

HOW DID THE PANDEMIC CHANGE THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS OF JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS?

Aim of the Study:

Research into Entrepreneurship Education (EE) is expanding globally. However, issues such as the focus on short-term, subjective outcome measurements and the lack of detailed descriptions of educational methods persist (Nabi et al., 2017). Recent studies have observed escalating problems in research agenda design, highlighting the need for non-cross-sectional measurements and detailed educational content (Matsumoto et al., 2024).

This study aims to compare and examine changes in entrepreneurial intentions (EI) and other factors over multiple years based on the responses of Japanese students to the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS) conducted in 2018, 2021, and 2023. It has been noted that the EI of Japanese university students has long been stagnating at one of the lowest levels globally (Sieger et al., 2019). This research also considers the impact of the pandemic on the EI of Japanese university students, comparing these trends with international data.

While there are numerous studies conducted during the pandemic, there has not been sufficient comparison of the pre-, during-, and post-pandemic periods in certain geographical areas. Additionally, the 2023 Japanese survey collected new data, such as the details of the education received, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis linked to EI and related factors.

Methods:

To examine changes over the years regarding "EI," "whether or not they have taken EE," "preparation for starting a business," "career choice intentions post-graduation," and "perceptions of the university environment," we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) using responses from 7780 Japanese university students in GUESSS 2018, 2021, and 2023.

Furthermore, based on the 2023 data, we conducted ANOVA to verify the relationship between specific types of EE taken by students and their EI.

Results:

Significant differences were observed in each item, excluding "perception of the university environment," over the years 2018, 2021, and 2023.

Firstly, the scores for "EI" and "whether or not they had taken EE" increased in 2021 compared to 2018 but decreased in 2023 to levels below those in 2018. This trend differs from global reports that indicate a declining trend in those choosing entrepreneurship in five years since 2018.

Secondly, the score for "preparation for entrepreneurship" increased in 2021 compared to 2018 and did not decrease in 2023, maintaining its level. In the "career choice intentions" category, the "other (not sure)" response saw a sharp increase in 2021. No significant changes were observed in the "perception of the university environment."

Regarding the 2023 survey's analysis of the relationship between specific EE types and EI, it was confirmed that students who took certain types of EE had significantly higher EI levels than those who did not participate.

Conclusions:

The pandemic has had a significant impact on university students, evident from the sharp increase in "not sure" responses in career choice intentions. The rise and subsequent decline in "EI" and "EE participation" among Japanese students, which had been stagnant for many years, further indicate the pandemic's impact.

Interestingly, the "preparation for starting a business" score did not decline but remained at the 2021 level, suggesting that while the pandemic significantly influenced students' attitudes, certain groups maintained their interest in entrepreneurship post-pandemic.

Additionally, the analysis of EE types and EI differences in 2023 showed significant differences in EI between participants and non-participants in most EE types. Exploring these differences further could provide valuable insights for enhancing EE and reviving EI among Japanese students. This study also highlights the limitations of current mainstream EE and EI verification methods and suggests directions for future research to overcome these challenges.

By addressing these limitations, future research can contribute to more robust and comprehensive EE programs, ultimately supporting the development of entrepreneurial talent in Japan and beyond.