

Impact of Social Identities and Business Education on Entrepreneurial Intent of Students: A Proposed Outer Model Evaluation

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship as an integral part of business education, emerges to be a handy solution for employment growth. However, it is critical to know the potential factors of motivation to enhance self-employment future designs of business students. This study explores the influence of students' social identities and participation in business education at their entrepreneurial intent. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from around 300 final year students of various business schools of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Statistical results show evidence of the validity of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2002) in explaining entrepreneurial intent. Findings confirm the importance of student's identities, as measured with dynamic-self and risk-taking self, in the entrepreneurial intent framework. A substantial relationship has been identified for participation in business education with entrepreneurial intent if combined with social identities' dimension of in-group and normative effect. Although it cannot be claimed that business education influences a student's self-employment intent for future, it possesses strong appeal for student with certain person and social identities. Universities should take measures to improve the image of entrepreneurship as a career choice by evolving a policy of inducting students with most promising identities. Furthermore, faculty having extensive academic and practical experience can help to create entrepreneurial atmosphere by identifying students with right personality. Further research is needed to probe the questions regarding intervening identities and mold them into more enterprising personalities.

Key Words: Business education, Social identities, Entrepreneurial intent

Introduction

Business schools are largely considered to be motivational engines for students carving their future as business owners. Globally, tertiary level business education seems to have a virtual slogan of producing graduates capable of taking risk of starting business. Who contrary to common rate race of clinching degrees and running in search of jobs, can themselves create jobs (Mishory, 2011). Since role of school training cannot be neglected in appreciating the entrepreneurial potential of business students, in Pakistan it's still challenging to attract more students to this emerging paradigm. Here at one hand we have number of newly established universities in public sector each starting with departments having high demand in masses. Business schools are one of such inevitable choices. That's why all these universities established in last fifteen years had business schools with varying titles.

Lack of university graduates in startups in Pakistan generally and in emerging small cities particularly may be attributed to myriad of reasons. Some are related to explicitly market conditions and a poor law and order situation beside lack of government initiatives and incentives. Literature does not provide any universally accepted definition of entrepreneur or entrepreneurship but its essence is a notion to start one's own business or any attempt to do so (Nabi *et al.*, 2006). Vesalainen and Pihkala (1999) describe the 'intentions' as a state of mind where one feels committed to achieve certain goal or follow a specific direction to achieve something of his/her interest. 'Entrepreneurial intentions' thus can be referred to a person's motivation to set up a business of his/her own in future (Van Gelderen *et al.*, 2008). Different aspects of business education play roles to either expedite or hamper the transfer of this zeal into students pursuing business degrees. The aspects were tested as constructs of the proposed independent variable of school training (Fig 1).

Social and person identities whose detail can be seen in literature review section, appear to have an anomalous role. Instead of its mediating role or intervening impact the study proposes to gauge its relationship as contesting variable.

Problem Statement

Business schools, in their evolving role, are meant to nurture the students to become good entrepreneurs besides developing them to be good executives. In Pakistan students' tendency to entrepreneurial maneuvers is negligible. The researcher asserts that sensitivities of social identity of the students, amongst other factors, significantly affect the entrepreneurial intentions of the students. Though training as being a business student at tertiary level of education may be positively related to entrepreneurial intentions.

Research Questions

This research primarily addressed the following main questions:

- Does business education impact the entrepreneurial intentions of students as training tool?
- Do person and social identities impact the entrepreneurial intentions of students as dominant social attitude?

- What drives the motive of business students to be entrepreneurs in future more significantly?

Literature Review

Despite the popular perception of business schools to prepare students to take on roles of entrepreneurs in future, the process of business education to serve as training tool has got much less academic attention. In fact, the training is deemed to be embedded in pedagogy but research work until now to probe the actuality of this fact is very abstract (Frederick *et al.* 2006).

