

University Students' Perception of Entrepreneurship as a Career Option

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Abstract

The need for the cream of the youth population, essentially students in universities, to consider entrepreneurship as a career choice cannot be over-emphasised. This is especially true in South Africa, where disturbingly high unemployment rates continue to feed a litany of social ills that threaten the continued peaceful existence of the society. Convinced that recourse to entrepreneurship can stem the tide of unemployment, the authors of the study set out to investigate the perceptions of entrepreneurship in the student population, and the possibility of students considering entrepreneurship as a career pathway. Data was collected in a cross-sectional manner from a non-probability sample comprising 220 students drawn from a university. Descriptive statistical tools were utilised to analyse the data. Findings reveal that the students have a seemingly narrow view of what entrepreneurship is all about. Nevertheless, evidence abounds that the majority of the respondents nurse an intention that indicates a desire to become entrepreneurs only after completing their tertiary education, as opposed to doing so while still studying. Results also reveal that the biggest impediment to the entrepreneurial intention transforming into actual entrepreneurship endeavours is the lack of support and assistance for such initiatives. Consequently, the study proposes more resolute action on the part of all stakeholders to pave the way for the emergence of more entrepreneurs from the student population.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship intention, entrepreneurship education, career development, perception, motivation

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is no doubt an important economic growth generator, especially because of its capacity to create jobs (Kuratko, 2005). For this reason, countries, especially the developing ones, are encouraged to promote and facilitate the environment for entrepreneurship to thrive (Iwu, 2018). Some researchers (e.g. Iwu, Opute, Nchu, Erasia-Eke, Tengeh, Jaiyeoba, & Aliyu, 2019; Potishuk & Kratzer, 2017; Duval-Couetil & Long, 2014) are therefore of the view that education becomes one of the ways in which entrepreneurship can be encouraged. Essentially, research has proven that education, and especially entrepreneurship education, enhances entrepreneurship success. Hence, entrepreneurship education and enterprise creation have a positive relationship with economic development (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Cheung, 2008). In acknowledgement of the fact that the future development of a country lies in the hands of the students (see Editorial, *Nature Photonics* 2014; Morris, Shirokova, & Tsukanova, 2017; Nowiński, Haddoud, Lančarič, Egerová, & Czeglédi, 2019; Iwu, Ezeuduji, Iwu, Ikebuaku, & Tengeh, 2018), the perception of these students towards entrepreneurship as a career option can be vital.

We thus set out to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do students perceive entrepreneurship as a career?
2. Could students' perception of entrepreneurship result in an entrepreneurial uptake?
3. What may persuade a student to take up an entrepreneurial initiative?

The following section addresses variables – perception, intention and motivation – that are pertinent to the study. Thereafter, we provide the methodological steps taken to address the research questions. Finally, we conclude with recommendations, including future research directions.

Literature review

Perception

Perception describes the way in which one views, understands or deduces something. Scholars and psychologists (e.g. Risenga & Davhana-Maselesele, 2017; Sokolowski, 2008) are of the notion that perception involves the interpretation of events or experiences. Therefore, perception is how we identify, consolidate, and construe information around us. Two ways in which perception can occur include top-down or

bottom-up processing (Risenga & Davhana-Maselesele, 2017). Top-down processing involves how we process information based on our knowledge, values and experiences, while bottom-up processing involves perception based on sensory input of information. In other words, sensation is a physical process, while perception is more psychological. Even though one's perceptions are from one's sensations, not all sensations give rise to perceptions. There are other determinants of one's perception, some of which will include principles, pre-conceptions, values, hopes and experiences. In a nutshell, whenever the content, context, and the degree of influences of perception differ, no two perceptions can be the same. Thus, perception is subjective to an individual (Lindsay & Norman, 1977).

The impression one has about something, or what one thinks about something, forms the perception one has about it. An individual's behaviour is typically based on what they perceive reality to be rather than what reality actually is. In effect, perceived reality is the behaviourally-important reality. Research has proven that entrepreneurs who succeed are those who are well educated, even if it is not necessarily in the entrepreneurship field (O'Connor, 2013). This ties in with the fact that an individual's ability to be self-sufficient is positively related to their level of education and in particular the level of entrepreneurship education (Reynolds, 1997).

According to Karri and Goel (2006), as well as Van Stel, Storey, and Thurik (2007), entrepreneurship has two sides, namely an entrepreneurship supply side and an entrepreneurship demand side. Both sides can be affected by one's perception of entrepreneurship in that those who want to become entrepreneurs are likely to first think of the willingness to start up a business and the ability to succeed (Davidson, 1991; Boulton & Turner, 2006). Access to education and entrepreneurship training programs is also one of the factors that determine whether a person has the perceived skills to be an entrepreneur.

