Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) (Bandura, 1986) is an individual’s confidence in his/her ability to successfully perform entrepreneurial tasks. Long been accepted as an important construct in entrepreneurship, ESE has been found to strongly predict entrepreneurial intentions (EI) (Zhao et al., 2005). While research suggests ESE could be shaped by entrepreneurship education (Souitaris et al., 2007), empirical results are mixed. This signals that the relationships among entrepreneurship education, ESE and EI may be more complex than initially theorized. In this paper, we examine whether entrepreneurship education serves to increase ESE and whether ESE is positively related to students’ EI. We further explore whether gender moderates the relationship between ESE and EI.

Method

Using a sample of 252 undergraduate students enrolled in six sections of an introductory entrepreneurship course at a Southeastern university in the US, we assessed: ESE and EI at the first day of the class and at the end of the semester. Instructors in all sections used the same course structure and teaching materials. Since Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behavior suggested that subjective norm was another important predictor of planned behavior and intention, we included subjective norm as a control variable.

Results and Implications

At the end of the course, ESE had increased for the male subsample only. While EI did not significantly increase at the end of the semester for either gender group, the male students’ EI were significantly higher than the EI of their female counterparts at the end of the semester. We also found a positive relationship between ESE and EI and showed that gender moderated this relationship; more specifically, ESE had a stronger positive relationship with entrepreneurial intentions for female than for male students. This strong, positive relationship between ESE and EI among women further accentuates the need to identify variables, beyond entrepreneurship education, that could strengthen women’s ESE. Additional research is necessary to determine whether these differences are attributable to perceptions of barriers that women identify or whether perceived gender roles influence female students’ intentions to pursue an entrepreneurial career.

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