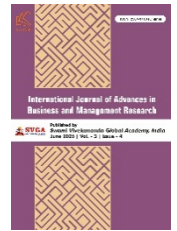




BEHAVIOURAL AND COGNITIVE DRIVERS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG MBA STUDENTS IN KARNATAKA, INDIA



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Original Article

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the determinants of Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) among final-year MBA students in Karnataka by extending the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) and Entrepreneurial Skills (ES). **Design/methodology/approach:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 418 final-year MBA students selected through stratified random sampling from autonomous institutions in Karnataka. **Findings:** The findings show that ESE is the strongest predictor of EI, followed by Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) and Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE). Subjective Norms (SN) also have a significant but comparatively weaker influence. ES has a modest direct effect on EI, but its stronger contribution appears through its interaction with ESE. This indicates that ES functions as a capability-conversion mechanism by strengthening the relationship between entrepreneurial confidence and intention. The model explains 65.9% of the variance in EI, demonstrating strong explanatory power. Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) further indicates that PBC and SN require greater practical attention. **Practical implications:** MBA institutions should strengthen confidence-building activities, applied entrepreneurial skills training, incubator exposure, founder mentoring, and social support systems through peers, family, alumni, and institutional networks. **Originality/value:** This study shows that ES does not merely act as an additional direct predictor; instead, it strengthens the conversion of ESE into EI within an extended TPB model.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy; Entrepreneurial Skills; Karnataka; PLS-SEM; Theory of Planned Behaviour*

Introduction

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) is considered the most valid antecedent of new venture creation and is a central construct in entrepreneurship research [1]. In India, where the policy agenda emphasises job creation due to demographic pressure, transforming the ambitions of educated young people into entrepreneurial action has clear economic relevance [2]. MBA students occupy a unique position in this process: although they acquire relevant knowledge through their education, research shows that they often prefer a corporate career over launching a venture [3]. Hence, understanding the factors influencing their entrepreneurial intentions is both theoretically and practically important. Karnataka provides a suitable context for this inquiry. With one of the busiest start-up ecosystems in the country, it hosts numerous independent MBA schools with the flexibility to incorporate entrepreneurship education, access to incubators, and entrepreneur networks. Yet, despite these advantages, graduate employment continues to be preferred over venture creation. Autonomous institutions are particularly significant for analysis, as they can develop programs to enhance entrepreneurial capability that can then be tested using intention-formation models.



This study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [4]. While TPB models applied to entrepreneurship have been validated across cultures and educational levels [5], two gaps limit its explanatory power in the context of Indian MBA students. First, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE)—the self-confidence to perform entrepreneurial activities—has consistently emerged as a dominant predictor in extended TPB models [6, 7]. Second, although some studies combine ESE with TPB, few address how readiness to apply skills affects the efficacy–intention link. Indian literature largely focuses on direct impacts, with the synergy between confidence and actionable skills remaining under-researched.

This study addresses these gaps through four research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), and ESE influence EI among MBA students in Karnataka?

RQ2: Does Entrepreneurial Skill (ES) directly influence EI?

RQ3: Does ES strengthen the relationship between ESE and EI?

RQ4: Which predictors show the greatest explanatory, predictive, and practical importance for improving EI?

The study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it demonstrates that ES functions as a capability-conversion mechanism, reinforcing the ESE–intention pathway rather than acting merely as an additional direct predictor. Empirically, it provides evidence from the largely under-explored autonomous MBA sector in Karnataka. Practically, the Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) findings are translated into prioritised recommendations for curriculum design.

Literature Review

TPB [4] posits that a person's intention to perform a behaviour is shaped by their attitude toward that behaviour, the influence of subjective norms, and their perceived level of behavioural control. In the context of entrepreneurship, the model has been widely applied to explain what makes an individual more likely to intend to become an entrepreneur—specifically, those who hold a positive attitude toward venture creation and are supported by a favourable social environment. To enhance its explanatory power, cognitive constructs such as Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) have been incorporated into the model [8, 9].

Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE) and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)

Attitude refers to the positive or negative evaluation an individual makes when determining the value of entrepreneurship as a career. A positive attitude toward entrepreneurship has been consistently associated with stronger entrepreneurial intentions in cross-cultural studies [10, 11, 12] and has also been observed among students in the Indian context, including those from neighbouring states [13].

