



# Understanding Entrepreneurial Intentions of Albanian Business Students Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour

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This research aims to contribute to the understanding of the effect of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intentions among university business students in Albania. A model interlinking entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention is proposed based on the theory of planned behaviour. Factors related to education that affect the entrepreneurial intentions among business students in Albania are identified and measured. Analysis of the data revealed significant relationships between personal attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions. Subjective norms and perceived control over the entrepreneurial abilities were both not significantly related to entrepreneurial intentions. Discussion of results is presented and future research possibilities are suggested.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship education, Theory of Planned Behaviour, entrepreneurial intention, perceived desirability, perceived entrepreneurial control, subjective norms

## Introduction

For almost four decades, Albania has faced one of the most extreme communist dictatorships in Europe, characterised by a total isolation (Xheneti & Bartlett, 2012). As a result, the system of higher education in Albania was obsolete in methodology as well as in the information provided. In the post-communist era, Albanian higher education system underwent a series of reforms, including radical institutional changes, aiming at adapting to the new democratic system. One of these reforms was the liberalisation of the Higher Education Institutions which resulted in a rapid increase in both public and non-public Higher Education Institutions. In the same period, comparable growth has emerged in the field of entrepreneurship education. But the higher education sector – including business education – is facing a great number of problems, and the system has to change in a variety of ways, including shifting of the focus from quantity to quality

and creating the opportunity for a quality education. In addition, the revival of entrepreneurship in the country definitely will contribute to job creation, flexibility and competitiveness, innovativeness and job satisfaction (Shaqiri, 2015). A study of return migrants to Albania by (Piracha & Vadean, 2010) shows that formal education significantly predicted their entrepreneurship aspirations.

Nevertheless, little research has been conducted on the effects and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programmes and the question of whether entrepreneurship education can influence entrepreneurial intention is still relatively unexplored. For many countries in South East Europe (SEE), entrepreneurship is linked mainly to management training instead of being considered as a process of acquiring attitudes (Xheneti, 2007). As an economy in transition, Albania needs to create a sustained basis of growth. Self-employment backed by entrepreneurial education can be part of the solution or an alternative way to joblessness. According to the The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2012), the ultimate goal of entrepreneurship education is to develop entrepreneurial effectiveness through multidisciplinary approaches and mixed pedagogies in order to achieve a balance of skills and knowledge related to the three contributory aspects: enterprise awareness, entrepreneurial mind-set, and entrepreneurial capability. As Xheneti (2007) suggests, the benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to more start-ups, innovative ventures and the creation of new jobs.

Entrepreneurship education can stimulate personal attributes and improve creativity, initiative, and can also promote innovation, self-confidence and the full potential of all individuals (Qorraj, 2017; Zepeda, 2013). Entrepreneurship education is the first and arguably the most important step for embedding an innovative culture in Europe (Wilson, 2008), and since the future of Albania is to be integrated into the EU, its economic growth competitiveness and innovation depend on being able to produce future leaders with the skills and attitudes to be entrepreneurs in their professional lives. Thus, one of the roles of the entrepreneurship education is to affect entrepreneurial intentions, affecting the attitudes and perceptions such as perceived desirability of self-employment and perceived entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Iqbal et al., 2012). This research paper attempts to study the effects of entrepreneurship education on determinant factors, such as attitudes, norms, and perceived control over the behaviour. In turn these determinant factors will affect the entrepreneurial intentions.

### **Background and Hypotheses**

It is widely held that today's students become tomorrow's entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship education is often integrated into traditional curric-

ula to ensure that this path is clear. In the past, researchers have examined how education in entrepreneurship could transform learners into entrepreneurial practitioners (Basu & Virick, 2008; Chen et al., 2015; Franke & Lüthje, 2004). Entrepreneurial intention has now become a preferred outcome in the business education assessments. Entrepreneurial intention is frequently employed as a theoretical framework in the literature (Fayolle & Liñán, 2014).

