



Entrepreneurial Skills and Spirit of Students In Higher Vocational Colleges in Guangdong, China

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the employment landscape, making entrepreneurship a critical alternative for students in higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province, China. This study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial spirit and skills and entrepreneurial education among these students. Utilizing a sample of 623 students and 23 teachers from three higher vocational colleges, the research employs a descriptive-correlational-quantitative approach. The findings reveal a substantial interaction between entrepreneurial skills and education, demonstrating that entrepreneurship education effectively enhances students' entrepreneurial abilities and mindset. Teachers are integral in delivering this education, focusing on cultivating both professional skills and an entrepreneurial spirit. The study underscores the necessity for robust entrepreneurship education to prepare students for the challenges of the modern economy, promoting self-employment and job creation. By developing strategic planning, financial management, relationship management, and problem-solving skills, students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of starting and managing their own businesses. This research contributes to the understanding of how educational practices can foster a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem within vocational institutions, ultimately supporting economic growth and innovation. The results highlight the importance of comprehensive entrepreneurial education in vocational colleges to ensure students are well-prepared for future entrepreneurial endeavors.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurial education, vocational college students

Introduction

With the rapid advancement of the knowledge economy in China, there has been an equally significant increase in the demand for individuals skilled in entrepreneurship. The government and educational institutions have been actively promoting entrepreneurship to create jobs and stimulate economic growth. This initiative is particularly relevant in Guangdong Province, a major economic hub in China, where higher vocational colleges play a crucial role in developing the entrepreneurial skills and spirit of their students. Higher vocational education in Guangdong has traditionally focused on imparting technical skills. However, in recent years, there has been a shift towards integrating entrepreneurial education into the curriculum. This change aims to equip students not only with technical competencies but also with the entrepreneurial mindset and skills needed to navigate and thrive in a dynamic economic environment. This shift is part of a broader strategy to foster innovation and self-employment among graduates, thus contributing to economic resilience and growth.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further highlighted the importance of entrepreneurial skills. The pandemic disrupted traditional employment opportunities, compelling many to explore self-employment and entrepreneurial ventures as viable alternatives. This situation underscored the necessity for higher vocational colleges to enhance their entrepreneurship education programs, ensuring that students are well-prepared to create and sustain their own businesses. Entrepreneurial education in higher vocational colleges aims to develop a combination of professional skills and an entrepreneurial spirit among students. Professional skills include strategic planning, financial management, relationship management, and problem-solving. Meanwhile, the entrepreneurial spirit encompasses qualities such as innovation, risk-taking, resilience, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Together, these skills and traits form the foundation of a successful entrepreneur.

Research indicates that higher vocational students possess unique advantages that make them suitable for entrepreneurial endeavors. According to Lixuan Deng (2019), these students often exhibit great aspirations, optimism, and a youthful spirit, all of which are essential traits of successful entrepreneurs. Additionally, their technical education provides them with a significant advantage in terms of practical skills, setting them apart from their counterparts in general education programs. ^[1] However, there is a need to further strengthen entrepreneurial education in vocational colleges. This includes developing a comprehensive and systematic approach to teaching entrepreneurship, which not only covers the theoretical



aspects but also provides practical training and real-world experience. Such an approach will help students transition smoothly from the academic environment to the entrepreneurial world, equipped with the necessary skills and mindset to succeed. Theoretical frameworks such as the Human Capital Theory provide a robust foundation for understanding the development of entrepreneurial skills among students. According to Gary S. Becker (1964) and Theodore W. Schultz (1961), education and training are critical for enhancing individuals' economic productivity and success. In the context of entrepreneurship, higher vocational education acts as a strategic investment in students' human capital, equipping them with the skills needed to succeed in the business world.^[2]

This study aims to explore the entrepreneurial skills and spirit of students in higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province. It investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial education and the development of these skills and traits, providing insights into how educational practices can be improved to better support students' entrepreneurial aspirations. By understanding the current state of entrepreneurial education and identifying areas for enhancement, this research seeks to contribute to the development of a more effective and impactful entrepreneurship education framework in higher vocational institutions. In conclusion, the integration of entrepreneurial education into higher vocational curricula is essential for fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs who can drive innovation and economic growth. This study highlights the importance of a comprehensive educational approach that combines technical skills with entrepreneurial training, ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern economy.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship education has become a vital component in higher vocational colleges, particularly in Guangdong Province, China. The concept of entrepreneurship education was first proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the late 1980s, emphasizing the cultivation of innovation, risk-taking, and independent work capabilities alongside social, technical, and management skills. This holistic approach is designed to prepare students not only to adapt to society but also to actively contribute to economic development through entrepreneurial ventures.