H₁: Attitude toward entrepreneurship is positively associated with entrepreneurial intention.

Subjective Norms (SN) and Entrepreneurial Intention

Subjective norms reflect the extent to which salient others—including family, peers, and mentors—are perceived to approve of entrepreneurship. Evidence regarding this construct is mixed: some studies report strong and significant relationships [14], while others find weak or non-significant effects, particularly in contexts where employment norms dominate [10, 15]. This variation highlights the context sensitivity of subjective norms, making it important to examine their influence among MBA students in Karnataka.

H₂: Subjective norms are positively associated with entrepreneurial intention.

Perceived Behavioural Control and Entrepreneurial Intention

Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to perform entrepreneurial behaviour, encompassing both internal capability perceptions and perceived access to external resources. Higher PBC is associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in entrepreneurial behaviour. PBC has been shown to be a major predictor of entrepreneurial intention in Indian samples [14] as well as among South Asian students [11]. Although related to Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE), PBC is not synonymous with it, as it includes perceptions of external resources and environmental constraints in addition to internal confidence [16].

H₃: Perceived behavioural control is positively associated with entrepreneurial intention.

ESE and Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to successfully perform specific entrepreneurial tasks, such as mobilising resources and managing uncertainty. Unlike PBC, ESE does not include perceptions of situational control or external resources. Empirical evidence indicates that ESE is one of the strongest cognitive predictors of entrepreneurial intention, across post-pandemic contexts [7], cross-national settings [8], and education-based contexts [9]. Boyd and Vozikis [6] established the foundational idea that self-belief is critical for sustaining entrepreneurial commitment over time, and Bullough et al. [17] extended this concept to high-risk environments.

H₄: ESE is positively associated with entrepreneurial intention.

Entrepreneurial Skills as a Direct Predictor and Moderator

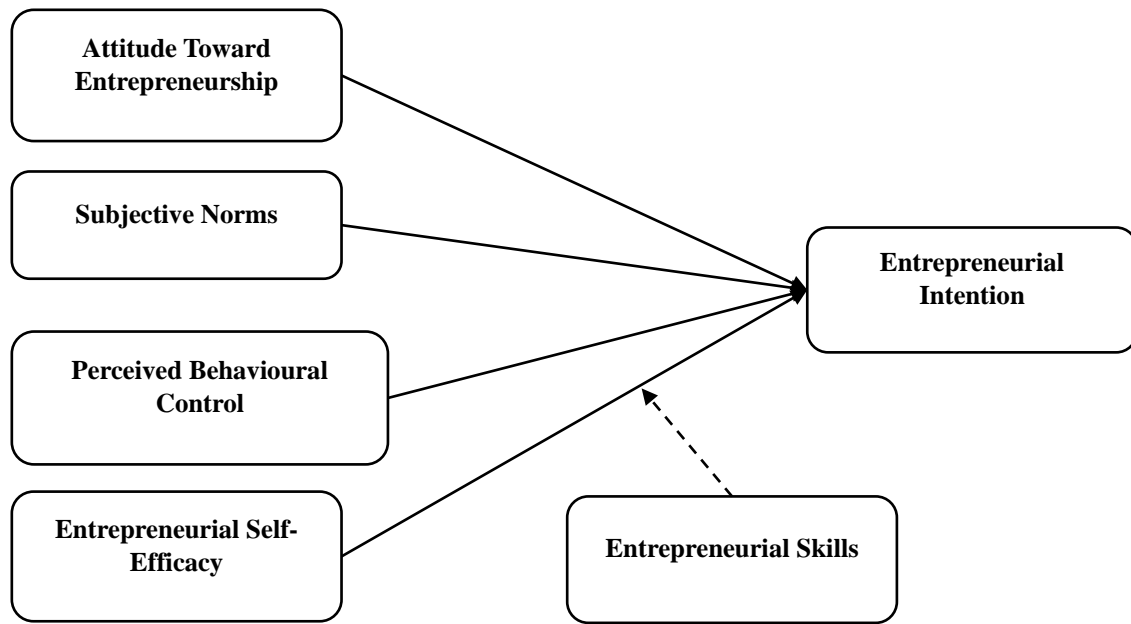
Entrepreneurial skills, such as financial planning, team management, and business development, can influence entrepreneurial intention (EI) both directly and indirectly, and they interact with Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE). The direct effect is supported by research showing that students with applied entrepreneurial skills perceive venture creation as more accessible [18, 19]. More conceptually, skills play a moderating role in the relationship between ESE and EI. According to Bandura's [20] social cognitive theory, mastery of skills reinforces efficacy beliefs, creating a synergistic effect: individuals with strong self-efficacy are better able to utilise opportunities, which in turn further strengthens their efficacy. Empirical evidence supports this interaction; Shabbir [12] and Al-Jubari et al. [18] found that programs combining confidence-building with skills development yield stronger entrepreneurial intentions than programs focusing solely on either skills or efficacy. This reasoning underpins the moderation hypothesis: ESE serves as a precondition for entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial skills enable action, and when combined, they produce the strongest intention outcomes [21].

