

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ENVIRONMENT WITH ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDE

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Abstract

There are two issues to be addressed in the research on college students' entrepreneurial intentions: First, the existing research focuses on the optimization and reform of entrepreneurship education mode from the perspective of university administrators and educators, but the discussion from the perspective of students' entrepreneurial learning is relatively lacking. Second, Most existing studies separate the individual from the environment, and many independently test the linear impact of a specific factor on college students' entrepreneurship, ignoring the synergistic effects of the entrepreneurial environment and the perception of environmental interaction on entrepreneurial intention. Based on the perspectives of internal entrepreneurship learning and external entrepreneurial environment, this study collected 460 questionnaires online. SmartPLS4 was used to construct structural equations to empirically analyze the antecedent variables and influencing factors of college students' entrepreneurial intentions. The results show that entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial environment have a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a mediating effect between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial self-efficacy has a mediating effect between entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial attitude has a mediating effect between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial intention, and entrepreneurial attitude has a mediating effect between entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial intention.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Learning, Entrepreneurial Environment, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Entrepreneurial Attitude, Entrepreneurial Intention.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial activities, as a source of dynamism for economic development, have always received considerable attention from researchers and policymakers. In September 2014, Premier Li Keqiang first proposed the call for "mass entrepreneurship and innovation" at the Davos Forum. Following this, the government introduced a series of development strategies, including "independent innovation" and "integrated innovation," aimed at promoting self-driven innovation and entrepreneurship among individuals.

Countless workers have joined the wave of entrepreneurship, which has become the "new normal" for the economy in the new era, playing a driving role in the continuous improvement of economic development in China. With the implementation of the "dual innovation" strategy, our country has entered a new phase of innovation-driven development and entrepreneurship-

driven employment, with new industries, new models, and new business forms emerging in various sectors, effectively stimulating overall social vitality.

College students, as an employment group with solid learning and innovation capabilities, are one of the leading entrepreneurial groups (Wang, 2023), and they are essential to the country's success in implementing its innovation-driven growth plan and transforming into a global powerhouse (Liang, 2022).

However, in comparison to developed nations, the actual entrepreneurship rate among Chinese college graduates is low, and the failure rate of startups is high. They face the dilemma of low entrepreneurial intentions and insufficient entrepreneurial capabilities. The MyCOS Chinese College Student Employment Report shows that the proportion of 2021 undergraduate graduates who chose "independent entrepreneurship" was 1.2%, significantly lower than the 1.8% of 2018 graduates.

The proportion of vocational college graduates in 2021 who chose "independent entrepreneurship" was 3.1%, slightly down from the 3.6% of 2018 graduates (Figure 1), indicating that the rate of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial aspirations among university students in China are relatively low and on a downward trajectory. Therefore, exploring the factors affecting entrepreneurial intentions and proposing ways to enhance these intentions are not only urgently needed to increase the rate of independent entrepreneurship among college students but also serve as an important entry point for deepening the reform of entrepreneurship education.

