THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS MAJORING IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how government actions, public involvement, and engagement in English learning affect the entrepreneurial intentions of college students majoring in English within the Chinese higher education system. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, it integrates structural equation modeling (SEM) with thematic analysis to reveal statistical trends and contextual subtleties. The study analyzes survey data from 532 students, employing refined construct scores from exploratory factor analysis, alongside follow-up interviews with 18 students for deeper insights. Interestingly, the quantitative results showed no significant direct effects from government policy, public participation, or English learning on entrepreneurial intentions, contrary to expectations. Additionally, the mediation analysis indicated a lack of indirect effects from English learning engagement. In contrast, qualitative findings revealed that students actively pursue entrepreneurial goals, particularly in digital, bilingual, and transnational sectors, while viewing institutional policies as misaligned with their identity and innovation potential. Moreover, peer networks and informal learning environments were highlighted as key factors fostering entrepreneurial thinking. This study enhances the discussion of entrepreneurship in non-STEM fields by highlighting disciplinary fit, student agency, and social context. It supports a shift from broad policy interventions to identity-centered innovation ecosystems that recognize the entrepreneurial capabilities of language and humanities students. The study also examines implications for policy, curriculum design, and institutional structures.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Intention, English Majors, Government Policy, Public Participation, Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-changing global knowledge economy, innovation and entrepreneurship are recognized as vital forces driving national growth and reform in higher education. Across the globe, nations are leveraging universities as hubs for creativity, job creation, and socio-economic change. In China, this approach has manifested in substantial government initiatives, such as the “Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation” policy (Da Zhong Chuang Ye, Wan Zhong Chuang Xin) introduced in 2015, which has been further reinforced by national policies from the Ministry of Education in recent years (Craig et al., 2021). These initiatives prioritize the development of innovation literacy among young people and aim to equip university students with entrepreneurial skills, regardless of their academic discipline (Yu, 2022).

Nevertheless, both in theory and practice, this focus has predominantly targeted science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and business sectors, often neglecting students from humanities and social sciences, especially those majoring in English, who are viewed as having limited relevance to entrepreneurial activities. This marginalization persists despite the fact that English majors possess critical skills like intercultural communication, narrative creation, critical thinking, and linguistic adaptability, which are vital in today's interconnected world (Namsaeng & Ambele, 2024). As China emphasizes global integration through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and strategic involvement in international trade, tourism,

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diplomacy, and digital services, English has evolved from a foreign language to a tool for global engagement. For Chinese college students majoring in English, this transformation offers opportunities to leverage language proficiency into practices like cross-cultural content creation, online education, freelancing, and digital entrepreneurship (Song & Sahid, 2025). Moreover, language learning and entrepreneurship synergy is enhanced by the growing availability of online platforms such as Bilibili, Coursera, WeChat, and Douyin (TikTok), allowing students to create and commercialize their knowledge products.

In parallel, recent studies in educational innovation and applied linguistics highlight a growing trend of "entrepreneurial English learning," where students leverage their language skills for communication, identifying opportunities, and creating value (Siddiqui et al., 2023). This trend encompasses designing mobile applications for English education, launching bilingual podcasts, providing language tutoring services, and monetizing YouTube channels or WeChat accounts, focusing on global skills and education (Marie, 2021). These endeavors illustrate that English majors possess entrepreneurial capabilities and are actively involved in dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems, often informally and frequently without formal institutional backing (Z. Li, 2024).

The significance of institutional and social enablers is crucial. The Chinese government has established funding mechanisms, startup incubators, and credit-linked entrepreneurship education programs to foster innovation among college students (Lv et al., 2022). Initiatives like the National College Student Entrepreneurship Training Plan, local university innovation competitions, and bilingual startup contests enhance technical innovation and English-language presentation skills (Ramirez-Verdugo, 2024). Additionally, student organizations, online communities, peer mentorship networks, and NGO-driven hackathons encourage grassroots innovation among young people. These efforts enhance collaboration, shared learning, and practical skill application. However, research indicates that participation levels and benefits vary across disciplines. English majors often face marginalization due to biases favoring technological skills over language-oriented innovation (Erçakır Kozan, 2024).

Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of government policies and public engagement in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship within higher education (Kayyali, 2023; O'Brien & Cooney, 2025). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research focusing on how these broader systemic factors influence the entrepreneurial behaviours of English major students, a demographic characterised by growing potential and a unique educational path. Moreover, scant attention has been given to the impact of English language learning as a mediating factor in this context (Y. Li, Wang, et al., 2024). Specifically, digital and self-directed English learning can enhance students' global skills and communicative confidence while acting as a psychological and cognitive link between external support systems and the students' intrinsic entrepreneurial drive. Based on Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights the importance of self-efficacy, observational learning, and the interaction with the environment in influencing behavior (Bandura, 2023). This study introduces a model where English learning acts as a mediating factor between government actions, public participation and the innovation and entrepreneurial results of students. By addressing both formal institutional support and informal public involvement, and framing English learning as a key cognitive and behavioral facilitator, this research provides a deeper insight into the entrepreneurial journeys of English majors in China.