H₅: Entrepreneurial skills moderate the ESE–entrepreneurial intention relationship such that the positive effect is stronger for individuals with higher entrepreneurial skills.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework positions Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE), Subjective Norms (SN), Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), and Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) as direct predictors of Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). Entrepreneurial Skills (ES) are included both as a direct predictor and as a moderator of the relationship between ESE and EI. This extended TPB model incorporates a capability-conversion layer, suggesting that ESE is more likely to translate into entrepreneurial intention when students possess entrepreneurial skills. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework that is being proposed



Source: Collected by Author

Methodology

Research Design and Sample

A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed, and data were collected from final-year MBA students at autonomous business schools in Karnataka between March and June 2025. The selected autonomous institutions were chosen for their curricular independence, which allows the integration of entrepreneurship-specific content, providing a structurally relevant context for studying intention formation. To ensure proportional representation across five specialisation strata—Finance, Marketing, Human Resources, Operations, and Other—stratified random sampling was employed. Of the 450 instruments administered (via paper and Google Forms), 418 complete and usable responses were retained. This sample size exceeds the commonly recommended threshold of 200, which is sufficient to detect medium effects at $\alpha = 0.05$ [22] and meets the ten-times rule for PLS-SEM [23].

Measurement

Each construct was measured using multi-item scales with 5-point Likert anchors (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), all of which have been previously validated. Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE; five items) and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI; four items) were adapted from Liñán and Fayolle [1]. Subjective Norms (SN; four items) and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC; six items) were adapted from Ajzen [4]. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE; five items) was measured using the instrument developed by Chen et al. [24], and Entrepreneurial Skills (ES; five items) were based on the scale by Barba-Sánchez and Atienza-Sahuquillo [19]. The validity of these scales has been established in the fields of entrepreneurship and education research [10, 18].

Analytical Approach

Data were analysed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS software, which is well-suited for predictive, theory-extension studies that include moderating effects [23, 25]. The measurement model was assessed using outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), the HTMT ratio, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Multicollinearity and common method bias were evaluated using full collinearity VIF values [26]. The structural model was assessed via path coefficients, R^2 , effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) using PLSpredict. Finally, the results were translated into prioritised recommendations for intervention using Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) to identify constructs that are highly important but show suboptimal performance.

Common Method Bias

Common method bias was assessed because the data were collected from the same source (respondents) using the same measurement instrument (questionnaire). The full collinearity VIF approach, as recommended by Kock [26], was applied. All variables had VIF values below Ethical Considerations, indicating that common method bias was not a serious concern in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical review board clearance was not required, as the study employed an anonymous questionnaire with adult MBA students and did not involve clinical procedures, vulnerable participants, psychological interventions, or the collection of sensitive personal data. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the data would be used for academic purposes. No personal identifiers were collected, and all responses were analysed in aggregate form.

Results

Participant Demographics

The sample included an almost equal distribution of male (53.6%) and female (46.4%) participants. Just over half (53.6%) had received prior entrepreneurship training, and a similar proportion (53.6%) came from families engaged in business ownership or self-employment. Participants' specialisations were distributed as follows: Finance (24.6%), Marketing (24.4%), Operations (23.0%), Human Resources (20.3%), and Other (7.7%). Most respondents (91.2%) reported having two years or less of work experience, reflecting a predominantly pre-career sample (see Table 1).