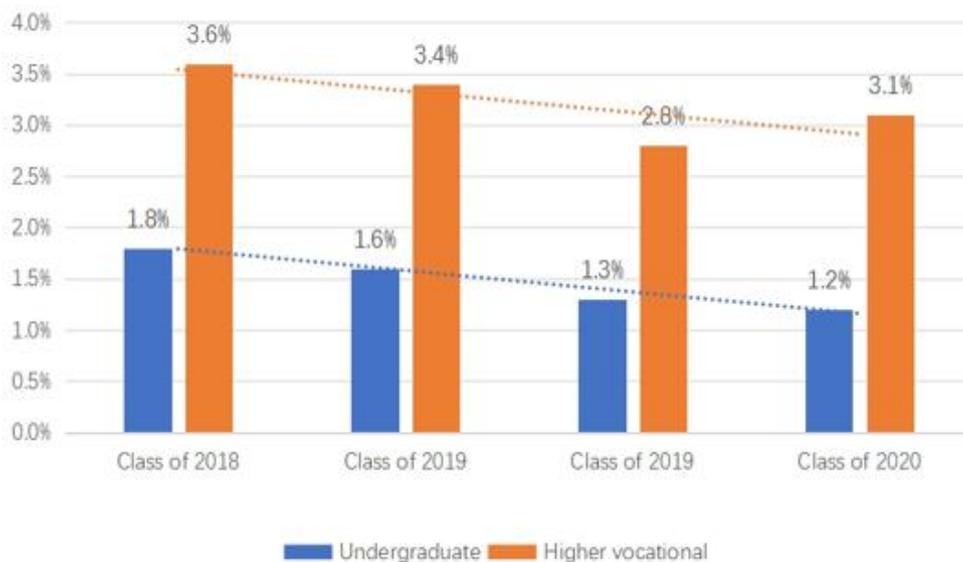


Figure 1: The percent of Chinese university students who start their own companies
(Source: Max's annual employment report of Chinese college students)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Basis

(1) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

TPB posits that intention is the primary and most direct influence on behavior. Before taking action, an individual's behavior is primarily driven by their purpose, which reflects their inclination to either engage in or refrain from a specific action (Ajzen, 1991). The model delineates three principal factors that significantly influence rational behavior. The first factor is the attitude an individual holds toward the behavior. The higher an individual's evaluation of a particular behavior and they approve of a specific behavior, the higher the behavioral tendency or behavioral intention that the individual may hold. The second factor is subjective norm. It refers to an individual's perceptions and beliefs about whether a specific behavior should be performed, which perceptions and beliefs are influenced by the opinions of others. The third factor is perceived behavioral control, which refers to an individual's perception of their ability to perform a specific behavior.

(2) Triadic Reciprocal Determinism (TRD)

Bandura (1986) integrated the debate of "whether the individual affects behavior or the environment affects behavior" and innovatively proposed Triadic Reciprocal Determinism from the perspective of cognitive psychology. He suggests that the formation of learners' social behaviors and learning outcomes is jointly determined by the interaction among subjective factors (such as mental abilities), learning behaviors, and the individual's environment.

2.2 Variable Relationship and Research Hypotheses

1. The Relationship between Entrepreneurial Learning and Entrepreneurial Intention

Lu (2022) states that as beginner entrepreneurs, college students must depend on entrepreneurial education to gain knowledge about entrepreneurship, build their entrepreneurial experience, and enhance their entrepreneurial skills. Entrepreneurship learning not only helps college students better understand what entrepreneurship is but also develops and cultivates their entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurial intention. Students learn from others' successful experiences and reflect on their own original experiences, mastering entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and experience, in order to support their entrepreneurial practice and form certain entrepreneurial abilities. This process promotes their cognition of entrepreneurship and enhances their entrepreneurial intention (Izedonmi, 2022). Additionally, studies by Rui (2019), Zhang & Wang (2020), and other researchers exploring the link between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial intention have consistently confirmed the positive impact of entrepreneurial learning on the entrepreneurial aspirations of college students. Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses based on the above analysis:

H1: Entrepreneurial learning has a significant positive effect on college students' entrepreneurial intention.

2. The Relationship between Entrepreneurial Environment and Entrepreneurial Intention

The impact of surroundings on people tends to be subtle, and when a region has a stronger entrepreneurial environment, people in that region tend to have higher entrepreneurial awareness and entrepreneurial intention as well. Rocha et al. (2022) discovered that by collecting entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial characterizations from 420 enrolled students from Amazon and São Paulo State Universities, the university environment tends to have a positive influence. Zhao (2021) conducted a survey among college students across 15 universities in three eastern provinces, analyzing the factors influencing their intention to return to their hometowns with a focus on the rural entrepreneurial environment. The findings indicated that the ongoing improvement of the rural entrepreneurial environment plays a crucial role in encouraging desire to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship. Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses based on the above analysis:

H2: Entrepreneurial environment has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention.

