportunities and advancement prospects, retrenchment, and a wish to evade stringent regulations.

The debate over whether entrepreneurship can be taught is a central theme in the literature. Although some argue that entrepreneurship is an innate quality and cannot be taught, others emphasise the teachability of entrepreneurship skills (Farny et al., 2019). Some scholars note that teaching entrepreneurship is similar to teaching any other discipline, with varying levels of proficiency among individuals (Cascavilla et al., 2022). A study by Cho and Lee (2018) revealed that emerging entrepreneurs who had interactions with entrepreneurial experts were more successful. Such interactions resulted in the transfer of knowledge from the experts to the students whose attitudes towards entrepreneurship were positively affected. Moreover, the need for necessary entrepreneurial skills was highlighted. As such, after completing entrepreneurial education, students displayed greater inclinations for entrepreneurship.

Despite differing opinions, many researchers support the idea that entrepreneurship education is valuable and can be effectively taught (Neck and Corbett 2018; Kuratko and Morris 2018; Chaker and Jarraya 2021). They focus on improving aspects of entrepreneurship education to enhance its academic legitimacy and social validation. Key considerations include what is taught, who teaches it, how it is taught, and the context in which it is delivered (Neck and Corbett, 2018; Farny, Frederiksen et al., 2019; Hägg and Gabrielsson, 2020a; Cascavilla et al., 2022b; Kuckertz, 2021). Other scholars stress the importance of understanding the student profile and the environmental context for designing and delivering effective entrepreneurship courses (Turner and Gianiodis, 2018; Fejes et al., 2019).

Intrinsic factors such as intelligence and natural dexterity, along with extrinsic factors such as deeper study and practice, contribute to varying levels of talent. At the centre of this understanding is a trait-based understanding (Frederiksen et al., 2019). Additionally, studies explore the connection between personality traits, particularly leadership dimensions, identified in adolescence and entrepreneurial propensity and success (Kerr et al., 2018). The overarching structure of entrepreneurship instruction involves multiple interconnected components, including educators, learners, instructional settings, educational tasks, and desired course results (Price and Ronnie, 2021). Moreover, the value of teaching entrepreneurship is emphasized as integrating knowledge, experience, and action, fostering not only scientific knowledge but also new ways of thinking, skills, and modes of behaviour (Cascavilla et al. 2022). Overall, the consensus is that entrepreneurship education can be taught, but careful attention to various factors is crucial for its effectiveness.

Research consistently supports the notion that there is a correlation between entrepreneurial activity and economic performance, as evidenced by numerous studies (Sánchez, 2013). The importance of entrepreneurship education in fostering the growth and progression of entrepreneurship has been underscored in various publications within this rapidly expanding area (Swanepoel *et al.*, 2008; Hasan et al., 2017; Costin et al., 2018; Bauman and Lucy, 2021). This body of research holds promise as a facilitator of income growth by enhancing entrepreneurial endeavours. The proliferation of new business initiatives is commonly thought to lead to higher national income while also playing a role in the generation of employment opportunities, especially for unemployed individuals, including recent graduates (Hameed and Irfan, 2019). An earlier study by Hynes (1996) suggested that aspiring entrepreneurs should be prepared to identify and capitalize on opportunities emerging from the expansion of the small and medium–sized enterprise (SME) sector.

Scholars have emphasized the importance of careful consideration in designing and delivering entrepreneurship courses (Farny et al., 2019; Hägg and Gabrielsson, 2020b; Kuckertz, 2021). The incorporation of the student profile and the environmental context is deemed essential for effective course delivery. Moreover, Kamovich and Foss (2017) stressed that entrepreneurship education interventions are influenced by the surrounding context and involve various interacting elements, such as teachers, students, the teaching context, learning activities, and course outcomes.

Entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial development, knowledge and skills

Entrepreneurial education programmes cater to diverse audiences, encompassing a wide range of objectives, content, and pedagogical approaches (Cascavilla et al., 2022b). These programmes are delivered across various faculties, targeting students with diverse educational backgrounds, socio-demographic characteristics, and levels of engagement in entrepreneurship (Blenker *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, teaching models for entrepreneurial education, which outline the principles guiding educators' instructional practices, exhibit significant diversity both within and across universities (Sansone *et al.*, 2021). As such, the education of entrepreneurs differs significantly from that of traditional employees, emphasizing the crucial role of education and study in achieving successful outcomes (Boldureanu *et al*., 2020). Considering this, the European Commission's Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020 focused on fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among young people through strategies such as enhancing entrepreneurship education, fostering conducive business environments, and engaging specific groups.

Moreover, educational institutions can serve as influential models for nurturing entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions among young entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education exposes students to successful business examples and interactions with practitioners, which fosters coping strategies, maintains motivation, and enhances entrepreneurial self-efficacy. According to Boldureanu *et al*., (2020), role models such as educational institutions in entrepreneurship serve four interdependent functions: inspiring and motivating individuals to start, increasing self-efficacy, providing guidance through examples, and offering practical support and advice.

Given the role played by entrepreneurial education, various models for teaching have been developed (Cascavilla et al., 2022a). For example, the demand model of education emphasizes individual learning driven by internal factors, focusing on learners' needs and their demand for content. It views students as active participants in the educational process and employs experiential and participative methods. Teachers serve as guides, and course content emerges on the basis of students' needs. In contrast, the competence model integrates internal and external factors, with students engaging in activities related to the entrepreneurial process and teachers acting as coaches. These models represent distinct paradigms but can be hybridised to better suit specific educational contexts, as seen in the supply–demand and demand–competence models, which combine features from their respective archetypes. These hybrid models accommodate diverse learning needs and real-world educational scenarios. On the basis of the description by Cascavilla et al. (2022a), the teaching models employed in entrepreneurial education highlight the differences in what are deemed the most appropriate methods for delivering entrepreneurial modules.

Entrepreneurship education is perceived to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes associated with entrepreneurship in learners (Ghafar, 2020). Entrepreneurship education can be taught in many ways within and across universities on the basis of topics and contents, objectives, pedagogies and teaching methods (Cascavilla et al., 2022b). However, some have divided these programmes into two main categories: entrepreneurship training programmes and academic entrepreneurship education programmes (Valerio et al., 2014). Entrepreneurship training programmes focus primarily on practical knowledge and skills for initiating businesses, targeting potential and existing entrepreneurs (European Commission, 2012). Conversely, academic entrepreneurship programmes extend beyond traditional classroom teaching, involving learners affiliated with research centres who apply research-derived knowledge to establish business ventures (Miranda et al., 2017). These academic programmes focus on theoretical aspects, aiming to build knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, and are usually designed for high school and tertiary students (European Commission, 2014).

Theoretical education, as applied in entrepreneurship, involves a set of ideas intended to explain factors influencing future events that may not be readily observable or deduced through direct observation (Boldureanu, *et al.*, 2020). According to Bae et al., (2014), entrepreneurship theory lacks inherent characteristics; it aids in understanding wealth creation and why certain entrepreneurs can identify economically worthwhile opportunities. Theoretical teaching is deemed critical for aspiring entrepreneurs to comprehend the implications of committing resources to starting a business. However, effective theoretical education in entrepreneurship should involve positioning teachers as coaches and mentors, engaging learners in the learning process and preparing for diverse class scenarios (Zotov et al., 2021).

Both entrepreneurship training programmes and academic entrepreneurship programmes aim to develop entrepreneurship knowledge and skills in learners (European Commission, 2012). To be successful entrepreneurs, learners must embrace both knowledge and skills, as entrepreneurship knowledge involves identifying opportunities and acting to realise value, whereas entrepreneurship skills encompass turning ideas into action and can be applied across personal and professional domains (Alvarez de Mon et al., 2021; Zainuddin and Mukhtar, 2023). Entrepreneurship skills, defined as fundamental skills enabling learners to initiate, develop, finance, and succeed in business endeavours, encompass creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and the ability to design and manage plans to achieve objectives (Acharya and Chandra, 2019, Hahn et al., 2020). Therefore, entrepreneurship education, as outlined by Irimie et al., (2008), is the development of the knowledge and skills essential for nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets and attitudes, spanning various aspects from idea generation and startup to growth and innovation.