Group Differences

Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences in entrepreneurial intention (EI) based on gender and exposure to entrepreneurship training (Tables 2 and 3). Male students reported higher EI than female students, and students who had received entrepreneurship training demonstrated higher EI compared to those without such training. One-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in EI across specialisation and work experience groups; results indicated no significant differences between these groups (Table 4). However, significant differences were observed based on parental occupational background. Students from business-owner families reported the highest EI, followed by those from self-employed, salaried, and other occupational backgrounds (Table 5).

Table 1: Demographic Summary (N = 418)

| Variable | Category | n | % |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----|------|
| Gender | Male | 224 | 53.6 |
| | Female | 194 | 46.4 |
| Entrepreneurship Exposure | Yes | 224 | 53.6 |
| | No | 194 | 46.4 |
| Parental Background | Business Owner | 111 | 26.6 |
| | Self-employed | 113 | 27.0 |
| | Salaried | 91 | 21.8 |
| | Other | 103 | 24.6 |
| Specialisation | Finance | 103 | 24.6 |
| | Marketing | 102 | 24.4 |
| | Operations | 96 | 23.0 |
| | HR | 85 | 20.3 |
| | Other | 32 | 7.7 |
| Work Experience | 0 years | 129 | 30.9 |
| | 1 year | 128 | 30.6 |
| | 2 years | 124 | 29.7 |
| | 3+ years | 37 | 8.9 |

Source: Collected by Author

Table 2: t-Test Results — Gender and EI

| t | df | p | Mean Diff | ESE | 95% CI |
|-------|-----|--------|-----------|------|--------------|
| 27.98 | 416 | <0.001 | 1.51 | 0.05 | [1.40, 1.61] |

Note. Equal variances confirmed: Levene's $F(1, 416) = 1.11, p = 0.292$.

Source: Collected by Author

Table 3: t-Test Results — Entrepreneurship Training Exposure and EI

| t | df | p | Mean Diff | ESE | 95% CI |
|--------|-----|--------|-----------|------|----------------|
| -27.98 | 416 | <0.001 | -1.51 | 0.05 | [-1.61, -1.40] |

Note. Equal variances confirmed: Levene's $F(1, 416) = 1.17, p = 0.280$.

Source: Collected by Author

Table 4: ANOVA Results — Specialisation and Work Experience

| Factor | df (Between, Within) | F | p | η^2 |
|-----------------|----------------------|------|-------|----------|
| Specialisation | (4, 413) | 2.14 | 0.075 | 0.02 |
| Work Experience | (3, 414) | 1.07 | 0.362 | 0.01 |

Source: Collected by Author

Table 5: ANOVA — Parental Background and EI (Games-Howell Post Hoc)