3. The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Learning: Entrepreneurial Environment and Entrepreneurial Intention

Duan and Du (2012) argued that the improvement of the entrepreneurial environment can stimulate college students to invest in entrepreneurial knowledge learning and practical exploration, effectively improving their entrepreneurial intention. Yuan and Xia (2022) constructed various mediation models of entrepreneurial passion and self-career management, demonstrating the mediating role of entrepreneurial learning in both. In the college environment, students can improve their expertise and experience in entrepreneurship through formal and informal entrepreneurial learning, as well as guidance from professional teachers, further stimulating their entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses based on the above analysis:

H3: Entrepreneurial learning mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial intention.

4. The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy: Entrepreneurial Learning and Entrepreneurial Intention

Social cognitive career theory posits that learning experiences act as a significant source of information regarding Self-efficacy, instilling in individuals the belief in their capability to pursue a specific career. Xiang (2022) put forward the notion that entrepreneurial self-efficacy, the conviction in one's ability to undertake entrepreneurship, is molded by cognitive, experiential, and practical learning about entrepreneurship. This belief is also influenced by the individual's intention to pursue entrepreneurship as a career objective. Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses based on the above analysis:

H4: Entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial intention.

5. The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Attitude: Entrepreneurial Learning and Entrepreneurial Intention

It is an indisputable fact that entrepreneurial attitude is an essential antecedent factor affecting entrepreneurial intention. However, some scholars have found that entrepreneurial attitude plays a mediating role in the study of the influence of certain factors on entrepreneurial intention. For example, Indarti (2021) emphasizes that entrepreneurial learning is a crucial precursor for fostering positive entrepreneurial attitudes. This learning process allows individuals to gain entrepreneurial experience and engage in entrepreneurial activities, thereby enhancing their understanding of such activities. This improved understanding leads to an enhancement in their cognitive perception of entrepreneurship, which, in turn, boosts their confidence and motivation to undertake entrepreneurial actions. As a result, a transformation in entrepreneurial attitudes occurs, significantly contributing to the strengthening of entrepreneurial intentions (Zhang & Wang, 2020; Yang et al., 2021). Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses based on the above analysis:

H5: Entrepreneurial attitude mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial intention.

6. The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Attitude: Entrepreneurial Environment and Entrepreneurial Intention

There is complicated interaction between the entrepreneurial intention and the entrepreneurial environment, involving direct and mediated effects. Peng & Luo (2021) identified that while the entrepreneurial environment directly impacts certain intrinsic factors, it does not directly influence entrepreneurial intention. Instead, extrinsic factors such as entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial self-efficacy serve as partial mediators, suggesting that to affect the entrepreneurial intentions of potential entrepreneurs, the entrepreneurial environment must first influence these extrinsic factors. Zhong & Shan (2023) further clarified this relationship by showing that the entrepreneurial environment enhances the entrepreneurial intentions of college students through the complete mediation of risk perception, entrepreneurial attitude, and self-efficacy. This result indicates that the influence of the entrepreneurial environment on entrepreneurial intentions is indirect, channeling through its effects on students' perceptions of risks, their attitudes toward entrepreneurship, and their confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. Therefore, this study proposes hypotheses based on the above analysis:

H6: Entrepreneurial attitude mediates between the entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial intention.