Methodology

This study was only concerned with examining the relationship between entrepreneurial education and the entrepreneurial goals of college students pursuing business degrees. The study investigated the attitudes of these students towards entrepreneurship as well as their opinions on the entrepreneurship education programme. Only the attitudes and perspectives of students presently enrolled in entrepreneurial education programs were the subject of the study. A sample of second- and final-year students enrolled in entrepreneurial studies courses at the two chosen UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, was used in the study. A sampling frame in the form of the class list of all registered second year and final-year students belonging to the entrepreneurial department of the selected UoTs was used in the study. The sample size of 400 randomly chosen individuals was calculated via the Cochran algorithm, and 224 participants completed the questionnaires, for a 56% response rate. Second-year and final-year students studying business and management were given a questionnaire. The questionnaires were designed to ensure that the respondents were able to complete the questionnaire in 20 minutes. It was estimated that respondents would take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire, which is within the recommended time of 25–30 minutes. Moreover, studies have shown that shorter questionnaires are associated with better completion and response rates (Sharma, 2022). The questionnaire was established by the researchers and pilot tested, with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.971803673. The quantitative data were collected in person from second- and final-year students at the chosen UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal during the second semester of the 2023 academic year. Mangosuthu University

of Technology (MUT) and Durban University of Technology (DUT) were the selected universities of technology and are the only two universities of Technology in the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa. Delimiting the data collection to these two institutions and one region of South Africa limits the generalisability of the findings. However, the findings add to the existing body of knowledge on the understanding of the effect of entrepreneurial education in the region. Notably, the use of quantitative methods may be subject to self-reporting bias in the form of recall bias and perception bias, and the results should be interpreted accordingly.

Data analysis

Cronbach's alpha serves as an indicator of internal consistency, particularly for multi-item measurement instruments. Greater variability contributes to an increase in the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. Findings from experiments or tests suggest that when Cronbach's alpha is used, the correlation of variance and standard deviation more effectively conveys reliability. The reliability of combining the items into a single latent variable is tested via Cronbach's alpha. An alpha value of at least 0.7 was considered adequate. If items do not correlate strongly enough with the other items in the construct and negatively affect reliability, they may be dropped. Factor extraction is deemed successful if the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) exceeds 0.6 and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant. These factors were tested for reliability via Cronbach's alpha. The results of factor analyses with Promax rotation, as applied to the items in each construct, are summarised in Table 10. These results include KMO, the items included in the composite variables, the variance that these extracted factors represent, the reliability statistic, and Cronbach's alpha.

Table 1: Summary of factor analysis

Construct	Variable name	KMO	Items included	Variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived importance of entrepreneurship (cognitive)	COG	.850	6.1-6.8	41.07	0.842
Feelings towards entrepreneurship (affective)	AFF	.778	7.1-7.5	57.32	0.865
Intention (behavioural)	BEH	.898	8.1-8.8	57.34	0.912
Business experience	BUSEX	.880	10.1-10.6	70.75	0.935
Entrepreneurial skills	SKILL	.836	11.1-11.5	57.20	0.837
Attendance	ATTEND	.826	12.1-12.2	41.72	0.721
Curriculum design and content	CURR		12.4-12.6	15.93	0.812
The course	COURSE CONTENT		12.7-12.10	5.64	0.838
Search/creativity	SRCH	.663	13.1.1-13.1.3	68.63	0.850
Planning/management	PLAN	.690	13.2.1-13.2.3	74.11	0.868
Leading	LEAD	.799	13.3.1-13.3.4	62.86	0.869
Managing ambiguity	AMB	.799	13.4.1-13.4.4	55.79	0.831
Financial knowledge	FIN	.705	13.5.1-13.5.4	58.62	0.842

Source: *Authors' own construct from survey results – SPSS*

Table I shows that all the composite variables are reliable, as indicated by alpha scores ranging from 0.721 to 0.0912. The results revealed that several questions in each section of the questionnaire were related and focused on the same subject. Therefore, the questions were reliable in ascertaining student responses to 13 factors. Notably, question 9 in section C was excluded from the analysis because they did not consistently measure the same thing.