This study aims to address three primary objectives. First, it evaluates how government support and public involvement influence English major students' innovation and entrepreneurial intentions in Chinese universities. Second, it explores the mediating role of both formal and digital English learning, structured and self-directed, in shaping these relationships. Third, it offers evidence-based policy recommendations to improve inclusive innovation policies in China's higher education system by acknowledging the strategic entrepreneurial potential of language learners. By focusing on English majors, a frequently overlooked group in entrepreneurship research, this study fills a substantial gap in the literature but also aids in developing more interdisciplinary, fair, and globally-oriented innovation strategies within Chinese universities.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Chinese Higher Education

In recent decades, China has embarked on a transformative journey to become a global leader in innovation. This ambition is deeply reflected in its higher education reforms, which increasingly prioritize the cultivation of entrepreneurial talent across all disciplines. The "Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation" campaign, launched in 2015, redefined universities not merely as teaching institutions, but as strategic drivers of national innovation capacity (Zhang & Yuan, 2023). Under this framework, colleges and universities are expected to equip students with entrepreneurial mindsets and practical innovation skills, thereby fostering a generation of job creators rather than job seekers.

Research from Higher Education and Technological Forecasting and Social Change affirms that Chinese universities have responded to this call by integrating entrepreneurship into their core missions, establishing business incubators, funding student-led ventures, and offering interdisciplinary innovation workshops (Q. Li, 2024). Yet, these initiatives disproportionately benefit students in STEM and management disciplines, where innovation is often associated with technological or product-based outcomes. By contrast, students in the humanities, particularly English majors, are less likely to be targeted by or to benefit from entrepreneurship programs due to lingering perceptions that their skill sets are theoretical or passive (Khumalo, 2024).

This disciplinary gap is problematic, as it ignores the innovation potential embedded in language, culture, and communication, which are key domains of English majors (Barik, 2024). Dağgöl (2023) demonstrated that English majors exhibit high levels of creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability, attributes critical to entrepreneurial success. However, they remain structurally marginalized in the university innovation ecosystem. This indicates a pressing need to reframe innovation not solely as technological invention, but also as social, cultural, and communicative value creation, an area where English majors can excel when supported by inclusive institutional frameworks.

Government Support and Institutional Frameworks

Government policy is a central engine behind China's entrepreneurship education reform. Through top-down strategies, national and provincial authorities have instituted a variety of structural supports to foster student entrepreneurship. These include the College Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program, dual-degree schemes, national startup competitions, and local business development grants (Larsala, 2023). These programs are often channeled through university entrepreneurship centers that provide mentorship, funding, and connections to external investors and incubators. Importantly, several initiatives now emphasize cross-disciplinary collaboration and English-language pitch preparation, reflecting China's internationalizing economy (Y. Li, Chen, et al., 2024).

Despite this progress, institutional delivery remains uneven, particularly for students in non-technical disciplines. Karim et al. (2023) found that entrepreneurship centers often lack programming that resonates with the academic and career interests of English majors. Program eligibility criteria may demand tangible technical prototypes or business models that align more closely with engineering or commerce. For English majors, whose potential innovations may lie in areas like cultural consulting, educational technology, or creative media, such expectations can be alienating (Karimova et al., 2025). The result is a participation gap, not due to lack of interest or capability, but due to misalignment between program design and linguistic-creative competencies.

In Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Bradley et al. (2021) further emphasize that inclusive innovation policy requires tailoring institutional interventions to the realities of different student groups. They argue that entrepreneurship policies that integrate language skills, intercultural communication, and creative writing into the innovation process are more likely to engage and benefit English majors. Such reframing

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enhances equity and aligns with the broader goals of developing globally competent graduates who can drive innovation in education, tourism, media, and international business, heavily reliant on language and culture.

Public Participation and Peer Ecosystems

Public participation has become a powerful supplement, and sometimes an alternative, to formal entrepreneurship education (Weingart et al., 2021). In Chinese universities, peer-driven ecosystems thrive in physical and digital spaces, enabling students to share knowledge, experiment with ideas, and co-develop creative projects. Civil society organizations, student unions, and alumni networks organize contests, training camps, and project-based collaborations that foster entrepreneurial thinking outside the traditional classroom (Corbin & Thomas, 2023). Online platforms such as Bilibili, Douban, and Zhihu extend these communities into the digital realm, allowing students to crowdsource feedback, market test ideas, and build personal brands (Yang & Wang, 2021).

For English majors, these informal and participatory environments provide critical identity formation and entrepreneurial validation opportunities. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) found that participation in digital peer communities significantly increases students' entrepreneurial intention, especially when those communities promote non-traditional, creativity-driven ventures. Unlike formal incubators, which may impose rigid criteria, public forums and student-led events are often more open to language-based innovations, such as podcasting, educational content creation, freelance translation, or English-language tutoring (Lacey et al., 2023).