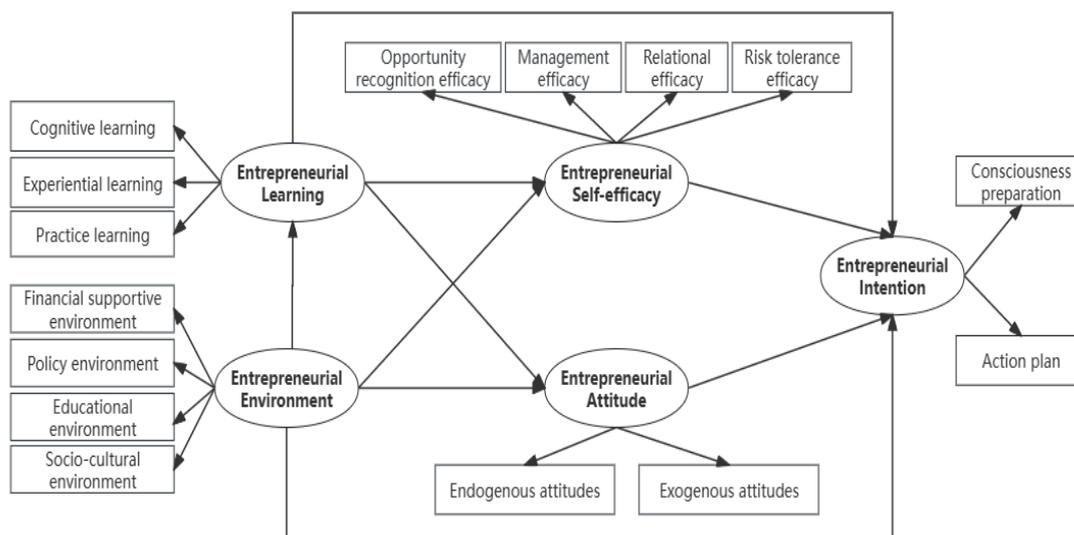


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

The sample frame is from 121 universities in Anhui Province, China. According to the 2023 Anhui education statistics, there were 1.58 million students enrolled in the province, including 788,000 undergraduate students and 792,000 higher vocational (specialized) students. The number of universities in Anhui Province, the size of the student body, the level of education, and other indicators are all in the middle range nationally. Therefore, the sampling frame can ensure that the sample is representative.

An online survey was used to collect the research data through the questionnaire platform (<https://www.wenjuan.com/>). Questionnaire.com is a professional online questionnaire platform that can quickly distribute questionnaires to a wide audience and cover more geographical areas, thus increasing the efficiency and scope of data collection.

In this study, considering that there are 15 observed variables, we chose a sample size calculation method based on the number of observed variables, referring to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010). According to the rule that each variable requires 20 samples, we initially determined a sample size of 300 (15*20). However, considering possible sample loss or other unforeseen factors in actual research, we decided to further increase the sample size based on preliminary calculations. Therefore, the final sample size was determined to be 460.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Demographic Variables (N=460)

Demographic Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Female	140	30.43	30.43
	Male	320	69.57	100.00
Grade	First Grade	254	55.22	55.22
	Second Grade	128	27.83	88.48
	Third Grade	25	5.43	60.65
	Fourth Grade	53	11.52	100.00
Place of origin	Rural	364	79.13	79.13
	Urban	96	20.87	100.00
Only child	No	333	72.39	72.39
	Yes	127	27.61	100.00

3.2 Measurement

The measurement tools used in this study are established scales that are widely used and have good universality. They can provide good predictability for college student entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs. Precisely, entrepreneurial learning is measured using the college student entrepreneurial learning measurement scale (Lu, 2022), the entrepreneurial environment is measured using the college student entrepreneurial environment scale (Duan & Du, 2012), entrepreneurial self-efficacy is measured using the scale developed by Jiang (2022), entrepreneurial attitude is measured using the method by Phillip H. Phan (2002), and entrepreneurial intention is measured using the individual entrepreneurial intention scale (Thompson, 2009). All five variables are measured using a Likert five-point scale, where "1" indicates complete disagreement, and "5" indicates complete agreement.

3.3 Data Analysis

SPSS 26 and SmartPLS 4 were used to statistically analyze the data to verify the rationality of the research hypotheses and model, thereby drawing specific research conclusions.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Measurement Mode

From Table 2, it can be seen that the Cronbach's Alpha values of all first-order variables are higher than 0.7, the CR values all exceed 0.8, the AVE values are all greater than 0.5, and the standardized factor loadings are all greater than 0.7. From Table 3, it can be seen that the HTMT values of the variables are all less than 0.85. In summary, this study demonstrates good reliability and validity.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Analysis is for Second-ordered Variables