To understand the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intention, linear regression was used. Entrepreneurial education (including skills gained) was measured via the ATTEND, CURR, COURSE CONTENT, SRCH, PLAN, LEAD, AMB, FIN, SKILL, and BUSEX composite variables, whereas entrepreneurial intention was measured via the BEH composite variable. Backwards regression, also known as backwards elimination, is a type of step regression used in statistical modelling to select the most significant variables for a predictive model. The process involves starting with all candidate variables and iteratively removing the least significant variables until only those that contribute meaningfully to a model are reached (Ament and Gomes 2021). Backwards regression analysis was used to analyse each of the entrepreneurial education variables (independent variables) against each variable of entrepreneurial intention (dependent variables) to determine which of the 'education' constructs was a significant predictor of intention. After the 10 independent variables were entered into the model, the following independent

variables were removed: ATTEND, COURSE CONTENT, CURR, PLAN, and AMB. The variables left in the model are those that significantly affect BEH (Intention).

Table II shows that the independent variables (SKILL, SRCH, LEAD and BUSEX) positively affect the behavioural intentions of students towards entrepreneurship. Having entrepreneurial skills, having business experience and the ability to search for or be creative and to lead a team positively affects the intention to become an entrepreneur. However, Table II shows that financial knowledge has a negative relationship with the behavioural intentions of students towards entrepreneurship.

Table II: Regression Analysis – Intention (Behavioural) (BEH)

IV	R^2	F	df1; df2	*p* value	B (regression coefficient)	t	*p* value
SKILL	0.302	18.745	5; 217	<0.001	0.343	5.626	0.001
SRCH					0.229	3.218	0.001
LEAD					0.246	3.103	0.002
FIN					-0.186	-2.518	0.013
BUSEX					0.085	2.267	0.024

Source: *Authors' own construct from survey results – SPSS*

R2 = 0.302: This means that 30.2% of the variance in the dependent variable's behavioural intention (BEH) can be explained by the model. With a modest effect size, this model's independent variables (IVs) appear to account for a sizable amount of the variation in BEH. F(5, 217) = 18.745, p < 0.001: The model's overall significance is tested via the F statistic. The model's statistical significance (p < 0.001) at the 95% confidence interval suggests that the independent variables affect entrepreneurial intention. After adjusting for other factors, each independent variable's distinct contribution to the model is indicated by its B (unstandardized regression coefficient), t -value, and p -value:

Entrepreneurial skills (SKILL): B = 0.343, t = 5.626, p = 0.001: The regression coefficient for SKILL is positive (B = 0.343), meaning that entrepreneurial intention increases in tandem with SKILL. With a p-value of 0.001, this link is statistically significant, indicating that SKILL significantly and favourably influences entrepreneurial intention. The ability to look out innovative ways to use resources is known as SRCH. **SRCH (Skill to Search for Creative Ways to Use Resources):** Additionally, SRCH and entrepreneurial intention have a positive correlation (B = 0.229, t = 3.218, p = 0.001), implying that entrepreneurial intention increases as SRCH does. The statistical significance of this link (p = 0.001) suggests that SRCH significantly contributes to the increase in entrepreneurial intention.