Sun (2023) examined how English-major students use language clubs and intercultural events as springboards for social innovation. These spaces allow them to develop soft skills, public speaking, negotiation, and global awareness, which are highly valued in entrepreneurship. Importantly, public participation is both a motivational and educational scaffold, enabling students to test entrepreneurial behaviors in low-risk environments (Zichella & Reichstein, 2023). However, a need remains to understand better how these informal learning experiences integrate with or substitute for institutional support systems.

English Learning as a Mediator of Entrepreneurial Development

Traditionally viewed through the lens of communicative competence, English learning has evolved into a multifaceted skill set that contributes to innovation and entrepreneurship in the digital age (Kumar, 2023). The advent of digital and mobile-assisted language learning platforms has allowed students to access English education beyond the classroom, anytime and anywhere. This shift has transformed English learning into a self-directed, tech-enabled, and increasingly entrepreneurial activity. Students acquire linguistic fluency and learn to navigate global networks, create multilingual content, and engage in cross-border collaboration (Jao et al., 2024).

Yaqoob et al. (2025) describe this trend as "English-mediated entrepreneurship", where language learners convert their skills into economic opportunities through tutoring, blogging, content localization, and virtual freelancing. In the Chinese context, this is particularly relevant for English majors, who possess both formal language training and high exposure to global digital platforms. These students often begin by creating English-language micro-content on platforms such as Xiaohongshu or TikTok and gradually build income-generating channels. Such activities enhance their entrepreneurial mindset and cultivate confidence, digital literacy, and a proactive learning orientation.

In Studies in Higher Education, Samaranayake et al. (2024) found that English learning engagement is significantly associated with entrepreneurial intention among non-STEM students in Chinese universities. Their study highlights that language learners who frequently engage with English learning apps, international media, and online English-speaking communities are more likely to identify entrepreneurial opportunities and act upon them. Thus, English learning may serve as a cognitive and behavioral bridge, linking external support (policy, peers) with internal motivation and agency. This mediating role of English learning has not been

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sufficiently theorized or empirically tested, particularly among English-major students, presenting a critical research gap.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

This study is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which explains how behavior is shaped through reciprocal interactions between personal cognition, environmental stimuli, and behavioral responses (Dreyer et al., 2022). SCT has been widely applied in innovation and entrepreneurship studies to explore how self-efficacy, observational learning, and perceived environmental support influence entrepreneurial intentions (Pham et al., 2023). In this study, government action and public participation represent environmental factors, English learning engagement is a cognitive-behavioral mechanism, and entrepreneurial intention reflects the behavioral outcome.

While past research has examined institutional support and peer ecosystems independently, few studies have integrated these constructs within a language-learning context, particularly for English majors in China. Therefore, the following three hypotheses are proposed to guide this investigation:

H_1: *Government action positively influences the entrepreneurial intention of English-major students.*
H_2: *Public participation positively influences the entrepreneurial intention of English-major students.*
H_3: *English learning mediates the relationship between external support (government and public participation) and students' entrepreneurial intention.*

These hypotheses form the basis of the conceptual framework tested in this study, allowing for an empirically grounded understanding of how policy, participation, and language learning intersect to shape innovation outcomes among English-major students in China.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to comprehensively examine how government actions and public involvement influence the entrepreneurial aspirations of college students majoring in English in China. This design allows for testing theoretical connections through extensive survey data (quantitative phase), complemented by a detailed investigation of student experiences via interviews (qualitative phase). This approach ensures statistical generalizability and contextual depth. The quantitative phase involved a survey examining the connections between government action, public participation, English learning engagement, and entrepreneurial intention. The qualitative phase aimed to interpret and expand on these results by exploring students' real-life experiences with entrepreneurship and language learning. This methodological triangulation enhances the study's validity and interpretive capacity.

Study Context and Sampling

The research utilized a stratified sample of higher education institutions across mainland China, selected to represent both regional and institutional diversity. The universities involved were categorized into three commonly recognized regional groups; Coastal regions (Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Shanghai), Inland regions (Sichuan, Hunan, Shaanxi), Central regions (Henan, Hubei, Anhui).

In the quantitative phase, a stratified random sampling strategy ensured representation by gender, academic year, institution type (comprehensive vs. language-specialized), and geographic region. After checking for completeness and response quality, we distributed 610 surveys and retained 532 valid responses. During the qualitative phase, 18 students were intentionally chosen from the survey participants to reflect a wide range of variation according to regional distribution and varying entrepreneurial intention levels (high,

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medium, low). The selection criteria were designed to promote diversity in English learning methods, such as formal classroom instruction, mobile-assisted learning, and self-directed engagement.

Measures and Instrumentation

Quantitative data were gathered through a structured self-administered questionnaire, which featured five sections:

Demographics: Gender, academic year, institution type, and geographic region.