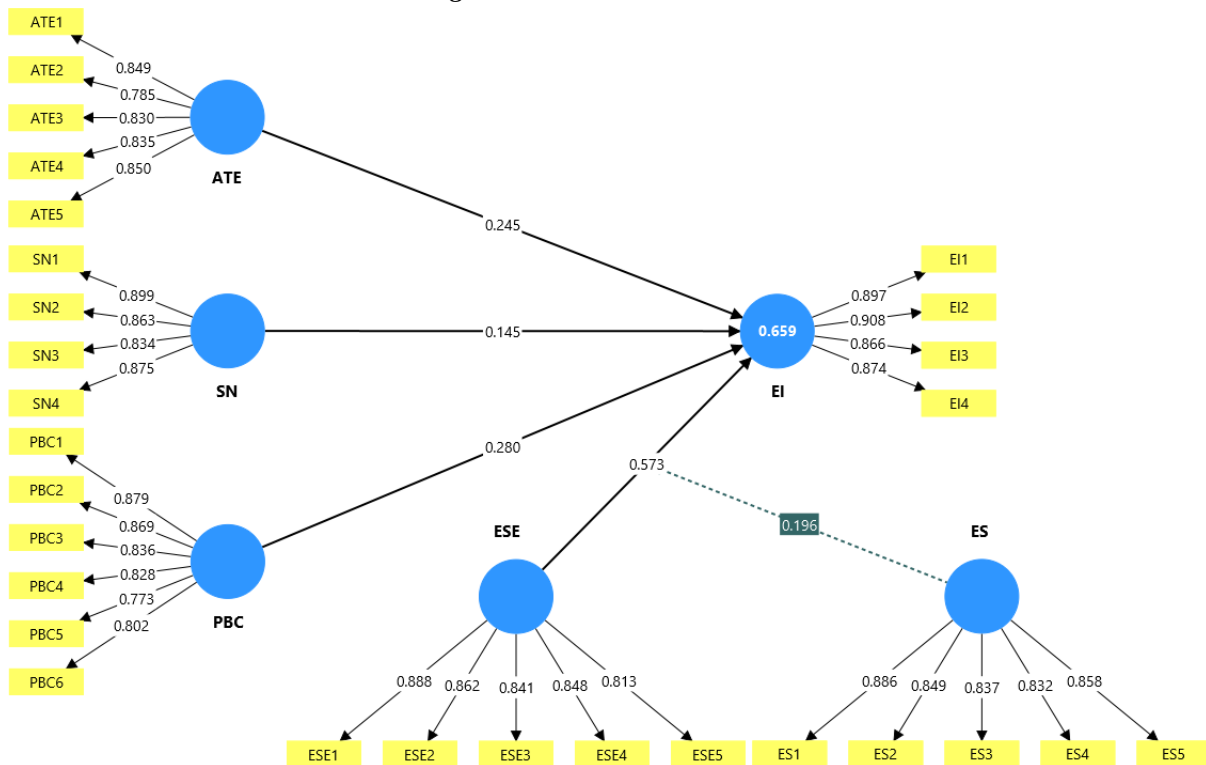
| Group (M) | Comparison | Mean Diff | ESE | 95% CI | p |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------|------|--------------|--------|
| Business Owner (4.44) | vs. Self-employed | 0.95 | 0.04 | [0.85, 1.05] | <0.001 |
| | vs. Salaried | 1.53 | 0.04 | [1.43, 1.62] | <0.001 |
| | vs. Other | 2.39 | 0.06 | [2.25, 2.53] | <0.001 |
| Self-employed (3.50) | vs. Salaried | 0.58 | 0.02 | [0.52, 0.64] | <0.001 |
| | vs. Other | 1.44 | 0.05 | [1.32, 1.56] | <0.001 |
| Salaried (2.91) | vs. Other | 0.86 | 0.04 | [0.75, 0.98] | <0.001 |

Note. All pairwise comparisons significant at $p < 0.001$. Measurement Model

Source: Collected by Author

The measurement model is presented in Figure 2, illustrating the relationships between constructs and their respective indicators. All constructs demonstrated strong reliability and convergent validity (Table 6). Outer loadings ranged from 0.773 to 0.908; Cronbach's alpha (α) values exceeded 0.88, composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.91, and average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.689 to 0.786, all above the recommended threshold of 0.50 [23]. Discriminant validity was confirmed using HTMT values below 0.85 (Table 7) and the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs (Table 8). Variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all predictors ranged from 1.016 to 1.067 (Table 9), indicating the absence of multicollinearity and common method bias [26].

Figure 2: Measurement Model



Source: Collected by Author

Table 6: Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

| Construct | Items | Outer Loadings | α | CR | AVE |
|-----------|-----------|----------------|----------|-------|-------|
| ATE | ATE1–ATE5 | 0.785–0.850 | 0.887 | 0.917 | 0.689 |
| EI | EI1–EI4 | 0.866–0.908 | 0.909 | 0.936 | 0.786 |
| ES | ES1–ES5 | 0.832–0.886 | 0.906 | 0.930 | 0.727 |
| ESE | ESE1–ESE5 | 0.813–0.888 | 0.904 | 0.929 | 0.723 |
| PBC | PBC1–PBC6 | 0.773–0.879 | 0.911 | 0.931 | 0.692 |
| SN | SN1–SN4 | 0.834–0.899 | 0.891 | 0.924 | 0.753 |
| ES × ESE | — | 1.000 | — | — | — |

Note. α = Cronbach’s alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. Thresholds: α and CR > 0.70; AVE > 0.50; outer loadings > 0.70

Source: Hair et.al. [23].