Why Social Identity

Social identity refers specifically to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships. Though simultaneously we are members of various groups but only few are meaningful when it comes to associate ourselves vividly. Another concept which is mistakenly intermixed with social identification is personality characterization and/or stereotyping which is very ego-centric in nature. Lesser work is found to probe the social identity development process, its impact on personality, future designs and importantly its negotiation.

Such social identity can be understood explicitly from the inner self of an individual and is relevant to the acquired skills, knowledge or trade. In Deaux (1996) classification it is indicated in type 'vocational identities'. When impact of social identities, is analyzed on proposed dependent variable, only achievable occupational identities would address the purpose of the study.

The researchers like (Begley *et al.*, 1997; and Segal *et al.*, 2005) have done considerable work to find out relationships of various correlating factors to entrepreneurial training and aspirations such as personality traits, social attitudes and educational environments. 'Intentions' have been then positioned as bridge between attitude and behavior where attitude transforms to behavior through identifiable intentions (Schwarz *et al.*, 2009). The study attempted to investigate what social identity, students reflect through their academic endeavors.

Theories, Model and Hypotheses

Identity control theory.

Life has multiple facets and identity theorists like Burke (1996) and Stets and Cast (2007) believe that human self also possesses multiple identities. Hogg and Terry (2000) discussed three basic layers of identities i.e. Person, Role and Social identities. These can be furthered as individual characteristics of a person, characteristics surrounding a role in society and characteristics required for alignment with a social group. Role identities are extrinsic in nature as such that they are not supposed to be embedded in individual's self (Hitlin, 2011 & 2003).

Social identity theory (SIT).

Tajfel and Turner (1986) explained some salient social psychological concepts with the help of their famous Social Identity Theory. These concepts include group processes which were broadly classified as self-categorization and social comparison. Another topical concept explained in SIT is social self which deals with inner individual process of turning to an identity formation. Social identities are references with which a person attempts to align with certain group and values this association (Stets and Cast

2007). Its basic premise is that individual's value the social groups they hail from and in doing so may attempt to identify and criticize rival groups. Identity theorists call the former as 'in group' and later as 'out group' (Cast and Burke 2002). In proposed research model dimension of 'entrepreneurs' in-group effect' represents this social identity. It means having a positive attitude towards entrepreneurial ventures because of feeling positive association with this social group. The other dimension 'normative effect' in model represents the already established association with social group of entrepreneurs because of a family member or own experience in startup ventures. This coincides with a factor mentioned in another theory discussed in following text.

Theory of Planned Behavior.

Researchers in entrepreneurial intent heavily relied on Theory of Planned Behavior. It frames one's beliefs as founding factors which can shape the consequent attitude. In our case, for example a student of business education can have a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship because of strong in-group perception. Haslam et al. (2014) proposes some more factors like risk behavior, locus of control and need for independence. This theory has been used and tested on myriad of cases involving human behavior and its prediction (Autio, Keeley, Klofsten, Parker and Hay, 2001, Franke and Luthje, 2004, Frederick, Kuratko, and Hodgestts, 2006, Holt, 2013).

Proposed Research Model

With the help of previous studies that separately explore the role of tertiary level education in motivating the students to go for startups and social identities that are more significantly identifiable in university students, a model can be developed for the study at hand. The proposed model (Fig.1) will measure the impact of social identity possessed by young adults on their entrepreneurial intentions as well as impact of school training and knowledge disseminated, practical role playing, program duration and field of specialization as its constructs.

Hypotheses

The study at hand draws its basis from other tested models, briefly presented above. Previous researches show a gap of observing a relationship of students' identities embedded in self-concept with their self-employment intent. Though theory of planned behavior concludes on actual behavior meaning in our case, the actual students who went for startups, yet intentions proved to be a great area of interest for recent researches (Franke and Luthje, 2004, Mishory 2011).