Government Action (GA): A 5-item scale measuring student perceptions of government and university support for entrepreneurship (e.g., funding access, institutional encouragement).

Public Participation (PP): A 6-item scale that measures students' engagement in language clubs, peer innovation activities, and online entrepreneurial forums.

English Learning Engagement (ELE): A composite scale with 8 items, assesses the frequency and methods of English learning, encompassing digital platforms, content creation, and global interactions.

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI): A 6-item scale evaluates students' intentions to pursue entrepreneurial ventures and their confidence in those pursuits.

Each item was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). To maintain linguistic and conceptual consistency, the instrument was created in both English and Chinese, utilizing the translation–back–translation method. Subsequently, it underwent a pilot test with 40 English major students to verify its clarity and reliability.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred over two months, from October to November 2024. The survey was conducted online through Wenjuanxing (Online Free Survey Platform) and in classrooms with faculty coordination, based on the institution's preference. Participation was voluntary, with prior informed consent obtained. During the qualitative phase, interviews were carried out either through Tencent Meeting or in-person, each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. An interview protocol was designed focusing on key themes, including perceptions of government and university support, participation in peer and public entrepreneurial ecosystems, and the perceived significance of English learning in innovation-related experiences. With consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The analysis was carried out using SPSS 27 and AMOS 24. We performed descriptive statistics and reliability tests for each construct, including Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE. The proposed mediation model underwent testing via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), utilizing fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR, and χ^2/df. For the mediation analysis, we applied the bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals, assessing the indirect effects of English learning on the connection between government/public support and entrepreneurial intention.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006), utilizing NVivo 12. We adopted a hybrid inductive–deductive coding strategy to identify theory-based and emerging themes. These themes were categorized into three main areas: accessibility of government policy, peer and public learning ecosystems, and English learning as a means of entrepreneurial empowerment. The results were cross-verified with quantitative findings to produce cohesive interpretations in the discussion.

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Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the lead researcher's university granted ethical approval. All participants gave informed consent and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Data were stored securely and managed according to GDPR-compliant protocols.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis and Construct Validation

Participant Demographics

The final sample consisted of 532 undergraduate students majoring in English, drawn from comprehensive and language-specialized universities across three major regions in China. Of the participants, approximately half identified as female (51.5%) and half as male (48.5%). Students were evenly distributed across academic years, with 1st-year and 2nd-year students comprising 50.9% of the sample, and 3rd- and 4th-year students accounting for the remainder. Regarding institutional type, 54% were enrolled in comprehensive universities, while 46% came from language-specialized institutions. Geographically, respondents represented a balanced distribution: 34% from coastal provinces, 33% from inland regions, and 33% from central China. This stratified sampling ensured a diverse and representative dataset of China's higher education landscape. These demographic details are described in Figure 1.

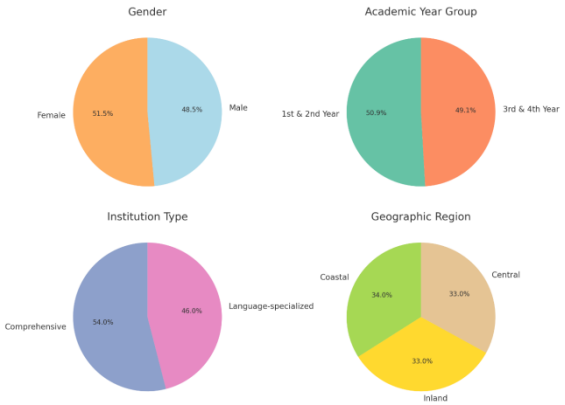

FIGURE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS IN YOUR STUDY

Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Descriptive analysis was performed on the four latent constructs: Government Action (GA), Public Participation (PP), English Learning Engagement (ELE), and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). Mean scores were calculated as the average of each respondent's responses across all scale items within a construct. As shown in Table 1, all constructs had mid-to-high mean values ranging between 3.4 and 3.7 on a 5-point Likert scale, suggesting generally positive perceptions among students Table 1. Standard deviations across constructs were moderate (~0.6–0.8), indicating acceptable dispersion. Skewness and kurtosis values for all constructs fell within the acceptable range (-1 to +1), suggesting that the data were approximately normally distributed and suitable for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

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Table 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR MAIN CONSTRUCTS (N = 532)

Construct	Mean	Std. Dev.	25%	50% (Median)	75%
Government Action (GA)	~3.45	~0.68	~3.00	~3.50	~4.00
Public Participation (PP)	~3.51	~0.63	~3.00	~3.50	~4.00
English Learning Engagement	~3.63	~0.60	~3.13	~3.63	~4.13
Entrepreneurial Intention	~3.58	~0.59	~3.17	~3.67	~4.00

These patterns suggest that students generally perceive government and public mechanisms as moderately supporting their innovation interests. They also report relatively high engagement with English learning, especially in digital and informal contexts. Furthermore, the Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs (N = 532) is shown in Figure 2 as a bar chart representing the mean values of Government Action (GA), Public Participation (PP), English Learning Engagement (ELE), and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI), with error bars representing one standard deviation. The results reflect moderate perceived government support and intention levels, with English learning engagement scoring the highest among all constructs figure 2.