Table 7: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

| | ATE | EI | ES | ESE | PBC | SN | ES×ESE |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| ATE | — | | | | | | |
| EI | 0.421 | — | | | | | |
| ES | 0.200 | 0.278 | — | | | | |
| ESE | 0.116 | 0.706 | 0.175 | — | | | |
| PBC | 0.134 | 0.439 | 0.132 | 0.141 | — | | |
| SN | 0.110 | 0.236 | 0.038 | 0.069 | 0.068 | — | |
| ES×ESE | 0.069 | 0.182 | 0.060 | 0.077 | 0.022 | 0.058 | — |

Note. All HTMT values < 0.85 confirm discriminant validity

Source: Hair et al. [23].

Table 8: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

| | ATE | EI | ES | ESE | PBC | SN |
|-----|-------|----|----|-----|-----|----|
| ATE | 0.830 | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| EI | 0.381 | 0.886 | | | | |
| ES | 0.177 | 0.255 | 0.853 | | | |
| ESE | 0.106 | 0.643 | 0.162 | 0.851 | | |
| PBC | 0.120 | 0.401 | 0.121 | 0.131 | 0.832 | |
| SN | 0.102 | 0.215 | -0.003 | 0.065 | 0.059 | 0.868 |

Note. Diagonal (bold) = square root of AVE; off diagonal = inter-construct correlations. Diagonal values exceeding all off-diagonal values confirm discriminant validity.

Source: Collected by Author

Table 9: Collinearity Assessment (VIF Values)

| Path | VIF |
|---------------|-------|
| ATE → EI | 1.062 |
| ES → EI | 1.067 |
| ES × ESE → EI | 1.016 |
| ESE → EI | 1.056 |
| PBC → EI | 1.039 |
| SN → EI | 1.018 |

Note. VIF < 3.3 rules out multicollinearity and common method bias

Source: Hair et.al. and Kock [23, 26].

Structural Model

Table 10 shows that all hypothesised relationships were statistically significant in the structural model. Among the predictors, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) had the strongest effect, followed by Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) and Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE). Subjective Norms (SN) also had a significant, though comparatively weaker, influence. Entrepreneurial Skills (ES) demonstrated a small direct effect on Entrepreneurial Intention (EI); however, their stronger contribution was observed through the interaction effect, indicating that ES significantly moderates the relationship between ESE and EI. This finding supports the notion that ES functions primarily as a capability-conversion mechanism rather than as an independent predictor. The model exhibited strong explanatory power, accounting for 65.9% of the variance in EI, and predictive relevance was confirmed through Q² values. Overall, these results address RQ1–RQ4, showing that EI among MBA students is primarily influenced by ESE, PBC, ATE, and the interaction between ESE and ES.

Table 10: Structural Model Path Coefficients

| Path | β | t-value | p-value | f ² | Effect Size | Result |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| ATE → EI | 0.245 | 7.739 | <0.001 | 0.166 | Medium | H ¹ Supported |
| SN → EI | 0.145 | 5.130 | <0.001 | 0.061 | Small–Medium | H ² Supported |
| PBC → EI | 0.280 | 9.387 | <0.001 | 0.221 | Large | H ³ Supported |
| ESE → EI | 0.573 | 20.250 | <0.001 | 0.911 | Large | H ⁴ Supported |
| ES → EI | 0.074 | 2.424 | 0.015 | 0.015 | Small (ns) | H ^{5a} Supported |
| ES × ESE → EI | 0.196 | 7.340 | <0.001 | 0.116 | Medium | H ⁵ Supported |

Note. R² = 0.659; Q² = 0.645. Significance at t ≥ 1.96 (p < 0.05). ns = not statistically significant as an isolated effect.