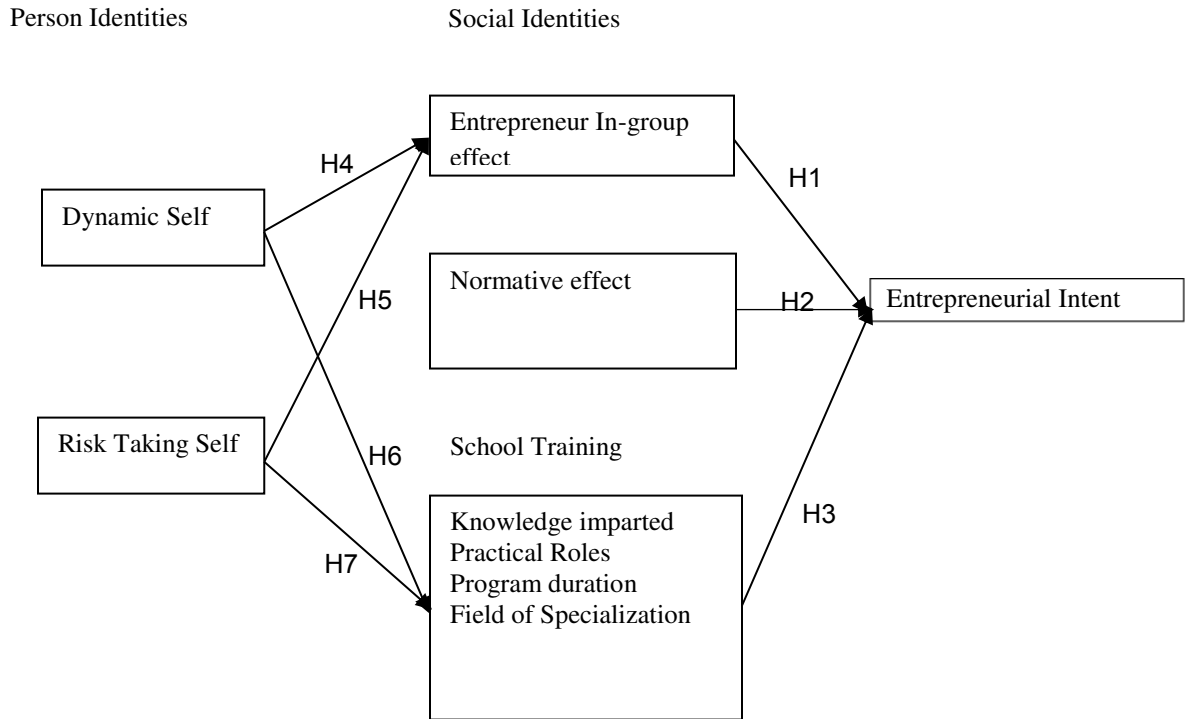


Fig 1. Proposed Research Model

Some researchers cited in our previous discussion under social identity theory have already tested in-group identity to favorably tend to support the group’s activities and become part of it and seek authenticity of self (Hitlin, 2011, Burke and Stets, 2009, Peters et al., 2012). The magnitude of its effects too does not remain same across countries and specific groups being studied. These facts provide solid ground to test the in-group dimension of social identity theory to have an impact on entrepreneurial intent of tertiary level students. Thus, we can safely suggest the following hypothesis;

H₁: Entrepreneurial in-group social Identity will positively affect the entrepreneurial intent of business students.

TPB established the effects of *normative effects* on intent but through subjective norm. This element didn’t show up in STI which enquires about normative effect and its relationship about the authentication process of person identity. Cast and Burke (2002) stressed its association with perceived alignment of target in-group. It leads to formulate following anticipated result for proposed study;

H₂: Normative social identity will positively affect the entrepreneurial intent of business students.

Luthje and Franke (2004) are of the view that academic context is an important dimension in giving rise to intent of self-employment. Other authors like Turker and Selcuk (2009) and Schwartz et al. (2009) counted number of factors directly related to offerings of a tertiary level educational institution. These include perceived support, role

of facilitator and types of courses offered in entrepreneurship education. However, the aggregate impact of business school training has not been considered yet. Hence the study proposes following hypothesis;

H₃: Business school training will positively affect the entrepreneurial intent of business students.