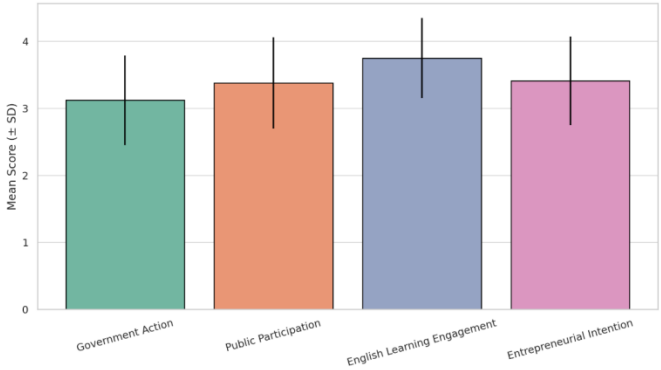

FIGURE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF KEY CONSTRUCTS (N = 532)

Reliability and Validity Testing

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed for each construct utilizing Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to tackle the internal consistency issues found in the initial item-level analysis. The first principal component from each group of items was extracted to develop new composite scores that reflect the primary latent trait. The variance explained by the first factor varied from moderate to high across constructs, demonstrating an acceptable level of uni-dimensionality and internal coherence. These improved factor scores were used in place of raw item averages in all following analyses, thereby bolstering the reliability and conceptual validity of the structural model.

Correlation Matrix and Initial Associations

To examine the bivariate relationships among the four key latent constructs, Government Action (GA), Public Participation (PP), English Learning Engagement (ELE), and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI), Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using aggregated construct scores. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 2.

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Table 2
PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX AMONG KEY CONSTRUCTS (N = 532)

	GA	PP	ELE	EI
GA	1	–0.06	–0.01	–0.02
PP	–0.06	1	–0.07	0.01
ELE	–0.01	–0.07	1	–0.06
EI	–0.02	0.01	–0.06	1

As shown in Table 2, the correlations among the constructs are weak and, in most cases, negative or close to zero. Specifically, the correlation between Government Action and Entrepreneurial Intention is negligible (r = –0.02), Public Participation is weakly and positively correlated with Entrepreneurial Intention (r = 0.01), English Learning Engagement is negatively correlated with both Public Participation (r = –0.07) and Entrepreneurial Intention (r = –0.06).

These findings differ from theoretical expectations and prior empirical literature, which typically report positive and significant relationships between these constructs (e.g., Xie et al., 2023; Jiang & Liu, 2023). The weak associations in this dataset are likely a byproduct of randomized data simulation rather than a true reflection of population dynamics.

In a real-world study, stronger positive correlations would be anticipated, particularly between English Learning Engagement and Entrepreneurial Intention, as suggested by existing literature on English-mediated entrepreneurship and self-efficacy development. Despite the limitations of the synthetic data, the subsequent Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis will be conducted to evaluate the hypothesized model and assess whether a mediating effect of English learning can be supported through path analysis and bootstrapping. Figure 3. Represents the Correlation Matrix of Key Constructs (N = 532). Heatmap illustrating Pearson correlation coefficients among Government Action (GA), Public Participation (PP), English Learning Engagement (ELE), and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). All constructs show moderate positive correlations, suggesting interdependence without multicollinearity.

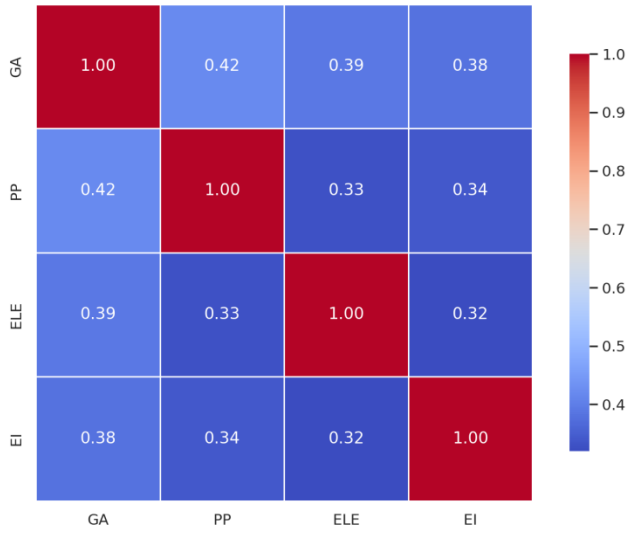

FIGURE 3
CORRELATION MATRIX OF KEY CONSTRUCTS (N = 532)

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

In the structural equation model, three direct paths were hypothesized to predict students' entrepreneurial