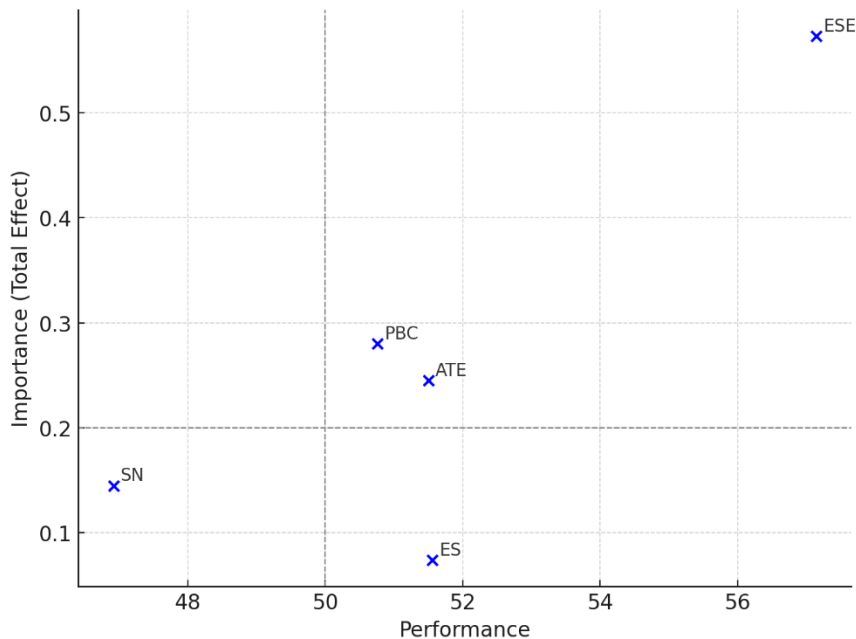
Source: Collected by Author

Importance-Performance Map Analysis

Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was conducted to address RQ4 by comparing the relative importance and performance of each predictor in explaining Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). The results are presented in Figure 3. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) exhibited the highest importance (0.573) and moderate performance (57.14), indicating the strongest positive impact on EI. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) had the second-highest importance (0.280) but lower performance (50.76), highlighting it as the most actionable area for institutional improvement. Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE) showed moderate importance (0.245) and performance (51.50). Subjective Norms (SN)

had the lowest importance (0.145) and the lowest performance (46.92). Entrepreneurial Skills (ES) demonstrated a low level of direct importance (0.074) but played a moderating role, with a performance score of 51.56.

Figure 3: Visual Representation of IPMA for EI



Source: Collected by Author

Discussion

The results collectively address all four research questions and provide a capability-conversion perspective on entrepreneurial intention (EI) formation among Karnataka MBA students. Regarding RQ1, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) had the strongest effect, with a path coefficient more than double that of any other direct predictor ($\beta = 0.573$, $f^2 = 0.911$) [16]. This finding aligns with Bandura's [20] social cognitive theory and with post-pandemic evidence from the Indian higher education context [7], suggesting that ESE represents the core cognitive mechanism driving entrepreneurial intention. Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC; $\beta = 0.280$) and Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship (ATE; $\beta = 0.245$) also had significant, medium-sized effects, confirming that control beliefs and positive attitudes remain important TPB factors even when efficacy is included. It is theoretically important to distinguish PBC from ESE: PBC reflects perceived feasibility, including access to resources, whereas ESE reflects internal competence beliefs. Their differing effect sizes and IPMA profiles underscore that these are distinct psychological constructs requiring separate development. Subjective Norms (SN; $\beta = 0.145$), while significant, were the least influential TPB factor, consistent with studies in Morocco and Saudi Arabia [10, 15]. This suggests that in Karnataka, where employment-oriented work behaviour is still dominant, social endorsement of entrepreneurship has yet to strongly influence intention. In relation to RQ2, Entrepreneurial Skills (ES) had a small but statistically significant direct effect on EI ($\beta = 0.074$, $f^2 = 0.015$). The negligible effect size indicates that skills alone, without high ESE, play a limited role in driving intention. This supports the notion of “enabling” rather than “motivating” skills—skills facilitate action once confidence exists but cannot substitute for the psychological drive provided by ESE. The most theoretically noteworthy finding pertains to RQ3. The interaction between ESE and ES ($\beta = 0.196$, $f^2 = 0.116$) had a medium effect on EI, indicating that ES amplifies the relationship between ESE and intention. Students with high ESE and applied entrepreneurial skills are more likely to translate confidence into action than those with efficacy alone [21]. This demonstrates that ES functions as a conditional amplifier of cognitive readiness—a capability-conversion mechanism—rather than as a parallel predictor. This finding is consistent with Barba-Sánchez and Atienza-Sahuquillo [19], who reported that entrepreneurship programs integrating confidence-building and skill development generate stronger intention outcomes than programs focusing on either component alone. IPMA results (RQ4) provide practical insights supporting the structural findings. ESE had the highest importance and moderate performance, suggesting that current MBA programs provide a baseline level of efficacy, but targeted confidence-building interventions could further enhance intention. PBC ranked second in importance but showed the lowest performance, highlighting a gap between potentially impactful control beliefs and students' perceived feasibility. SN had both low importance and the lowest performance, indicating underdeveloped social support for entrepreneurship. Interventions leveraging alumni networks, mentor programs, and family engagement may strengthen the norm-intention pathway.