This research design interlinks entrepreneurial intentions of business students with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Ajzen (1991). The TPB has been used by several researchers as a framework to study and explore entrepreneurial intentions (Fayolle & Gailly, 2004; Linan & Chen, 2009; Karali, 2013; Kolvereid & Isaksen, 2006; Kolvereid, 1996; Krueger et al., 2000). According to Ajzen (1991), attitudes toward the behaviour, social norms with respect to the behaviour, and perceived behavioural control are usually found to predict behavioural intentions. This research follows Basu & Virick (2008) in modelling entrepreneurial intentions after the theory of planned behaviour but explores the validity of the model within the nuances of the Albanian business education context.

In summary, the (TPB) postulates the following three predictors of intention, as cited in Karali, (2013, p.9):

- *Attitude toward the behaviour.* This is the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question.
- *Subjective norms.* These are the perceived social pressures to perform or not the behaviour.
- *Perceived behavioural control.* It is the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour. This predictor is assumed to reflect the perceived ability to perform certain tasks as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles.

The theory predicts that the greater the favourable attitude and subjective norm (social support) with respect to the behaviour, combined with a strong perceived behavioural control (ability), the greater the intention will be to perform the particular behaviour (Karimi et al., 2012).

The literature reviewed points to a further need for exploration of entrepreneurship education and its impact on entrepreneurial intentions. The coming points will detail the backgrounds, methodology and the findings of this study in detail.

In the light of the discussion above, this research tests three hypotheses. Personal attitudes are related to the expected value of starting a business such as financial rewards, personal satisfaction and independence

(Krueger et al., 2000). As a result, students with a high expected value will show a strong tendency to start a business. In this case, it is expected that university educators' aim is to help students discover and develop personal attributes for successful enterprise, develop an awareness of these, and find opportunities to enhance them. From the other part, students should be able to demonstrate ability of self-confidence, perseverance, action orientation, innovation and creativity. In simple terms, those with favourable personal attitudes towards something will more likely intend to perform action that lead to behavior aimed at achieving it (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

*H1 There is a positive and significant relationship between personal attitude towards entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial Intentions among Albanian business students.*

This is an important determinant for university students since they can be influenced by their social environment. Support and opinions from friends are likely to encourage or discourage a potential entrepreneurial behaviour (Zhang et al., 2015). Culture is a hidden ingredient in determining the entrepreneurial direction of a society – certain cultures have in them memes that nurture or hamper entrepreneurial behaviour of people and institutions finding existence in them. Social norms of the group with which a person aligns could determine that person's entrepreneurial attitude, note Qureshi et al. (2016). Entrepreneurial identity aspiration as a personal attitude is also observed to be another critical factor influencing entrepreneurial intentions (Pfeifer et al., 2016).

*H2 There is a positive and significant relationship between social norms and entrepreneurial intentions among Albanian business students.*

University students who believe they have acquired the skills to start a business are likely to become entrepreneurs (Zhang et al., 2015). Those abilities are supposed to be developed by university educators, whose aim is to help students develop core skills for enterprise and provide opportunities for these to be practiced within a range of situations to gain enhanced confidence and self-belief. From the other part, students should be able to demonstrate ability in the area of creativity and innovation, persuasion and negotiation, approach to management, decision making, financial and business literacy (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2012, p. 16–17). Perceived self-control and action-related doubt are found to be influencing individuals' choice to become entrepreneurs (Van Gelderen et al., 2015). Those with greater internal locus of control might be more willing to engage in planned behaviour that results in entrepreneurial actions and outcomes (Hsiao et al., 2016).

H3 *There is a positive and significant relationship between perceived behavioural control and entrepreneurial intentions among Albanian business students.*

## **Methodology**

This research seeks to describe trends in a population of individuals, in this case the Albanian business students. The design for this research is planned to be quantitative correlational. The design is suitable for the research as it seeks to describe students' perception of their entrepreneurial intentions and how intentions may be affected by entrepreneurship education programmes. The main dependent variable in this study is the entrepreneurial intention, which is considered the most appropriate indicator for measuring the direct impact of an entrepreneurship education programme.