Variable	Dimensions	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Entrepreneurial Learning	Experiential learning	EEL1	0.856	0.819	0.892	0.735
		EEL2	0.892			

Variable	Dimensions	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
	Cognitive learning	EEL3	0.822	0.836	0.89	0.67
		ECL1	0.812			
		ECL2	0.842			
		ECL3	0.832			
	Practice learning	ECL4	0.788	0.773	0.854	0.595
		EPL1	0.75			
		EPL2	0.787			
		EPL3	0.779			
Entrepreneurial Environment	Financial supportive environment	EPL4	0.769	0.795	0.867	0.62
		FSE1	0.736			
		FSE2	0.752			
		FSE3	0.836			
	Policy environment	FSE4	0.822	0.898	0.936	0.831
		GPE1	0.932			
		GPE2	0.911			
	Educational environment	GPE3	0.891	0.891	0.932	0.82
		SEE1	0.91			
		SEE2	0.908			
	Socio-cultural environment	SEE3	0.9	0.837	0.891	0.672
		SCE1	0.747			
SCE2		0.849				
SCE3		0.841				
Entrepreneurial Self-efficacy	Management efficacy	SCE4	0.838	0.899	0.922	0.664
		ME1	0.814			
		ME2	0.828			
		ME3	0.859			
		ME4	0.768			
		ME5	0.809			
	Risk tolerance efficacy	ME6	0.81	0.814	0.878	0.642
		RTE1	0.829			
		RTE2	0.784			
		RTE3	0.814			
	Opportunity recognition efficacy	RTE4	0.779	0.925	0.947	0.816
		ORE1	0.892			
		ORE2	0.914			
		ORE3	0.929			
Relational efficacy	ORE4	0.877	0.854	0.901	0.695	
	RE1	0.823				
	RE2	0.839				
		RE3	0.804			

Variable	Dimensions	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
		RE4	0.867			
Entrepreneurial Attitude	Endogenous attitudes	ENA1	0.883	0.871	0.921	0.795
		ENA2	0.885			
		ENA3	0.907			
	Exogenous attitudes	EXA1	0.880	0.852	0.91	0.772
		EXA2	0.908			
		EXA3	0.847			
Entrepreneurial Intention	Consciousness Preparedness	CP1	0.861	0.88	0.917	0.735
		CP2	0.845			
		CP3	0.880			
		CP4	0.842			
	Action plan	AP1	0.867	0.9	0.93	0.77
		AP2	0.864			
		AP3	0.905			
		AP4	0.873			

Table 3: HTMT Analysis of Second-ordered Variables

	Entrepreneurial Attitude	Entrepreneurial Environment	Entrepreneurial Intention	Entrepreneurial Learning	Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy
Entrepreneurial Attitude					
Entrepreneurial Environment	0.503				
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.598	0.566			
Entrepreneurial Learning	0.421	0.62	0.55		
Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy	0.519	0.622	0.565	0.569	

4.2 Common Method Biases Test

Common Method Bias (CMB) is a measurement error that may exaggerate or falsely establish the associations between actual research variables when the same data collection method is used. Harman's single-factor test is often used to examine common method bias, and it is considered acceptable if the variance explained by the first factor does not exceed 40%. In this study, there are 15 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and the cumulative variance explained by the first factor is 27.419%, which is within the acceptable range. This indicates that there is no significant common method bias in this study.

4.3 Direct Path Analysis

This study used SmartPLS 4 to construct a structural equation model (Figure 3) and tested the path coefficients. The Q² values of all latent variables in this study are greater than 0.3. The impact of entrepreneurial learning on entrepreneurial intentions is 0.042, indicating a small effect. The impact of the entrepreneurial environment on entrepreneurial intentions is 0.025,

also indicating a small effect. It can be seen that the path coefficient of entrepreneurial learning on entrepreneurial intention is 0.196 ($t = 3.850, p < 0.01$), indicating that entrepreneurial learning has a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurial intention. The path coefficient of the entrepreneurial environment on entrepreneurial intention is 0.158 ($t = 3.049, p < 0.01$), indicating that the entrepreneurial environment also has a significantly positive impact on entrepreneurial intention (Table 4).

