



Gender differences among the students in higher education in perception of entrepreneurship: A study of north-east India

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Abstract

The mindset of young people who want to start their own business is crucial to the economic growth of any state or nation. The study investigates gender-based perceptions regarding the importance of entrepreneurship knowledge and the effectiveness of graduate courses in providing the necessary skills for starting a new venture. The analysis uses the Mann-Whitney U test to evaluate differences between male and female responses to the knowledge and skill relating to the entrepreneurial activities. The results indicate no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents on either statement, suggesting that both genders share similar views on the importance of entrepreneurship education and the effectiveness of higher education programs in equipping students with essential business skills.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Gender, Skills, Knowledge, North-east India

Introduction

Entrepreneurial activities play a crucial role in reducing unemployment and fostering economic development within a region. As one of the richest sources of job creation and economic growth, youth entrepreneurship has become a significant area of focus for nations. In its simplest form, it involves operating one's own business. However, when viewed more broadly, entrepreneurship represents initiative, innovative thinking, and the ability to organize social and economic systems to transform human and natural resources into tangible outcomes. Entrepreneurs take on the challenge of managing risks and accepting the possibility of failure, all while aiming for long-term profits.

Entrepreneurship education has gained increasing attention in recent years, with many educational programs aiming to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to start and manage successful businesses. However, students have the least chance to study the subjects business studies, entrepreneurship etc beyond the courses of commerce and management. Understanding how students perceive the importance of entrepreneurship knowledge and the effectiveness of graduate courses is crucial for improving educational curricula and promoting entrepreneurial activity. This study explores the perceptions of male and female students regarding entrepreneurship education and assesses whether gender influences their views on the essential knowledge and skills offered by graduate programs.

Literature Review

Different studies have enriched the area of entrepreneurship from different aspects. Atef & Balushi (2015) ^[1] observed that the entrepreneurship holds immense potential for individuals and economies by reducing the number of job seekers. Covin & Slevin (1990) ^[5] have traced the three core traits of entrepreneurship as innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactivity. Carsrud & Brannback (2007) ^[4] emphasize that entrepreneurship is vital for the economic prosperity of individuals, communities, and nations. Miller *et al.* (2013) ^[9] assert that entrepreneurs face complex decisions when building their businesses, decisions that are neither linear

nor dependent on a limited set of variables. By applying human capital's creative ideas to new ventures, entrepreneurship represents a platform for innovation and the introduction of fresh, untested concepts. Various scholars and experts have used terms such as innovator, risk-taker, organizer, creative thinker, risk-bearer, opportunity-taker, and resource-creator to describe entrepreneurship (Knight, 1965 ^[7]; Huefner & Hunt, 1994). These entrepreneurial activities are driven by various factors, with Goel *et al.* (2007) ^[6] noting a generally positive attitude towards entrepreneurship among the youth in both India and China.

Research has shown that entrepreneurship knowledge is crucial for youth, as it promotes innovation, economic growth, and job creation. According to recent studies, education in entrepreneurship provides a foundation for developing key competencies such as problem-solving, creativity, and leadership (Kuratko, 2005) ^[8]. However, research on gender differences in entrepreneurial perceptions is mixed. Some studies suggest that men and women approach entrepreneurship differently due to social, cultural, and educational factors (Baughn *et al.*, 2006) ^[2]. For instance, women may perceive entrepreneurship as riskier or more challenging due to societal norms, while men may be more likely to engage in entrepreneurial ventures due to socialization patterns (Carter *et al.*, 2003) ^[3]. However, limited studies specifically address gender-based differences in perceptions of entrepreneurship education, particularly within the context of north-east region of the country. This study aims to bridge that gap.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are:

1. To assess the perceptions of entrepreneurship knowledge among male and female students.
2. To evaluate the perceptions of male and female students on whether higher education provides the necessary knowledge & skills to start a new venture.

Research Methodology

To achieve the specific objectives, primary data was collected through a questionnaire from 500 selected respondents from two north-east Indian states, representing various educational backgrounds studying in Degree College and universities. Descriptive statistics along with Mann-Whitney U test have been applied to analyze the data.