The need for entrepreneurship education has been underscored by various studies. Yuye Wang (2019) highlights the increasing demand for entrepreneurial talents in China's knowledge economy, where individuals are encouraged to engage in entrepreneurship to create jobs and drive economic growth. Higher vocational students, in particular, possess unique advantages. According to Lixuan Deng (2019), these students often exhibit great aspirations, optimism, and a youthful spirit, essential traits for successful entrepreneurs. Their technical education provides a significant practical advantage, enabling them to apply theoretical knowledge effectively in entrepreneurial activities.^[3]

Caluma (2019) argues that entrepreneurial skills are crucial for thriving in the modern world, especially as traditional employment opportunities diminish. Dlabajová (2019) reinforces this by emphasizing the importance of skills development in the European Union's strategy to enhance competitiveness. The New Skills Agenda for Europe, as noted by Pendergast (2019), aims to bridge the skills gap, making retraining and skills enhancement a priority.^[4]

Moreover, Morente (2019) asserts that the rapid technological advancements necessitate a curriculum shift to include both "hard" and "soft" skills. Hard skills, such as technical and digital competencies, are critical, but soft skills like creativity, empathy, and flexibility are becoming increasingly important. This comprehensive skill set enables individuals to navigate the complexities of modern business environments.^[5]

Entrepreneurship education in higher vocational colleges has evolved to include various pedagogical approaches. According to Aquino (2018), entrepreneurial education should imbue students with self-control, risk-taking, inventiveness, and perseverance. It also emphasizes the importance of technical knowledge, management skills, financial literacy, and effective communication.^[6] Chowdhury (2018) views entrepreneurial skills as life skills, advocating for resilience, hands-on experience, and the ability to overcome obstacles.^[7]

Rengamani (2019) highlights the necessity of faith in one's abilities as a fundamental component of entrepreneurial success. He argues that entrepreneurial confidence and a strong dislike of traditional employment drive individuals to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This perspective is echoed by Guerrero (2018), who emphasizes the importance of teaching entrepreneurial values such as creativity, critical thinking, and risk-taking.^[8]

In conclusion, the literature underscores the critical role of entrepreneurship education in developing the necessary skills and mindset for successful entrepreneurship. Higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province are uniquely positioned to integrate these educational practices, fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs who can drive innovation and economic growth. By combining technical skills with entrepreneurial training, these institutions can provide students with a comprehensive education that prepares them for the challenges and opportunities of the modern economy.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection for this study involved distributing structured questionnaires to a targeted sample of 623 students and 23 teachers from three vocational colleges in Guangdong Province, China. The questionnaire was designed to assess both entrepreneurial skills and spirit as influenced by entrepreneurial education. The sections of the questionnaire included items on strategic planning, extrapolation, financial management, relationship management, and problem-solving. The data gathering was conducted after receiving approval from the institutional review board and the respective

administrative departments of the colleges involved. Participation was voluntary, with respondents informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

Data Analysis Methods

Data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The following statistical methods were employed to analyze the data:

1. Frequency Distribution and Percentage Analysis - Used to determine the distribution and proportion of responses for each item.
2. Two-sample t-test - Employed to compare the assessments between students and teachers regarding entrepreneurial skills and spirit.
3. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) - Conducted to explore the differences in entrepreneurial skills and spirit among different demographic groups (age, sex, major).
4. Pearson Correlation Coefficient - Calculated to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial spirit.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

The results were organized into four tables, each representing key components of entrepreneurial skills and spirit as assessed by both students and teachers. The tables are followed by an analysis that provides insights into the implications of these findings.

Table 1: Assessment of Entrepreneurial Skills - Strategic Planning

RESPONDENT TYPE	MEAN SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
STUDENTS	2.64	0.39	Moderately Skilled
TEACHERS	2.87	0.32	Skilled

This table shows that teachers rate the students' strategic planning skills higher than the students rate themselves, suggesting a possible underestimation of abilities by students or a more generous assessment by teachers.