The primary theoretical assumption guiding this inquiry is that entrepreneurship education has a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions. This study assumes that the more favourable attitudes toward behaviour, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control toward the behaviour are, the stronger the intention to perform the behaviour will be (Ajzen, 1991). It focuses on investigating whether young graduates have the necessary skills (as self-perception) that are required to become part of the entrepreneurship world. An important part of the research is the investigation of the role of higher education institutions on how they influence the entrepreneurial capabilities, self-reliance and self-independence in motivating the young students to initiate their own, new businesses. The study will identify the contribution of the independent variables in creating entrepreneurial intentions and how they relate to the dependent variable – entrepreneurial intentions. The study will be focused on Albanian business students. This research method aims to provide a statistical investigation of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. The research design will incorporate the collection of data from respondents using a questionnaire and the analysis of that data using statistical methods of analysis.

## **Data and the Basic Structural Equation Analysis**

This form of quantitative research seeks to describe trends in a population of individuals (Albanian business students) and in this case, a survey is a good procedure to use. Using the software facilities provided, such as the R-Studio, the completed questionnaire responses are processed for the initial statistical analyses. A questionnaire is administered to a group of students (the sample) to identify trends in behaviours, attitudes and skills. The sample population consists of university students in Albania at their un-

dergraduate final term level studying in the business administration department. There are 201 responses, representing three public universities and four private universities. The total sample is divided in two subgroups. In the first one, students who took the entrepreneurship major were included, and was considered the Target Group. In the second subgroup, students who had not been exposed to entrepreneurship studies were included, and was considered the as the Control Group. Samples of students are very common in the entrepreneurship literature (Linan & Chen, 2009; Kolvereid, 1996; Krueger et al., 2000) and as a quantitative study, a minimum of 30 individuals in the sample size ensured a normal distribution for parametric analysis, such as correlation (Triola, 2009).

Selection of this sample has been made for two reasons. First, final year university students are at a stage when they are most likely making career related decisions. Second, the students are about to face their professional career choice, so they may answer the Entrepreneurship Intention Questionnaire more consciously.

The model used to evaluate the entrepreneurial intentions can be written as follows:

$$\text{Entrepreneurial Intention} = f(\text{Perceived Desirability, Subjective Norms, Perceived Entrepreneurial Abilities/Skills})$$

$$EI = \alpha + \beta_1 PD + \beta_2 SN + \beta_3 PEA + \varepsilon$$

### **Reliability and Validity**

The instrument used for this study, titled entrepreneurial intention questionnaire (EIQ), has been developed and tested for reliability and validity by Linan and Chen (2009) and used by other researchers (Iqbal et al., 2012; Karali, 2013; Zhang et al., 2015). The study sought to investigate the relationship between students' entrepreneurial intentions and its antecedents (key attitudes that predict intention) that are composed of students' subjective norms, personal attitudes towards entrepreneurial behaviour, and perceived behavioural control, which in turn influences the entrepreneurial intention. The first step was validity analysis. There are several validation procedures and methods (Chandler & Lyon, 2001; Messick, 1988). The instrument was checked for structural and content validities and the items were both relevant and representative of the construct being measured. Although the reliability of the instrument was tested by its developer, the construct used for this study was checked again for inter-item consistency. The Cronbach's alpha shows a range between 0.64 and 0.77. The alpha value between 0.2 and 0.4 is considered reliable (Briggs & Cheek, 1986) and a value of 0.70 is considered satisfactory for most studies (Nunally, 1978).

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	SD	Level
Perceived Desirability	5.15	1.00	Moderate to High
Subjective Norms	4.63	1.07	Moderate
Perceived Entrepreneurial Abilities/Skills	5.47	0.93	Moderate to High

**Table 2** *t*-Test Results for Students' Perceived Desirability, Subjective Norms and Perceived Entrepreneurial Abilities/Skills

Construct	Type of University	Mean	<i>t</i> -test	P-value
Perceived Desirability	Public	5.01	-2.994	0.003154
	Private	5.41		
Subjective Norms	Public	4.47	-2.987	0.003216
	Private	4.91		
Perceived Entrepreneurial Abilities/Skills	Public	5.44	-0.595	0.552800
	Private	5.52		

## Data Analysis

First, in Table 1 are presented the means of the three antecedents of the entrepreneurial intention ranging from moderate to high levels.

Although the Welch Two Sample *t*-test have shown (Table 2) an insignificant difference between the public and private university means for the Entrepreneurial Intentions, the other independent variables have shown a significant difference, except for the Perceived Entrepreneurial Abilities.