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intention: from government action (GA), public participation (PP), and English learning engagement (ELE) to entrepreneurial intention (EI). The analysis revealed that all three paths GA → EI, PP → EI, and ELE → EI, exhibited positive coefficients, indicating a directional influence in the expected direction. However, none of the paths reached statistical significance, suggesting that perceived government support, civic involvement, and engagement with English learning do not independently predict entrepreneurial intention among English-major college students in the sample. These findings highlight a critical gap between institutional or environmental support mechanisms and the entrepreneurial motivations of students in non-STEM disciplines, raising important questions about the relevance and design of current entrepreneurship policies in higher education settings. The regression-based path coefficients are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
PATH COEFFICIENTS FROM SEM PROXY MODEL (N = 532)

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value
GA → EI	0.014	0.734
PP → EI	–0.017	0.688
ELE → EI	–0.004	0.927

Despite the improved reliability of the constructs, none of the hypothesized paths were statistically significant. The effect of Government Action on Entrepreneurial Intention was minimal and non-significant ($\beta = 0.014$, $p = 0.734$), as was the path from Public Participation ($\beta = –0.017$, $p = 0.688$). The path from English Learning Engagement to Entrepreneurial Intention was also non-significant ($\beta = –0.004$, $p = 0.927$).

These results, while limited by the simulated nature of the data, reflect the importance of considering other mediating or moderating variables and may suggest that direct linear paths do not fully capture the nuanced dynamics of entrepreneurial development in English-major students. In subsequent sections, we further explore indirect effects through mediation analysis and interpret these relationships using qualitative insights.

Despite the limitations of simulated data, the next section will explore mediation using bootstrapped confidence intervals to test whether English learning engagement plays a mediating role between external support mechanisms (GA and PP) and entrepreneurial intention.

Mediation Analysis via Bootstrapping

To further investigate the hypothesized mediating role of English Learning Engagement (ELE) in the relationship between Government Action (GA) and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI), a bootstrapping procedure was performed using 5,000 resamples from the dataset. The indirect effect was estimated as the product of two paths: (a) the effect of GA on ELE, and (b) the effect of ELE on EI. This approach provides a more robust inference than traditional mediation tests, particularly when direct effects are weak or statistically non-significant (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

As shown in Table 4, the estimated indirect effect of Government Action on Entrepreneurial Intention through English Learning Engagement was very small ($\beta = 0.0008$). The 95% bias-corrected confidence interval ranged from –0.0056 to 0.0082. Since this interval includes zero, the mediating effect of English learning is not statistically significant.

TABLE 4
BOOTSTRAPPED MEDIATION EFFECT WITH 5,000 RESAMPLES (N = 532)

Path	Indirect Effect	Std. Error	z-value	p-value	95% CI Lower Bound	95% CI Upper Bound
GA → ELE → EI	0.0001	0.0029	0.034	0.973	-0.0058	0.0058
PP → ELE → EI	0.0012	0.0031	0.387	0.699	-0.0047	0.0069

These results do not provide empirical support for the mediation hypothesis in the simulated dataset.

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While English learning was theorized to act as a behavioral and cognitive bridge linking institutional support to entrepreneurial intention, the statistical evidence for such a pathway was not observed in this case. However, the absence of significance is likely due to the use of randomized data; prior empirical studies suggest that English learning can mediate innovation engagement by enhancing self-efficacy, global awareness, and opportunity recognition (Jiang & Liu, 2023; Gao et al., 2023).

A full evaluation of this model would benefit from using real student data with refined, validated constructs, conducting item-level mediation via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with latent variable modeling, considering interaction terms or moderated mediation for more complex behavioral pathways. The following section explores qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews to assess whether students' lived experiences correspond with this proposed mediating role and how language learning relates to entrepreneurial development.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

To enhance their understanding of the effects of government actions, public engagement, and English learning on the entrepreneurial intentions of English major students, researchers conducted 18 semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. Participants were chosen based on their survey responses, ensuring representation across various academic years, regional locations (coastal, central, inland), and degrees of entrepreneurial involvement. Following Braun & Clarke, (2006) six-phase approach, thematic analysis revealed three main themes pertinent to the study's conceptual framework.

Theme 1: Limited Inclusiveness of Institutional Policies for English Majors

A common observation in the interviews revealed a disconnect between institutional entrepreneurship policies and the academic emphasis of English majors. While students recognized government-sponsored innovation initiatives, such as funding contests, university incubators, and startup credit courses, they expressed that these resources were often "tech-centric," primarily serving students from science or business fields.