Table 2: Assessment of Entrepreneurial Skills - Financial Management

RESPONDENT TYPE	MEAN SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
STUDENTS	2.73	0.37	Moderately Skilled
TEACHERS	2.94	0.25	Skilled

Students show moderate proficiency in financial management, a critical area for entrepreneurial success. Teachers perceive the students to be better prepared, indicating effectiveness in educational approaches focusing on financial literacy.

Table 3: Assessment of Entrepreneurial Spirit - Innovation and Risk-Taking

RESPONDENT TYPE	MEAN SCORE	STANDARD DEVIATION	INTERPRETATION
STUDENTS	2.56	0.38	Moderately Observable
TEACHERS	2.75	0.36	Observable

Both students and teachers acknowledge the presence of an entrepreneurial spirit, though teachers again rate it higher. This may reflect the teachers' observations of student behaviors that students themselves may not recognize.

Table 4: Correlation between Entrepreneurial Skills and Spirit

VARIABLES	PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE (P-VALUE)
ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS & SPIRIT	0.61	< 0.01

A significant positive correlation between entrepreneurial skills and spirit indicates that improvements in skills are associated with enhancements in entrepreneurial spirit, underscoring the holistic impact of entrepreneurship education. These analyses are informed by recent findings in entrepreneurship education that emphasize the need for integrated approaches to developing both skills and mindset. According to recent studies by Jones et al. (2020), such educational frameworks significantly contribute to nurturing well-rounded entrepreneurs who are not only skilled but also possess the necessary spirit to innovate and take risks. This comprehensive approach is crucial in today's rapidly evolving business landscape (Smith & Hamilton, 2019).

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the crucial role of entrepreneurship education in shaping the entrepreneurial skills and spirit of students in higher vocational colleges in Guangdong Province, China. The findings underscore the positive impact of integrating entrepreneurial education into the vocational curriculum, revealing significant interactions between entrepreneurial skills and the education provided. This interaction not only enhances students' technical competencies but also fosters an entrepreneurial mindset essential for navigating the modern economic landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship as a viable career path amid disrupted traditional employment opportunities. The research shows that higher vocational colleges are pivotal in equipping students with the necessary

skills to start and sustain their own businesses. The combination of professional skills—such as strategic planning, financial management, relationship management, and problem-solving—and an entrepreneurial spirit characterized by innovation, risk-taking, resilience, and adaptability, forms a solid foundation for future entrepreneurs.

The study reveals that teachers often perceive students to have higher entrepreneurial skills and spirit than the students themselves recognize. This discrepancy suggests a need for further confidence-building measures within the educational framework to help students accurately assess and leverage their abilities. The literature review supports the findings by emphasizing the critical role of entrepreneurship education in the knowledge economy. It highlights various educational strategies and frameworks that can enhance entrepreneurial outcomes, such as the integration of both "hard" and "soft" skills and the importance of fostering traits like creativity, critical thinking, and perseverance.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the understanding of how higher vocational colleges can effectively foster a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. By focusing on comprehensive entrepreneurship education, these institutions can prepare students not only for self-employment but also for creating job opportunities and driving economic growth. The positive relationship between entrepreneurial skills and spirit underscores the necessity of a well-rounded educational approach that equips students to meet the challenges of a dynamic and evolving business environment.

To further enhance the impact of entrepreneurship education, higher vocational colleges should consider implementing the following recommendations:

Enhanced Practical Training: Integrate more hands-on entrepreneurial activities, such as internships, mentorship programs, and business simulations, to provide real-world experience.

Curriculum Development: Continuously update the curriculum to include the latest trends and technologies in entrepreneurship, ensuring that students are equipped with cutting-edge knowledge and skills.

Confidence Building: Implement workshops and activities that focus on building self-confidence and entrepreneurial identity among students, helping them to recognize and harness their potential.

Teacher Training: Provide ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure they are equipped with the latest pedagogical techniques and knowledge in entrepreneurship education.

Collaboration with Industry: Strengthen partnerships with local businesses and entrepreneurs to provide students with networking opportunities and insights into the practical aspects of running a business. By adopting these strategies, higher vocational colleges in Guangdong and beyond can significantly enhance their entrepreneurship education programs, ultimately contributing to a more innovative and resilient economy.

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