Researchers investigating attitude and identities have dichotomous findings e.g. (Schwarz *et al.*, 2009; Luthje and Franke, 2003; Haslam *et al.*, 2014). Wu and Wu (2008) confirmed that role of various identities i.e. person, role and social, interrelate and is having varying degree of confidence depending upon both context and content of intervention. They further argue that positive attitude towards change inclusive of risk taking and dynamic aspects of self will significantly predict the factors strengthening positive social perceptions thus intent to be in desired group. Akerlof and Kranton (2010) and Douglas and Shepherd (2002) revealed that above propositions do not have significant contributions to form intent but can be tested in a pure academic context with a moderately homogenous group of respondents. Therefore, following two hypotheses can be proposed;

H₄: Students with a dynamic identity in their self-concept are more likely to have entrepreneurial in-group social Identity.

H₅: Students with a risk-taking identity in their self-concept are more likely to have entrepreneurial in-group social Identity.

Researchers of behavioral studies such as Azzat *et al.* 2009; VanAuken *et al.*, 2006 have reported a positive significant relationship between person identity dimensions and the degree of pursuit of an academic program. Van Gelderen *et al.* (2008) also confirmed that risk taking propensity and dynamism are the aspects of self-concept that will influence the learning behavior of future entrepreneurs. Paradoxically Franco *et al.* (2010) found no significant impact of person identities, social background and other propensities on degree of enthusiasm to pursue a degree program. Following hypothesis is being proposed to further our understanding about the impact of person identity dimensions on the pursuit of business education among young adults.

H₆: Students with a dynamic identity in their self-concept will more actively pursue business school training.

H₇: Students with a risk-taking identity in their self-concept will more actively pursue business school training.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in sampled business schools of Pakistan. The research design is explorative and descriptive in nature. The study was suggested to be quantitative. Population comprises of all students studying at various business schools in public and private sector. To get reliable results, suitability of respondents depended on their number of years spent at respective educational institution. Focusing on this criterion the most promising respondents appeared to be those studying in their last year i.e. final and semifinal semesters. The emerging target group is highly homogenous in terms of program structure, duration, evaluation and to major extent the courses being studied.

Limited financial and time resources did not permit to randomly draw the number of business schools nationwide to be considered for survey. Therefore, only universities situated in province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been considered and conveniently sampled. Business schools regardless of their public or private status are taken based on their physical proximity i.e. nearest being accessed earliest and so on. Target sample comprised of 300 students. Data were collected through survey questionnaire using validated measures as stated in the framework of the study (Autio et al 2001; Krueger, Reilly, Carsrud and Kruegar 2000; Luthje& Franke 2003; Schwarz et al, 2009; and Hitlin, 2011).

Data Analysis

Dependent Variables

Study proposes a model containing three dependent variables to be tested. The final and most critical one is *Entrepreneurial Intent* of students and is also the crux of research problem. The established relationships of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) have been slightly modified to accommodate a construct of *Entrepreneurial In-Group Effect* (referred to as EIF onward). School Training (ST) is third dependent variable and is framed to be influenced by two person identities constructs taken here as independent variables.

Independent variables

The proposed model begins with the induction of person identities depicting personality traits apparently valid to influence possible future endeavors as entrepreneurs. The Dynamic Self (DS) according to Aizzat *et al* (2009) is an identity of high core self-evaluation. The closest group of Person identities sharing same attributes is the next independent variable of this study i.e. Risk-Taking Self (RTS) where the beholder inclines to identify themselves with likes of risk taking individuals. Normative effect refers to the obvious unavoidable influences of environment where intervention is administered.

Instrument

An entirely new instrument was developed with all the items borrowed from previous works and reworded according to locally acceptable English proficiency. All the authors whose items were adopted, have provided ample discussions in their write ups regarding the validity (both face and statistical). So, it didn't need any pretest enquiry and/ or pilot testing. Few questionnaires were however given out to immediately available students for a quick feedback.

Data collection

As part of proposed sampling strategy business schools were contacted as per their physical proximity to researcher's workplace i.e. Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) Kohat. Composition of sample based on gender can be seen in table. 2.