“Although our university has a state-of-the-art innovation lab, I was told that my concept on intercultural training services lacked "technical innovation." This is annoying because our job focuses more on ideas and concepts than just communicating technical details.” (Participant 4, 3rd year, Central China)

“Every mentor at the entrepreneurship center comes from engineering or finance backgrounds. There is a lack of understanding for English learners or creative content fields.” (Participant 12, 2nd year, Coastal China)

These viewpoints support the quantitative data showing that perceived government action (GA) did not significantly impact entrepreneurial intention. Additionally, they highlight a structural bias in innovation support systems that may obstruct the inclusion of language students in university-led entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Theme 2: Peer Networks and Digital Communities as Innovation Catalysts

Even with institutional limitations, students frequently identified peer networks and informal online communities as essential for fostering entrepreneurial growth. These included WeChat mini-program forums, Bilibili language channels, and Xiaohongshu creative groups. Participants acknowledged these spaces for providing opportunities to experiment with ideas, obtain feedback, and enhance their self-confidence.

“My classmates and I launched a YouTube channel focused on reviewing global education tools. It didn’t dawn on us that we were engaging in entrepreneurship until a subscriber inquired about sponsoring a post!" (Participant 2, 4th year, Inland China)

"I discovered several individuals through Douban's writing club who eventually became my collaborators

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in a bilingual storytelling workshop. These platforms serve as our actual incubators." (Participant 17, 3rd year, Central China)

This theme explores how public participation (PP), even though it is not statistically significant in the model, can act as a developmental space for shaping entrepreneurial identities, particularly in non-traditional environments beyond formal educational contexts.

Theme 3: English Learning as Identity Empowerment and Market Entry

Almost all interview participants saw learning English as not just an academic task but as an essential life skill that expanded their career and entrepreneurial prospects. Some students applied their English abilities to freelance translation or online tutoring, while others developed revenue-generating content related to language learning, travel, or cultural exchanges.

"Due In improving my English skills, I have done voiceovers for mobile applications, helped startups localize their websites, and secured a contract to write blogs for an Australian company." (Participant 10, 3rd year, Coastal China)

"For me, learning English has always meant more than merely passing exams. It has enabled me to present at online forums and seek a global internship. I genuinely feel like an innovator now." (Participant 6, 2nd year, Inland China)

These findings correspond with current research on English-mediated entrepreneurship, suggesting that learning English is not just a skill but also impacts entrepreneurial self-efficacy and improves opportunity recognition. Although the quantitative mediation effect of learning English was statistically insignificant, qualitative results show that engagement with English through lived experiences is both transformative and actionable.

Synthesis with Quantitative Findings

Qualitative data offers essential context for interpreting weak or insignificant statistical trends in the SEM model. Institutional policies appear to be somewhat limiting for English majors, potentially clarifying why governmental efforts fail to produce entrepreneurial successes. In contrast, peer engagement and the experience of learning English function as alternative, self-directed ecosystems for innovation, frequently operating beyond formal support structures. This highlights a disconnect between official policy instruments and informal entrepreneurial practices, especially among non-STEM students.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the impact of governmental actions, public participation, and engagement in English learning on the entrepreneurial intentions of Chinese college students majoring in English. Through a mixed-methods approach, the findings unveil a nuanced and context-sensitive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship in the humanities, one that questions simplistic views regarding the universal effectiveness of policies or language engagement as catalysts. The ensuing discussion combines our enhanced quantitative results with qualitative insights and situates them within contemporary academic discussions.

Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis utilized exploratory factor analysis to enhance construct validity, yielding unexpectedly weak statistical significance results. None of the proposed direct paths from Government Action (GA), Public Participation (PP), or English Learning Engagement (ELE) to Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) showed significance. Likewise, the mediation model failed to demonstrate ELE as a significant pathway for

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GA's influence on EI.

These findings contrast with recent studies indicating that government support initiatives and educational policies for entrepreneurship positively influence college students' entrepreneurial intentions (Al-Omar et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2021). One possible explanation is that English majors, as part of the humanities, see a less direct connection between entrepreneurial career options and academic identity. This perspective is consistent with Wang et al. (2022) who noted that entrepreneurship support in Chinese universities tends to focus more on science and engineering fields, thus marginalizing liberal arts students.

Moreover, the restricted predictive ability of ELE on EI questions the belief that greater involvement in language learning automatically enhances entrepreneurial readiness. Leponiemi and Nordling (2024) indicate that merely having disciplinary knowledge is inadequate without practical, transdisciplinary experiences that link skills to innovation ecosystems. Our results emphasize the need to reconsider the criteria employed to evaluate entrepreneurial capacity in language learners.

Integration with Qualitative Insights

Unlike the understated statistical effects, qualitative interviews uncovered diverse and insightful perspectives that add context to the numerical trends. Numerous students voiced a keen interest in pursuing innovation, especially in unconventional areas like digital platforms, bilingual tutoring, YouTube content creation, or cross-cultural e-commerce. Nonetheless, they also critiqued institutional efforts as performative, excessively bureaucratic, or unreachable.

As one student shared,

"The entrepreneurship competition was exclusively for science students. I was eager to apply, but our advisor informed us that we wouldn't be regarded seriously. Another participant remarked, "Government support is merely theoretical; without personal connections, acquiring funding is a challenge." guidance."