The Pearson's product-moment correlation (Table 3) has shown a significant correlation between each of the independent variables (three antecedents) and the dependent variable (entrepreneurial intention). The correlation between perceived desirability and entrepreneurial intention is 0.55 (*p*-value 2.20e<sup>-16</sup>), subjective norms and entrepreneurial intention 0.39 (*p*-value 2.16e<sup>-8</sup>), and the perceived entrepreneurial abilities/skills and entrepreneurial intention is 0.28 (*p*-value 0.0001172). The correlation results between the intention antecedents and the intention proves also the inter-item consistency of the construct.

The regression model built in this research takes into consideration the base model according to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which predicts that attitude, social norm, and controlled behaviour are as-

**Table 3** Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation

Construct	Correlation	T	DF	Pr(> t )
Perceived Desirability	0.55	9.0235	189	2.20e <sup>-16</sup>
Subjective Norms	0.39	5.847	189	2.16e <sup>-8</sup>
Perceived Entrepreneurial Abilities/Skills	0.28	3.9341	189	0.00012

**Table 4** Regression Analysis

Construct	Estimate	Std. error	T-value	Pr(> t )	Mult. R <sup>2</sup>	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
Intercept	1.12349	0.58548	1.919	0.0565	0.3207	0.3098
Perceived Desirability	0.60244	0.10262	5.870	1.95e <sup>-08</sup>		
Subjective Norms	0.16068	0.09556	1.681	0.0943		
Perceived Entrepren. Abilities/Skills	0.14976	0.09298	1.611	0.1089		

sociated with entrepreneurial intention. The results of the linear regression are presented in Table 4. Among the three intention antecedents, the effect of perceived desirability is significant, and the coefficient is 0.6. The coefficients of subjective norms and controlled perceived entrepreneurial abilities are both not significant.

In conclusion, this research paper has found support that perceived desirability is positively associated with entrepreneurial intention, however, subjective norms and perceived entrepreneurial abilities have shown a weak association with the intention. Thus, only Hypothesis 1 has received support.

## Discussion

First, the study compared the means of intention determinants between private universities' students and their counterparts at public universities. The results have shown that there is a significant difference between the scores for the perceived desirability and subjective norms between students in both types of universities. Students from private universities had significant higher perceived desirability and subjective norms to become entrepreneurs. This indicates that the environment in private universities was more effective in constructing a sense of social support and personal experience among students.

Second, the study provided important results on the regression model. The positive relation between the perceived desirability and intention could be explained by the personal entrepreneurial experience among university students, so university students have an easy time to assess the expected value of starting a business. The case is different for subjective norms and perceived entrepreneurial abilities/skills, where university students can not accurately assess these two constructs.

The regression model indicates a mean variation in the subjective norms and perceived entrepreneurial abilities/skills that correlates little with the variation of intention. Students are unsure about the support of their individual social environment to start a business, and the same is for their inner ability/skills to start and run a business. Regarding the effect of perceived desirability on intention, the study has found that it has the highest impact.

This indicates the perceived desirability is the main drive of entrepreneurial intention among university business students.

The findings suggest that exposure to entrepreneurship education has not a significant positive effect on students' subjective norms and perceived entrepreneurial abilities/skills that would lead to strong entrepreneurial intentions. Entrepreneurship education should play a stronger role in the development of entrepreneurial intentions. Therefore, entrepreneurship educators in public and private universities should help students develop core behaviours for enterprise through learning activities that enable them to practice, exhibit and develop confidence in key areas.

From the other part, students should be able to demonstrate ability of opportunity recognition, problem solving, managing autonomously, networking and communication (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2012).

In addition, students should experience various tasks of an entrepreneur since they play a critical role in enhancing students' self-efficacy and intention (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Zhao et al., 2005; Henry et al., 2003). These are all important steps in support of the argumentation that attitudes are open to change. In the context of two schools of thoughts that prevail in the context of entrepreneurship (the nascent entrepreneurship and planned behaviour entrepreneurship), this study supports the applicability of the theory of planned behaviour, in learning, intention, and behaviour.