Table. 1: Educational Institutions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Hazara University	27	9.2	9.2	9.2
University of Malakand	37	12.6	12.6	21.8
Islamia College University Peshawar	32	10.9	10.9	32.7
University of Peshawar	49	16.7	16.7	49.3
Kohat University of Science and Tech	31	10.5	10.5	59.9
Valid Karak University	12	4.1	4.1	63.9
University of Science and Tech Bannu	31	10.5	10.5	74.5
Abasyn University Peshawar	38	12.9	12.9	87.4
COMSATS Institute Attock	37	12.6	12.6	100.0
Total	294	100.0	100.0	

Table. 2: Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	234	79.6	80.1	80.1
Valid female	58	19.7	19.9	100.0
Total	292	99.3	100.0	
Missing System	2	.7		
Total	294	100.0		

Table. 3: Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid <20	4	1.4	1.4	1.4
Valid 20-21	43	14.6	14.8	16.2

	22-23	160	54.4	55.0	71.1
	24-25	55	18.7	18.9	90.0
	>25	29	9.9	10.0	100.0
	Total	291	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.0		
Total		294	100.0		

Results

Reliability analysis

Table. 4 shows Cronbach alpha for constructs of the study. Almost every measure needed slight adjustments from 0.1 to 0.3 points. This was achieved through deletion of some items and by increasing the amount of cases taken for pilot testing.

Table. 4: Reliability Score

Construct	Adjusted Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Entrepreneurial intent	0.801	2
SI In group effect	0.710	6
Normative effect	0.733	4
Risk taking self PI	0.685	5
Dynamic self PI	0.502	6
School training	0.696	10

Cross Tabulation for correlational analysis

To see the correlation among various constructs of the study, all variables excluding demographics were cross tabulated. Dynamic self has strongest relationship with school training implying that strong personal inclination is likely to lead to fit with actively pursuing learners. The same also moderately correlate with entrepreneurial in-group effect and normative effect and thus meet the expectation of current study. The weakest relationship i.e. (0.176) is with entrepreneurial intent which helps to understand that person identities alone cannot initiate inclination to self-employment as career choice. Risk-taking self as a persona identities dimension has stronger relationship with normative effect and school training 0.4 and 0.3 respectively.

The entrepreneurial in group effect of social identities dimension shows strong relationship with school training but is trivial to proposed model while both EIF and NE shows encouraging correlational ratios with EI (0.21 and 0.26) and helps to support hypotheses 1 and 2. Correlation of business education intervention as ST turns out to be nominally acceptable with self-employment future designs EI standing at 0.1 with weak significance of 0.06.

Table. 5: Correlations

		DS MEAN	RTS MEAN	EIF MEAN	NE MEAN	ST MEAN	EI MEAN
DS MEAN	Pearson Correlation	1	.451**	.382**	.330**	.410**	.176**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.002
	N	294	294	294	294	294	294
RTS MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.451**	1	.280**	.412**	.365**	.145*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.013
	N	294	294	294	294	294	294
EIF MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.382**	.280**	1	.279**	.433**	.210**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	294	294	294	294	294	294
NE MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.330**	.412**	.279**	1	.333**	.266**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	294	294	294	294	294	294
ST MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.410**	.365**	.433**	.333**	1	.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.062
	N	294	294	294	294	294	294
EI MEAN	Pearson Correlation	.176**	.145*	.210**	.266**	.109	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.013	.000	.000	.062	
	N	294	294	294	294	294	294

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results of Hypothesis and Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 3.

The individual variable effects were observed as NE and EIF have significant effects on students’ entrepreneurial intentions (beta1=0.23; beta 2=0.16). Hence it can safely be concluded that both hypotheses have sufficient grounds to be accepted.

School training has an insignificant effect on students’ entrepreneurial intent i.e. beta =-0.039. The overall model still gives a good significance score (0.000) which keeps hope alive for a slightly acceptable relationship between ST and EI and thus its alignment with sketched model. This was evident from cross tabulation as well. In fact, a negative beta with corresponding significance of 0.54, is the reason for a careful analysis and consequent inference. The analysis surprisingly showed a near to significance relationship (p=0.062). As such the results of H3 should be cautiously interpreted as being near to significance thus hypothesis three is partially supported.