Data analysis & Findings

Exhibit-1: shows the distribution of responses to the statement "Entrepreneurship knowledge is essential for every youth". A total of 70% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed, suggesting a strong consensus that entrepreneurship knowledge is essential for youth. Neutral responses (20%) represent a noteworthy group who may require more information or clarity on the importance of entrepreneurship knowledge. However, 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed, which shows a relatively small portion of people who reject the statement.

Exhibit 1: Entrepreneurship knowledge is essential for every youth

Perception	Frequency	Percent	CumulativePercent
Strongly Disagree	23	4.6	4.6
Disagree	26	5.2	9.8
Neither agree nor disagree	100	20.0	29.8
Agree	176	35.2	65.0
Strongly agree	175	35.0	100.0
Total	500	100.0	

Source: author’s Calculation from Primary Data (2024)

Overall, the data indicates a strong belief in the importance of entrepreneurship knowledge for youth, with most respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Exhibit-2 shows the data which presents the distribution of responses to the statement, “Higher education courses provide the essential knowledge and skills to start a new venture. A total of 62% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the graduate course provided the necessary knowledge and skills to start a new venture, indicating a positive perception of the course. Neutral responses (21%) make up a significant portion, which could suggest that while many students are uncertain or ambivalent, they might still recognize some value in the course. 17% represent a smaller group but still show that some felt the course does not meet their expectations in providing essential knowledge and skills relating to the entrepreneurial activities.

Exhibit 2: Higher education provides the essential Knowledge and skills to start a new venture

Perception	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	29	5.8	5.8
Disagree	57	11.4	17.2
Neither agree nor disagree	104	20.8	38.0
Agree	203	40.6	78.6
Strongly agree	107	21.4	100.0
Total	500	100.0	

Source: author’s Calculation from Primary Data (2024)

Overall, the data suggests that while there is strong support for the course's effectiveness, there is also notable room for improvement or clarification for those who are neutral or dissatisfied.

The Exhibit-3 represents the Mean Rank about the perceptions of male and female students on the issues separately. In the first case (entrepreneurship knowledge is essential), males have a slightly higher mean rank (252.39) compared to females (248.50). This suggests that, on average, males gave a somewhat stronger endorsement or agreement that entrepreneurship knowledge is essential. However, in the second case (Higher education provides the essential knowledge and skills to start a new venture), females have a slightly higher mean rank (253.40) compared to males (247.76). This indicates that, on average, females perceive the graduate course as providing the necessary knowledge and skills to a slightly greater degree than males. There is a minor difference, suggesting general agreement between genders on both the issues.

Exhibit 3: Mean Rank

Questionnaire	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Entrepreneurship knowledge is essential	Male	257	252.39	64864.00
	Female	243	248.50	60386.00
	Total	500		
Graduate Course provides the knowledge & skills	Male	257	247.76	63674.50
	Female	243	253.40	61575.50
	Total	500		

Source: author’s Calculation from Primary Data (2024)

The **Mann-Whitney U test (Exhibit-4)** shows whether there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups (males and females). The result shows for both cases p-values are greater than 0.05. (p = 0.752 and p = 0.648 respectively). This means that there is

Exhibit 4: Test Statistics of Mann-Whitney U

Grouping Variable: Gender	Entrepreneurship knowledge is essential	Graduate Course provides the knowledge & skills
Mann-Whitney U	30740.000	30521.500
Wilcoxon W	60386.000	63674.500
Z	-.316	-.456
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.752	.648

Source: author’s Calculation from Primary Data (2024)

no statistically significant difference between male and female responses for either of the two statements. This suggests that gender does not have a meaningful impact on perceptions of these two factors.

Conclusion

The study’s results indicate that gender does not play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of entrepreneurship education. Both male and female respondents believe in the importance of entrepreneurship knowledge and recognize that their higher education courses provide the necessary skills to start a new venture. This finding suggests that graduate entrepreneurship programs are equally effective for both genders, and curriculum developers should continue to focus on providing comprehensive education that equips all students with the tools needed for entrepreneurial success. However, the study has not considered the other factors such as prior experience, motivation, and entrepreneurial intentions which could change the gender perceptions regarding knowledge and skill about the entrepreneurial activities.

Funding

The work has been supported by a financial grant, F.N0. 02/7/2022-23/ICSSR/RP/MN/GEN; dated 04-05-2023, from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). The author gratefully acknowledges ICSSR for financial support during the research work.

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