Leadership Skills (LEAD): BEH is positively and statistically significantly impacted by LEAD (p = 0.002), as indicated by B = 0.246, t = 3.103, and p = 0.002. This implies that pupils are more likely to have greater behavioural intentions if they possess superior leadership abilities. **Financial Knowledge (FIN**): B = -0.186, t = -2.518, p = 0.013: FIN and entrepreneurial intention have a negative relationship, meaning that entrepreneurial intention (BEH) decreases as financial knowledge, acquired through the entrepreneurial education offered at the two institutions, increases. This association is statistically significant (p = 0.013), the belief held by the students that the knowledge obtained did not enable them to 'Read and interpret financial statements' or to 'Control costs for projects'. Therefore, the increase in this knowledge, which fails to enable students to control costs or read financial instatements, would not positively affect the students' entrepreneurial intentions. **Business Experience (BUSEX):** t = 2.267, p = 0.024, and B = 0.085: Entrepreneurial intention benefits from BUSEX in a way that is statistically significant (p = 0.024). This implies that although the effect is minimal in relation to other factors, business experience has a favourable influence on entrepreneurial behavioural intention.

Discussion of Results

Entrepreneurship education, encompassing acquired skills, was assessed through variables such as attendance, curriculum design (current/up-to-date curriculum), course content, ability to innovate, planning and leadership skills, handling ambiguity, financial knowledge, and business experience. Entrepreneurial intention was measured as a combination of attitudes toward entrepreneurship and behavioral intentions. The findings in Table 2 indicate that the four independent variables significantly influence behavioural intentions towards entrepreneurship. The possession of entrepreneurial skills, business experience, creative problem-solving abilities, and leadership skills positively impacts the intention to pursue entrepreneurship. Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions (Sánchez, 2013; Aladejebi, 2018; Lv *et al.*, 2021; Mahlaole and Malebana, 2021; Cui and Bell, 2022). However, the conceptualization of entrepreneurship education varies. For instance, Lv *et al.* (2021) conceptualize it as comprising entrepreneurial pedagogy, business plan development ability, and support for entrepreneurial practices. Their study revealed that entrepreneurial pedagogy significantly influences entrepreneurial competence, thereby positively affecting entrepreneurial intentions. These findings align with the results of this study, where the regression model integrated skills as part of the educational provision for students. Prahalad and Hamel's (1994) seminal definition of competencies as accumulated learning and the approach of Huang et al., (2020), which includes skills in their definition of entrepreneurial

competencies, provide a framework for drawing parallels with the model of Lv *et al.,* (2021). Staniewski (2016) also reported that, in addition to unique entrepreneurial knowledge, experience can predict entrepreneurial success. However, Miralles et al., (2017) argued that the impact of experience varies with age and is influenced by beliefs and reasoning about behaviour. They suggest that for younger entrepreneurs, work experience serves as a gateway to knowledge and enhances self-efficacy in entrepreneurial endeavours. Financial literacy, as indicated in other studies (Hasan *et al.,* 2020), has a partially positive influence on entrepreneurial intention, supporting the findings of this study. The underlying theme is the adequacy of financial education, which has been described as existing in various forms of financial education programs (Kaiser *et al*., 2022). Moreover, many studies have shown differences between financial literacy and financial expertise (McDaniel et al., 2002; Stolper and Walter, 2017; Purwidianti and Tubastuvi, 2019; Purwidianti, *et al*., 2022).

