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Manuscript Abstract

Is Entrepreneurial Education for Everyone? Minority Identity, Institutional Inclusion, and Perceived University Support

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Full reference

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Abstract

Research in entrepreneurship education (EE) has consistently highlighted the role of both formal pedagogical practices and broader institutional support in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions, competences, and behaviour (Souitaris et al., 2007; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Nabi et al., 2017). Beyond the provision of courses, universities actively contribute to entrepreneurship by signalling a supportive entrepreneurial climate - making entrepreneurial paths visible, accessible, and legitimate through initiatives that extend beyond classroom-based instruction (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Guerrero & Urbano, 2012; Siegel & Wright, 2015). As such, universities function not only as providers of entrepreneurial knowledge, but also as institutional contexts that frame how entrepreneurship is encountered and evaluated by students.

However, these institutional signals may not be perceived uniformly across the student population. Prior research shows that dominant narratives around entrepreneurship continue to revolve around a relatively narrow archetype, often associated with masculinity, nativeness, and alignment with normative socio-economic and disciplinary profiles (Ahl, 2006; Gupta, Turban & Bhawe, 2008; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Marlow & McAdam, 2013). This archetypal understanding of entrepreneurship may implicitly influence how EE and related support are designed, communicated, and showcased within universities - affecting which role models are presented, which entrepreneurial trajectories are valorised, and which cultural cues are used to promote entrepreneurial engagement (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Verduijn et al., 2014). As a result, identical institutional and pedagogical signals may be more easily recognised and trusted by students who resemble the dominant entrepreneurial template, and less readily recognised by those who do not.

Against this backdrop, the first objective of this study is to examine whether students from less-represented backgrounds - defined by gender, migration-related minority status, and their intersection - systematically perceive the university's entrepreneurial environment and competence-building opportunities as less supportive, even when formal entrepreneurship offerings are comparable. This allows us to assess whether encouragement to engage in entrepreneurship is equally visible and credible across the student cohort, or whether it resonates more strongly with students who already fit the prevailing image of the entrepreneur (Gupta et al., 2008; Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Second, the study aims to investigate whether engagement in entrepreneurship education can alter these perceptions. Drawing on the distinction between second-hand and first-hand experience, we examine whether participation in EE is associated with more positive evaluations of the university's entrepreneurial support over time, and whether such perception gains are particularly pronounced among less-represented students who initially report lower

levels of perceived support. Prior research suggests that experiential EE can revise expectations, enhance legitimacy, and strengthen perceived institutional support by providing direct access to mentors, networks, and entrepreneurial practice (Souitaris et al., 2007; Nabi et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022).

Third, the study addresses the role of institutional context by asking whether entrepreneurship education can function as an inclusive mechanism when embedded within institutional environments that vary in their degree of inclusion. Building on research showing that participation in optional and high-impact educational activities is shaped by institutional opportunity structures rather than individual characteristics alone (Greenman et al., 2021; Hu & Borden, 2025), we examine whether structural features of institutional inclusion condition access to EE, shaping whether minority students are able to engage with entrepreneurship education in the first place. This allows us to assess whether EE's equalising potential depends on the inclusivity of the broader educational context in which it is embedded (O'Connor, 2023; Bourabain, 2024). Taken together, the objective of this study is to advance an intersectional and institutional understanding of entrepreneurship education by examining how student identities, educational experiences, and institutional inclusion jointly shape perceptions of entrepreneurial support over time.