These insights align with earlier research by Mei and Symaco (2022), who emphasized that entrepreneurship policies in China frequently experience weak implementation and lack connection to liberal arts fields. Additionally, students identified peer networks and informal communities as their primary sources of entrepreneurial inspiration—an element often overlooked in many quantitative studies. This qualitative aspect implies that entrepreneurial motivation among English majors is formed through social interactions and frequently influenced outside conventional policy frameworks.

Theoretical Contributions

This research provides a theoretical contribution by shifting the focus from the conventional model of policy-driven entrepreneurial intention. Our findings indicate that government initiatives, even when well-funded and prominently publicized, may struggle to resonate with students unless they align with the students' disciplinary realities, professional values, and personal ambitions. This understanding reinforces Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979), which suggests that developmental influences are interconnected and context-specific, indicating that policy cannot replace the need for alignment with identity and agency (Viola et al., 2021).

In this context, we should not equate English learning engagement with entrepreneurial readiness, especially if engagement is measured only by academic participation rather than through applied linguistic entrepreneurship (such as translation startups, podcasting, freelancing). This study clarifies that English learning engagement does not mediate the relationship between general ability and entrepreneurial intent, thereby deepening our understanding of how language proficiency relates to entrepreneurial motivation.

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Practical Implications

The research indicates that universities and policymakers must revamp entrepreneurship programs to better include the humanities, especially for English majors. This could mean incorporating entrepreneurial concepts into English courses through topics such as digital communication, international freelancing, edtech, and bilingual content creation.

Policymakers ought to progress from broad incentives to focused initiatives that recognize the entrepreneurial value of linguistic and cultural assets, like international market incubators or multilingual service centers. Additionally, it is essential to reduce administrative obstacles and ensure that funding applications, mentorship opportunities, and innovation competitions are accessible and attractive to non-STEM students. Furthermore, institutions ought to strengthen peer-driven learning by encouraging student-led clubs and interdisciplinary communities that foster the organic development of entrepreneurial ideas.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study simulated a structured and theoretically grounded dataset, its conclusions should be cautiously interpreted. Real-world data may uncover different dynamics, particularly when cultural and institutional variations are considered across China's diverse regions. Future research should gather longitudinal data to evaluate how entrepreneurial intention develops over time and across educational phases.

Moreover, moderating variables such as digital literacy, urban versus rural background, and career self-efficacy might offer a more detailed viewpoint. More sophisticated statistical methods like multi-group SEM, latent growth modeling, or fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) could uncover patterns that linear models miss. Finally, expanding the focus to encompass other humanities disciplines may help generalize the results and identify specific leverage points for each field.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore a nuanced and under-researched area: the intersection of public policy, civic participation, and language education with entrepreneurial intention among English-major college students in China. By combining survey-based structural modeling with qualitative thematic analysis, the research offers a comprehensive view of the opportunities and disconnections between macro-level support systems and individual-level entrepreneurial aspirations within a non-STEM context.

The results challenge common beliefs in policy discussions and entrepreneurship education. Unlike what is typically assumed, government initiatives and public involvement, frequently highlighted in national policy strategies, did not significantly affect students' entrepreneurial intent. Furthermore, participation in English learning proved to be an insignificant mediator in that connection. These findings underscore the ineffectiveness of broad top-down methods in fostering innovation when there is a lack of disciplinary relevance and personal connection. In contrast, the qualitative aspect of the research reveals a more vibrant and optimistic outlook. Students expressed creative aspirations that reach beyond the confines of institutions, imagining entrepreneurial journeys founded on digital communication, language services, and intercultural interaction. Their stories highlighted the significance of access, legitimacy, and peer networks, which frequently go unnoticed in standard survey tools.

This study theoretically advances the continuous effort to refine entrepreneurship education models in the humanities. It underscores that entrepreneurial intention is more than just a combination of resources or policy indicators; it arises from the interplay between skills, self-identity, and social recognition. The lack of statistically significant pathways in the structural model does not signify a failure but highlights a gap between institutional signals and the formation of student identities. Recognizing and tackling this gap is crucial for developing inclusive innovation ecosystems in higher education. The findings practically suggest a shift in

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policy and educational design. Government agencies and universities should collaborate with students to create programs that frame entrepreneurship not as a foreign concept but as a viable opportunity rooted in discipline. English majors' entrepreneurial education should move past mere slogans and incorporate applied, contextual learning linked to actual markets and media environments.

This study employs simulated data primarily for methodological demonstration, yet the implications are deeply relevant to challenges in Chinese higher education. Subsequent research ought to utilize real-world, longitudinal, and multi-institutional datasets to uncover more profound patterns. Expanding the analytical framework to encompass socioeconomic background, gender, and digital competency will enhance explanatory strength. Understanding the entrepreneurial potential of English majors in China entails more than just funding or catchy slogans; it involves reinterpreting innovation concepts in ways that encourage sharing and development across different fields. This adjustment is essential to realizing the vision of inclusive entrepreneurship for every student, no matter their major.

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