Table 4: Direct Path Coefficients

NO.	Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	f ²
H1	Entrepreneurial Learning -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.196	0.196	0.051	3.850	0.000	0.042
H2	Entrepreneurial Environment -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.158	0.159	0.052	3.049	0.002	0.025

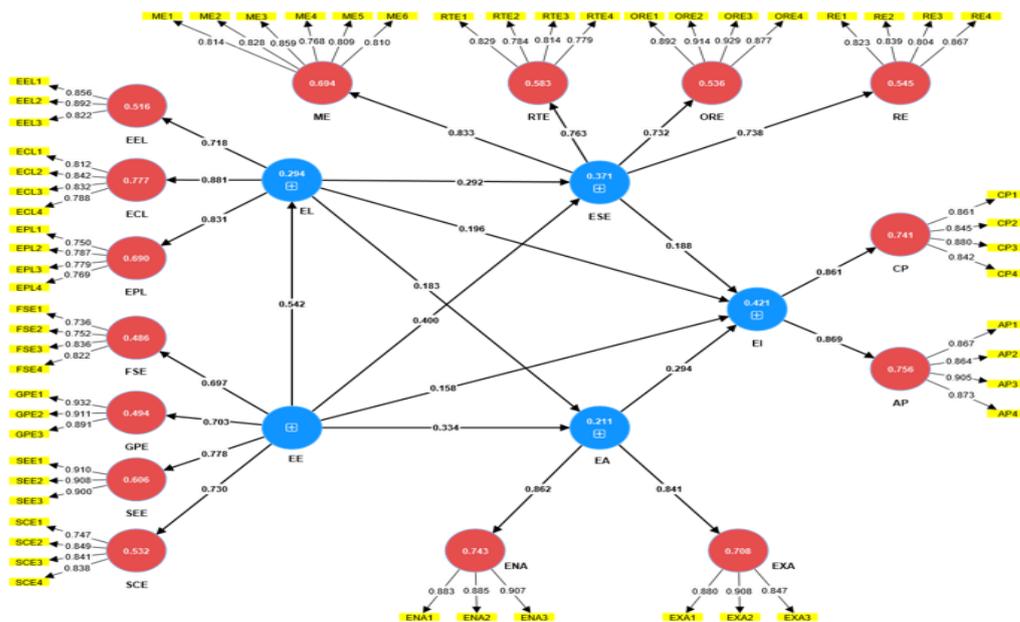


Figure 3: Structural Equation Model

(Note: AP=Action Plan; CP=Consciousness Preparedness; ECL=Cognitive Learning; EEL=Experiential Learning; ENA=Endogenous Attitudes; EPL=Practice Learning; EXA=Exogenous Attitudes; FSE=Financial Supportive Environment; GPE=Policy Environment; ME=Management Efficacy; ORE=Opportunity Recognition Efficacy; RE=Relational Efficacy; RTE=Risk tolerance Efficacy; SCE=Socio-Cultural Environment; SEE=Educational Environment; EL=Entrepreneurial Learning; EE=Entrepreneurial Environment; EA=Entrepreneurial Attitude; EI=Entrepreneurial Intention; ESE=Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy)

4.4 Mediation effect in the research model

The results of the mediation effect analysis in this study are shown in Table 5.

In the path "Entrepreneurial Learning ---> Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy ---> Entrepreneurial Intention" (H3), the indirect effect of entrepreneurial learning on entrepreneurial intention is 0.055, with a standard error of 0.020 (95% confidence interval [0.021, 0.101]), and a p-value of 0.007. This indicates that the indirect effect model is established, meaning that entrepreneurial learning significantly enhances entrepreneurial intention by increasing students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

In the path "Entrepreneurial Environment ---> Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy ---> Entrepreneurial Intention" (H4), the indirect effect of the entrepreneurial environment on entrepreneurial intention is 0.075, with a standard error of 0.025 (95% confidence interval [0.033, 0.132]), and a p-value of 0.002. This indicates that the indirect effect model is established, meaning that the entrepreneurial environment significantly enhances entrepreneurial intention by increasing students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