Similar results were noted regarding the influence of the independent variables on attitudes toward entrepreneurship (affective component), as presented in Table 3. Entrepreneurial skills (SKILL), the ability to search for creative ways to use resources (SRCH), the ability to lead (LEAD), financial knowledge (FIN) and business experience (BUSEX) are highlighted as independent variables. Nonetheless, business experience did not play a role as an independent variable in the connection between entrepreneurship education and attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Additionally, a negative correlation was found between financial knowledge and students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship, contradicting previous studies where financial literacy moderated entrepreneurial passion and persistence (Al Issa *et al.,* 2019). In contrast to past research, this study uncovers a detrimental impact of financial knowledge on students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. This outcome implies that financial knowledge may result in negative attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Another key aspect highlighted in the relationship facilitated by entrepreneurship education (including entrepreneurial skills) is the capacity to handle ambiguity, a skill honed through such education. The literature suggests that tolerance for uncertainty, whether high or low, influences the ability to thrive in dynamic work environments, such as those faced by entrepreneurs (Deng et al., 2019). Therefore, considering that entrepreneurship education provides students with tools to manage uncertainty and ambiguity, their concerns about entering uncertain work environments may decrease. Consequently, the ability to manage ambiguity could impact overall attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intention, this study employed linear regression analysis. The components of entrepreneurial education were consolidated into composite variables. The analysis incorporated multiple dimensions of entrepreneurial education, measured through composite variables, including ATTEND, CURR, COURSE CONTENT, SRCH, PLAN, LEAD, AMB, FIN, SKILL, and BUSEX. Entrepreneurial intention was operationalized through the composite variable BEH. The results revealed that several entrepreneurial education variables demonstrated positive linear relationships with student entrepreneurial intentions—specifically, SKILL, SRCH, LEAD, and BUSEX—while FIN exhibited a negative linear relationship. This negative correlation may be attributed to the emphasis on risk management, planning, and cost-control measures in financial education. Students exposed to comprehensive financial education, particularly with respect to startup risks such as failure rates, personal debt, and capital acquisition challenges, may develop increased risk aversion. This heightened awareness of financial risk can diminish entrepreneurial intentions, as students may perceive entrepreneurship as less attractive than traditional career paths do. The coverage of financial constraints in business courses, including cash flow management, profitability challenges, and funding requirements, may further contribute to this effect. This risk aversion appears particularly pronounced when students lack confidence in managing high-risk financial scenarios inherent in entrepreneurial ventures. Consequently, the findings suggest that insufficient confidence in acquired financial knowledge negatively impacts entrepreneurial intentions, potentially leading students to favor traditional employment offering stable income and reduced financial uncertainty.

Students demonstrating strong entrepreneurial skills—measured under the SRCH variable—including opportunity identification, strategic thinking, problem solving, and adaptability—exhibit greater preparedness for enterprise creation and development. Enhanced self-efficacy in these domains makes entrepreneurship appear more accessible and achievable, thereby increasing entrepreneurial intentions. This relationship suggests that entrepreneurial education should prioritize skill development and foster creativity, innovation, and leadership capabilities to promote increased entrepreneurial intention among students. Additionally, education-enhancing practical business experience positively correlates with entrepreneurial intention, whereas financial education has an inverse relationship. These findings support the existence of significant relationships between entrepreneurial education components and entrepreneurial intentions among students at selected universities of technology (UoTs) in KwaZulu-Natal.

Resource optimization capabilities, measured under SKILL, prove crucial in entrepreneurship, where capital and resources are often limited. This competency enables students to maximize available resources through innovation and repurposing—critical skills for early-stage ventures. Resourcefulness cultivates a "can-do" mindset, empowering students to overcome resource constraints and promoting action-oriented thinking over hesitation, even with limited initial funding.

Leadership capabilities, assessed under LEAD, are fundamental for venture guidance and stakeholder motivation. The development of leadership competencies, including team management, communication, and motivational skills, enhances students' perceived readiness for founder or executive roles. Strong leadership abilities facilitate students' self-identification with entrepreneurial positions involving team management, growth facilitation, and strategic decision-making. This leadership preparedness strengthens entrepreneurial intentions by developing capabilities essential for founder roles and resource mobilization.

Recommendations for UoTs include expanding financial education within their curricula and emphasizing practical aspects such as budgeting, cash flow management, and risk assessment which are essential competencies for venture finance management. Enhancing experiential learning through internships, design thinking workshops, prototyping exercises, and real-world problem-solving activities will develop students' practical business ability, creative problem-solving capabilities, and leadership skills, all of which positively influence entrepreneurial intentions. Policymakers should advocate for curricula emphasizing these competencies, ensuring that graduates possess the requisite skills and confidence for successful entrepreneurship in contemporary business environments. Implementation challenges may include resource constraints and curricular inflexibility.

Future research opportunities include investigating the impact of entrepreneurial education across non-business disciplines and examining the differential effects of financial literacy versus financial expertise on student entrepreneurial intentions at comparable institutions. Additionally, expanding the research scope beyond the current regional focus to include universities across different geographical areas is recommended. Furthermore, incorporating a mixed-methods approach could provide richer insights into this research domain.

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