



Original Article

Influence of the university environment in the entrepreneurial intention in public and private universities

Influência do ambiente universitário na intenção empreendedora em universidades públicas e privadas

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Abstract

This study analyses the entrepreneurial intention (EI) in different higher education institutional environments – public and private universities. To achieve the objectives, an EI model adapted from Krueger et al. (2000) was used, which is known as Entrepreneurial Intention Classical Model. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire applied in three public universities and three private universities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Through comparative analysis and employing the Difference-in-Differences econometric method, it was seen that the results are in accordance with part of previous studies which pointed out that private university students have higher entrepreneurial intentions. However, the results also revealed that private university students already had higher EI before starting their graduation courses. Therefore, there is no evidence of difference of the influence of public and private university environments in EI, or in its underlying factors (that form EI), except for the factor that expresses the desire to learn about entrepreneurship.

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Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial intention; Students; Entrepreneurial education

Resumo

Neste artigo, tem-se como objetivo a análise da intenção empreendedora em diferentes ambientes institucionais de educação superior – universidades públicas e privadas. Para tanto, utilizou-se um modelo de intenção empreendedora adaptado de Krueger et al. (2000), conhecido como Modelo Clássico de Intenções Empreendedoras. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um questionário estruturado aplicado em três universidades públicas e três privadas do estado do Rio Grande do Sul. Através da análise comparativa utilizando-se do método econométrico de diferenças em diferenças evidenciou-se que os resultados estão de acordo com parte de estudos anteriores mostrando que os estudantes de universidades privadas têm intenções empreendedoras mais elevadas. No entanto, os resultados revelaram que os alunos das universidades privadas já tinham intenção empreendedora mais elevada antes de entrarem no curso superior. Assim, não há evidências de que exista diferença na influência do ambiente universitário público e privado na intenção empreendedora, e nem nos fatores subjacentes desta (que formam a mesma), exceto para o fator que expressa o desejo de aprender sobre empreendedorismo.

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Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo; Intenção empreendedora; Estudantes; Educação empreendedora

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is an important social phenomenon, since it generates occupational opportunities and, consequently, reduces unemployment (Birch, 1981; Reynolds et al., 2001). Also, the entrepreneurial activity is able to stimulate regional development and economic growth (Acs & Storey, 2004; Morris, 1998; Porter, 2000; Reynolds, Storey, & Westhead, 1994) and, partly due to the latter, it promotes innovation (Acs & Storey, 2004; Sutaria & Hicks, 2004). Therefore, more and more governments of different countries devise programs to favor the creation of new companies and the promotion of entrepreneurship (Audretsch & Keilbach, 2004).

Since the 1980s, and in Brazil the beginning of the 2000s, the literature on entrepreneurship has become an important and fertile field of scientific investigation. Nowadays, entrepreneurship has been studied in several knowledge areas such as anthropology, geography, psychology, economy, business and sociology. One of the areas with great tradition is the study of individuals and their relation with the entrepreneurial event. Such line of investigation highlights the motivational (Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003) and cognitive (Baron & Ward, 2004; Canever et al., 2017; Krueger, 2003) dimensions of the individuals in the creation of new companies and in entrepreneurship in general. In this study, the knowledge on cognition, specifically, the formation of entrepreneurial intention (EI) is used to analyze the influence of different institutional environments in university students' EI.

The Brazilian university system is made up of public and private institutions. The public Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are those maintained by the public fund and can be either federal, provincial or municipal. Private institutions are funded by natural persons or legal entities governed by the private law, and might or not to aim profit. Although there are exceptions, it is the public university that owns the largest and best qualified base of scientific investigation in the country (Audy, 2006; Hilu & Gisi, 2011; Speller et al., 2012). The emphasis on the private university is sustaining a financial equilibrium. To attract students, they seek strategies of differentiation, which are many times in tune with the immediate demands of the community and companies.

A recent movement was started to make universities more responsible and committed to the economic and social future of the regions where they are located (Iizuka and Moraes, 2014; Lima et al., 2014). Therefore, pedagogical concerns related to the innovation and entrepreneurial education has been raised in both types of universities. Thus, qualification of human resources in business has been stimulated, and better entrepreneurial spirit has been inducted by the creation of business incubators and technological parks. However, there is neither a clear and effective evaluation of these actions nor measurement of how these initiatives impact the attitudes, intentions and behavior of students in the public and private environments.

For the development of entrepreneurial traits in students, university education and entrepreneurship cannot be dissociated. The identification and analysis of such traits have a central role for the development of proper programs of entrepreneurial education. For this reason, investigating which factors

determine EI in different institutional environments is vital to the entrepreneurship research, as EI is considered a primary predictor of future entrepreneurial behavior (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000; Schwartz, 2006). There is a growing number of studies focusing on the evaluation of EI in university environments (Lima et al., 2015; Perim, 2012; Pihie, Bagheri, & Sani, 2013; Silva & Teixeira, 2013; Wang & Wong, 2004). Such studies, in general, tend to focus on descriptive analyses pointing that the level of EI is higher among private university students than those in the public ones (Lima et al., 2014; Perim, 2012; Silva & Teixeira, 2013). However, these studies do not evaluate whether the university environment is the determining factor of such difference. Therefore, this study aims to analyze whether university environments (public and private) differ in the way they influence their students' entrepreneurial intention.

To achieve this objective, the theoretical background used as a starting point was the EI model proposed by Krueger et al. (2000). This model claims that EI is formed by the following antecedents: the desirability and viability of starting a business, which in turn depends on the acceptability of the entrepreneurial activity and the individuals' self-confidence in their entrepreneurial competences and abilities. To test this model, a survey was carried out with business administration students enrolled in six universities (three public and three private) in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The main contribution of this study is concerned with the methodological ability for distinguishing the net effect of university environments on EI and antecedents. For that purpose an adapted Difference-in-Differences method was used. This method has been widely reported in the literature of public policy evaluations (Neri & Medrado, 2010), but scarcely used in entrepreneurship research.

After this introduction, a brief literature review about the models of entrepreneurial intentions and the characteristics of Brazilian public and private universities is presented. After that, the methodology is outlined. Results and discussion are presented together in the following section. Finally, some conclusions and implications of the results are outlined.

Theoretical background

Model of entrepreneurial intention

The traditional approach to the studies on entrepreneurial activity predicted that situational conditions (for example, position in the job market) and the individuals' personal characteristics (demographic characteristics or personality traits) (Krueger et al., 2000; Singh, Prasad, & Raut, 2012) were the major factors to define who would become an entrepreneur. However, this approach has been abandoned due to methodological and conceptual flaws, as well as for the lack of explanatory power of the entrepreneurial phenomenon (Krueger et al., 2000; Schwartz, 2006).

For Krueger et al. (2000), the intention models are superior to the models of traditional approach since the entrepreneurs are also shaped by motivational factors, the social environment and their perceptions of personal abilities. The authors suggest that setting up a business requires planned behavior which is

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