In the path "Entrepreneurial Learning ---> Entrepreneurial Attitude ---> Entrepreneurial Intention" (H5), the indirect effect of entrepreneurial learning on entrepreneurial intention is 0.054, with a standard error of 0.019 (95% confidence interval [0.019, 0.096]), and a p-value of 0.005. This indicates that the indirect effect model is established, meaning that entrepreneurial learning significantly enhances entrepreneurial intention by improving students' entrepreneurial attitudes.

In the path "Entrepreneurial Environment ---> Entrepreneurial Attitude ---> Entrepreneurial Intention" (H6), the indirect effect of the entrepreneurial environment on entrepreneurial intention is 0.098, with a standard error of 0.024 (95% confidence interval [0.059, 0.154]), and a p-value of less than 0.001. This indicates that the indirect effect model is established, meaning that the entrepreneurial environment significantly enhances entrepreneurial intention by improving students' entrepreneurial attitudes.

Table 5: Mediation Effect

No.	Path	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	Bias-corrected 95%CI		P values
				2.50%	97.50%	
H3	Entrepreneurial Learning -> Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.055	0.02	0.021	0.101	0.007
H4	Entrepreneurial Environment -> Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.075	0.025	0.033	0.132	0.002
H5	Entrepreneurial Learning -> Entrepreneurial Attitude -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.054	0.019	0.019	0.096	0.005
H6	Entrepreneurial Environment -> Entrepreneurial Attitude -> Entrepreneurial Intention	0.098	0.024	0.059	0.154	0.000

4.5 Hypotheses Test

A total of fourteen hypotheses were formulated in this study, and all of them were supported by the tests.

Table 6: Hypothesis Test Results

NO.	Hypothesis	Results
H1	Entrepreneurial learning has a significant positive effect on college students' entrepreneurial intention.	support
H2	Entrepreneurial environment has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention.	support
H3	Entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial intention.	support
H4	Entrepreneurial self-efficacy mediates between entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial intention.	support
H5	Entrepreneurial attitude mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial intention.	support
H6	Entrepreneurial attitude mediates between entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial intention.	support

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the dual perspectives of "external conditions" and "internal drive," this paper deeply analyzes the formation mechanism of college students' entrepreneurial intentions. It establishes a comprehensive model that examines the impact of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, entrepreneurial environment, entrepreneurial attitude, and entrepreneurial learning on entrepreneurial intentions. This model can more comprehensively predict and explain the entrepreneurial intentions of potential entrepreneurs and provides a valuable supplement to existing research in the field of entrepreneurial intentions. The conclusions of this study include the following aspects:

Entrepreneurial learning has a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions. It indirectly influences entrepreneurial intentions by enhancing college students' entrepreneurial attitudes and improving their entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This suggests that college students can enhance their entrepreneurial awareness by actively participating in entrepreneurial competitions or related activities, and by reflecting on and summarizing the typical experiences and practices of successful entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurial environment has a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions. It indirectly influences entrepreneurial intentions by enhancing college students' entrepreneurial attitudes and improving their entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This indicates that individuals, driven by the entrepreneurial environment, will develop a strong entrepreneurial attitude and self-efficacy. Therefore, college students need to adopt a positive and optimistic mindset towards entrepreneurship to better adapt to the ever-changing entrepreneurial environment, handle unexpected challenges and risks more effectively, and persist in their entrepreneurial activities. This study, starting from the essence of entrepreneurial learning and combining the practice of entrepreneurial education in Chinese universities, proposes the

connotations and dimensions of college students' entrepreneurial learning. This helps to grasp the intrinsic characteristics of college students' entrepreneurial learning, provides a reflection on the practice of entrepreneurial education in universities, and offers references for improving the entrepreneurial education system in universities and enhancing the quality of talent cultivation.

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