Theoretical Contributions

This study provides a twofold analytical extension of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). First, incorporating Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) as a fourth direct predictor substantially enhances explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.659$), demonstrating the limitations of the standard three-component TPB model in explaining intention formation in entrepreneurship education contexts. Second, and more importantly, the study introduces a capability-conversion perspective for Entrepreneurial Skills (ES), rather than treating them as an additive predictor. The significant moderating effect of ES (H5) on the ESE–Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) relationship indicates that entrepreneurial confidence is more likely to translate into intention when combined with applied entrepreneurial skills. This distinction clarifies the conceptual difference between cognitive constructs (ESE, PBC, Attitude) and skills: cognitive constructs directly influence intention, whereas skills function as a catalyst, strengthening specific pathways. These findings suggest that theoretical models of EI should not only report predictors but also identify which predictors conditionally amplify others. The Karnataka MBA context provides a robust test environment, where institutional factors such as curricular autonomy, proximity to startup ecosystems, and managerial education exist, yet employment preference remains dominant. This sample therefore allows for the examination of TPB intention-formation heterogeneity in an educationally active but entrepreneurially cautious population.

Practical Implications

Given that Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) emerged as the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial intention, confidence-building should be a primary goal of MBA curricula. This can be achieved through practical activities such as business simulations, structured pitching competitions, visits to incubators, and interactions with founders. These approaches promote enactive mastery and vicarious learning, the two most effective sources of efficacy beliefs identified by Bandura [20]. The deficit in perceived feasibility, reflected in the low performance of Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC), should also be addressed. Workshops on opportunity recognition, navigation of seed funding, regulatory compliance, and business planning can help mitigate externally induced barriers and strengthen control beliefs. Incorporating real business problems and live projects can simultaneously enhance both PBC and skill readiness. The low performance of Subjective Norms (SN) indicates that social support for entrepreneurship is currently limited among MBA students. Structured alumni mentoring, peer entrepreneurship communities, and family engagement initiatives can gradually enhance social endorsement, strengthening the norm-to-intention pathway over time. As Entrepreneurial Skills (ES) do not directly drive entrepreneurial intention, skill development should be integrated with confidence-building rather than offered as a standalone component. Blended programs that first foster confidence and then develop applied skills are likely to be more effective than programs focused solely on skills or motivation.

Limitations

This study has four main limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents tracking the evolution of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE), skills, and subjective norms throughout an MBA program. A longitudinal design following students from admission to graduation would provide more detailed evidence on the trajectory of entrepreneurial intention. Second, the use of self-reported data may have introduced common response biases, although collinearity tests suggest that these did not materially affect the results. Third, the sample was limited to autonomous MBA schools in Karnataka, which may restrict the generalisability of the findings to affiliating institutions, other Indian states, or non-business graduate populations. Fourth, actual entrepreneurial behaviour was not measured; future research should investigate whether the intentions observed here translate into venture creation two to three years post-graduation.

Future studies could also examine the capability-conversion framework in broader contexts, incorporating institutional support variables such as incubator access, government policy exposure, and peer entrepreneurship density, to enable comparative analyses and refine understanding of how contextual factors influence the formation of entrepreneurial intentions.

Conclusion

For final-year MBA students in Karnataka, entrepreneurial intention is strongest when cognitive confidence (ESE), perceived feasibility (PBC), a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship, and applied skill readiness converge. ESE emerges as the central element in this alignment, amplified by entrepreneurial competencies that enable students to translate confidence into actionable decision-making. While PBC and Attitude Toward Entrepreneurship remain important TPB predictors, Subjective Norms, though statistically significant, represent the dimension with the greatest

potential for improvement. MBA institutions that combine efficacy-building activities with applied skills training and foster supportive social networks through alumni and peer connections, are best positioned to facilitate the translation of entrepreneurial intention into action. The capability-conversion perspective developed in this study provides a theoretical lens for future research and practical interventions in entrepreneurship education.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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