## Conclusion

Because of its communist heritage, the model of education in Albania was generally uniform in the sense of methods of teaching and studying (Welter & Smallbone, 2011). The educational system was meant to prepare young people for the entry into the centrally planned economy and thus producing uniform models of behaviour (Xheneti & Smallbone, 2008). For long, unfair competition, inadequate banking intermediaries, and lopsided taxation policies too demotivated entrepreneurs (Bitzenis & Nito, 2005). Corruption continues to be a major impediment to the nation's progress. In such climates, an entrepreneur's ability to navigate corruption may become a greater predictor of successful entrepreneurship than the presence of a corruption free business environment. Such abilities are embedded in the social capital and tapping them for opportunity exploitation might determine who gets to win.

Generally speaking, it is now recognised that in Albania business education should promote entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours, and moreover is important to stimulate the entrepreneurial mind-set and encourage innovative business and new start-ups ideas (Kasimati & Koxhaj, 2011). As stated by OECD (2009) there is no single approach to the evaluation of ed-

ucation for entrepreneurship programmes, but a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches may be used. Based on the ideas presented above, the innovative aspects of this proposed research is to evaluate the education for entrepreneurship based on the three elements suggested by the The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and that educators should aim to develop: *enterprising behaviours, attitudes and skills*.

The results of this study may have implications for entrepreneurship educators, higher educational institutions, private sector and policy makers in Albania. In this context, the academicians and university authorities should rethink about what is to be done in order to better teach and prepare younger generations for the forthcoming challenges. As observed before, analysis of the data revealed significant relationships between personal attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions. Subjective norms and perceived control over the entrepreneurial abilities were both not significantly related to entrepreneurial intentions.

Something that does not go well with the mainstream findings is the weak correlation between perceived control and entrepreneurial intentions (Rapp-Ricciardi et al., 2018). It is generally held that greater sense of control over one's destiny (internal locus) would lead to greater entrepreneurial drive (George, 2018). Why is this not the case among the Albanian students? We could hypothesise that this is due to the way locus of control is constructed in different cultures. If it is constructed as a dependent variable, cultures would try to preserve the status quo. If Albanian culture holds that they have a certain amount of control over their futures as a result of the ways they always do things, they will not change their ways. However, this needs to be tested empirically.

The research also provides valuable feedback to Albanian universities, in order to offer more well-structured entrepreneurship educational programmes to students. The results of this study will facilitate efforts for further research to explore ways and means to promote and encourage entrepreneurs generally and students particularly. Also, based on the results of this research, Albanian policy makers should start to better understand the degree up to which entrepreneurship education is effective in achieving its goals and allocating the resources necessary for it. From its part, the Albanian government should see public universities as hubs that can develop future entrepreneurs, and to concentrate on the results of education rather than the number of the educated.

One important area that we did not address is the additional nuances associated with international entrepreneurship (George et al., 2020). With increasing levels of EU integration and globalisation of the region, a whole new set of drivers related to entrepreneurship need to be emerged. Factors that make cross-border entrepreneurs successful too need to be embedded

into the business curriculum (Tukamushaba et al., 2011). This is another potential avenue for future research.

### Notes

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## **Appendix**

### *The Questionnaire*

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree):

- Being an entrepreneur implies more advantages than disadvantages to me.
- A career as an entrepreneur is very attractive to me.
- If I had the opportunity and resources, I would love to start a business.
- Being an entrepreneur would give me great satisfaction
- Amongst various options, I would rather be anything but an entrepreneur.

If you decided to create a firm, people in your close environment would approve of that decision? Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree):

- Closest family.
- Closest friends.
- Other important people to you (colleagues).

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree):

- For me, developing a business idea would be easy.
- The number of events outside my control which could prevent me from starting a new business are very few.
- I believe I can successfully conduct market analysis related to starting a new business
- I believe I can identify potential new venture funding.
- I believe I can identify and build a management team to develop a business.
- I believe I can develop business relationships with key people to assist in a business opportunity.
- I believe I can tolerate unexpected changes in business conditions.
- I believe I can work productively under continuous stress and pressure from work.
- If I tried to start a firm, I would have a high probability of succeeding.

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree):

- I'm ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur.
- My professional goal is becoming an entrepreneur.
- I will make every effort to start and run my own firm.
- I'm determined to create a firm in the future.
- I have very seriously thought in starting a firm.
- I'm going to start my own business within one year of graduation.
- I'm going to start my own business someday in the future.

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