Table. 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.109 ^a	.012	.008	.99780	.012	3.509	1	292	.062

a. Predictors: (Constant), ST

Hypothesis 4 and 5.

To test H4 i.e. Students with a dynamic identity in their self-concept are more likely to have entrepreneurial in-group social Identity and H5 i.e. Students with a risk-taking identity in their self-concept are more likely to have entrepreneurial in-group social Identity. From table 8 both hypotheses are supported.

Table. 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.401 ^a	.161	.155	.56335	.161	27.822	2	291	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), RTS, DS

Moreover, both DS and RT collectively explain almost sixteen percent variations in EIF as can be seen in table.8, paving the way for acceptance of both hypotheses.

Hypothesis 6 and 7.

For last two hypotheses two constructs of person identity were regressed with school training. Model is evident in table with R square value of almost twenty one percent. From the beta values of 0.31 and 0.22 it can be supported that both predictors are responsible for substantial change in dependent variable i.e. school training. Both of hypotheses are thus accompanied with strong evidence of support.

Entrepreneurial in group effect has a positive relationship with self-employment intent, albeit a low score under adjusted R square column of model.

Table. 8 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.457 ^a	.209	.204	.59744

a. Predictors: (Constant), RTS, DS

Discussion, Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The aim of the study was to contribute to an improvement of business education as a training intervention for enhancing entrepreneurial acumen among learners. Personal and social identity dimensions of subjects, concerning entrepreneurial designs and normative environmental effects positively influenced the ultimate intent. Though a weak relationship between school training and entrepreneurial intent was observed. The proposed model tested direct relationships of selected constructs of various identities dimensions, school training of business students and entrepreneurial intent to provide rudimentary understandings, future researches can check for mediating and moderating roles among them.

Precisely, students with a dynamic-self have a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and have more rigorously participated in entrepreneurship activities during business education. Entrepreneurship in business education influences students' intentions to start a new business. Identity characteristics do not pre-determine students' entrepreneurial intentions. The participants in entrepreneurship education show more entrepreneurial personality characteristics than their non-participant counterparts.

Since it cannot be claimed that business education influences the entrepreneurial characteristics of students, this research recommends the national business schools to focus their attention on the students with the 'entrepreneurial' identity inclinations. Since a selection process for these students does not seem as a reasonable option, students should not be selected, but *attracted* towards entrepreneurship. It is more promising to train the students with the 'correct' profile to become successful entrepreneurs. During entrepreneurship courses and activities, skilled teachers should be able to identify students with the most entrepreneurial characteristics. Encouraging these students to attend more entrepreneurship programs would be most effective. Furthermore, teachers should not only have the necessary knowledge in entrepreneurship, personal experiences inspire the students as well.

Since the higher students' educational attainment, the more these students will make in the marketplace, entrepreneurial intentions of students may be a function of opportunity costs. Each year, considerable number of students gets enrolled to various business schools pursuing business degrees. These schools can serve as a source to inculcate business acumen, strategic thinking and risk-taking perseverance in students. Thus, they can be developed as future entrepreneurs who can boost national economy. Development of such students is highly affected by their aspiration and image of salaried jobs. Social identity analysis provided a close and clear picture of the way the students perceive employment options in contrast with starting their own businesses. Findings of this study may be greatly relevant for academicians who can include sessions of some sensitivity training to depict positive social identities in business startups.

Conclusively, if emerging economies and mostly developing ones want to harness entrepreneurship at national level and increase the employment figures among the youth, business education should be stimulated as an effective training tool. It certainly should attract and focus on the 'right' students, particularly those with dynamic social identities and a risk taking social attitude. Further research should focus on more antecedents of students' entrepreneurial intentions and should further explore the personality dimensions of an 'enterprising individual learner'.

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