

Chapter 41

Entrepreneurial Intentions among Higher Education Students in Finland and Spain: Developing and Piloting a Survey Instrument

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present the results of a pilot study in which the new instrument was developed and tested to measure the formation of entrepreneurial intentions in multi-country context. The developed instrument was largely based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen (1991)). In the pilot study, the authors were also paying attention to two issues, namely (i) whether the level of entrepreneurial intentions varies as a function of country of origin, (ii) whether the relative importance of the three antecedents of entrepreneurial intentions varies as a function of country of origin, and (iii) whether the background variables exercise similar effects on the formation of entrepreneurial intentions in different countries. The empirical context of the pilot study is made of two higher education institutions (one in Finland, one in Spain) and concerns their first-year students at undergraduate programs. In the end of this paper, the authors will discuss the implications of the empirical observations of their pilot study.

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INTRODUCTION

At current societies, especially in Western countries, a large number of different initiatives to promote entrepreneurial actions have been initiated to respond to different societal challenges (such as aging population, regional inequalities, etc.). However, there seems to be a lack of systematic approaches to evaluate the impact of these various entrepreneurial initiatives at the individual level. This kind of information would help the further development of these initiatives. As a result to this challenge, an effort is currently under the way to develop an instrument (called *Entre Intention*) to measure the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives at the individual level. This development effort is motivated by the call of Linan and Chen (2009) to standardize measurement instruments and use them in cross-cultural settings.

The developed instrument is largely built on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) because of its detailed and consistent theoretical specification and the great amount of cross-disciplinary research devoted to testing, advancing and criticizing the model (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Sheeran, 2001). According to Ajzen (1991), the TPB is designed to predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts by looking at the individuals' intention to perform a given behavior. Intentions are assumed to be "indications of how hard individuals are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p.181). The stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its actual performance. As such, the intention to perform a behavior has been described as the best single predictor of an individual's actual behavior (Bagozzi et al., 1989; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). We set a purpose to develop an instrument to measure the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives on the development

of entrepreneurial intentions and its antecedents, that is, attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm.

While the overall purpose our research program is to develop and test an instrument to measure the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives on the development of entrepreneurial intentions and its antecedents, in this paper our objective is to present the results of the pilot study where we tested the instrument for the first time in multi-country setting. In our empirical testing we are interested in investigating (i) whether the level of entrepreneurial intentions varies as a function of country of origin, (ii) whether the relative importance of the three antecedents of entrepreneurial intentions varies as a function of country of origin, and (iii) whether the background variables exercise similar effects on the formation of entrepreneurial intentions in different countries. As such, our study will try to explore whether the relative importance of the antecedents of entrepreneurial intentions vary according to different country context as proposed by the literature (e.g. Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004). The fact that the relative importance of intention antecedents would vary in different countries would able educational institutions to better tailor their entrepreneurship related initiatives.

Next, we will develop the theoretical rationale of our study, before explaining the empirical context of the pilot study, which is made of two higher education institutions (one in Finland, one in Spain) and concerns their first-year students at undergraduate programs. In the end of this paper, we will discuss the implications of the empirical observations of our pilot study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to study the relative importance of intention antecedents, we will adopt an existing

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