Perception is important in entrepreneurship in that there is a possibility of one engaging in an entrepreneurial venture if one's perception of entrepreneurship is a positive one (Gem, 2008). For instance, when an individual believes that they are able to withstand any challenges that come with being an entrepreneur, it signifies that they have a positive perception towards entrepreneurship (Palich & Bagby, 1995; Moy, Luk, & Wright, 2003). This positive disposition can however be disturbed by endogenous and exogenous factors. The endogenous factors are those which the individual has control over, such as one's personality and character. Contrastingly, the exogenous

factors are those that are usually beyond one's control and these include external factors such as government policies, taxes, and economic situation of the country (Edelman & Yli-Renko, 2010).

With regard to how students may perceive entrepreneurship as a possible career option, the literature reports that social groups and the academic environment of students are likely to significantly influence how they perceive entrepreneurship as a career (Nchimbi, 2002; Bosma, Wennekers & Amoros 2012). Other factors that may influence their perception towards entrepreneurship could include the availability of business opportunities, capability to run a business, level of risk involved, and the fear of failure in starting and running a business (Iwu, Opute, Nchu, Erasie-Eke, Tengeh, Jaiyeoba, & Aliyu, 2019; Iwu, Ezeuduji, Erasie-Eke & Tengeh, 2016). This somewhat suggests that, aside from how one perceives entrepreneurship, there are factors that may catalyse or encumber their actual involvement in an entrepreneurial endeavour.

Entrepreneurial intention

The importance of entrepreneurship intention for the development of many countries has made it an extensively researched concept. Entrepreneurial intention denotes the plans of an individual towards becoming self-reliant (Douglas & Fitzsimmon, 2008). Entrepreneurship is the process of identifying an opportunity, and successfully exploiting it into a profitable venture (Kuckertz, Kollmann, & Stöckmann, 2016). Therefore, the most predictable factor for determining entrepreneurship is an individual's intention, as opposed to characteristics and demographics, the reason being that entrepreneurship is considered to be a planned act.

There is consensus among certain researchers (for example Mellor, Coulton, Chick, Bifulco, Mellor & Fisher, 2009) that entrepreneurship is not an innate skill and this therefore means that entrepreneurship can, in fact, be taught. Hence, entrepreneurship development and the factors that will affect the uptake of entrepreneurship are necessary for research (Kobia, & Sikalieh, 2010). Krueger, Reilly and Carsrud (2000), as well as Kadir, Masinaei and Rahmani (2011), posit that entrepreneurship activities are intention-based, thereby implying that there should be an intention to be entrepreneurial before an individual engages in entrepreneurship.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), espoused by Ajzen (1991), postulates that human behaviour usually results from human intention. In this regard, researchers such as Krueger et al. (2000), Segal, Borgia and Schoenfeld (2005), and Nabi and

Holden (2008), advocate that entrepreneurial intention is the most precise attribute to determine involvement in entrepreneurial activities when compared with demographic variables, situational factors, or personality traits. These authors argue that intention comes from the mind and thus is a precursor for the conscious effort to become an entrepreneur. Consequently, the cognitive state is more accurate than character traits or demographics in predicting entrepreneurial behaviour because intention precedes behaviour. In a nutshell, when an individual perceives they have the right resources and the ability to perform a certain behaviour, they will be more confident to engage in that behaviour. As argued by Kirkwood (2009), students who believe they have the zeal and skills required to take up entrepreneurship as a career option are likely to emerge with genuine intentions to take up entrepreneurship.

Motivation

An entrepreneur needs to stay motivated in order to sustain the desire to start their own business and also to convince others to believe in the business venture. The transformation process of an individual into an entrepreneur can be classified as entrepreneurial motivation (Jensen, 2003). Motivation is a propelling force that energises an individual to act in a manner that enables goal-achievement (Lewicka, 2013). Maslow's need hierarchy theory (1970) and McClelland's acquired needs theory (1961) affirm the notion that motivation boosts an individual's zeal, creativity and ability to achieve one's goals such as taking up entrepreneurship as a career option.

Maslow's theory illustrates that all human needs can be divided into two levels, the lower level needs and the higher level needs. He states that once a given level of need is fulfilled, there is no more motivation from an individual to satisfy that need, suggesting that the individual is motivated to fulfil the next level of need. Five levels of needs are recognized by Maslow in his hierarchy of need theory, as shown in Figure 1.

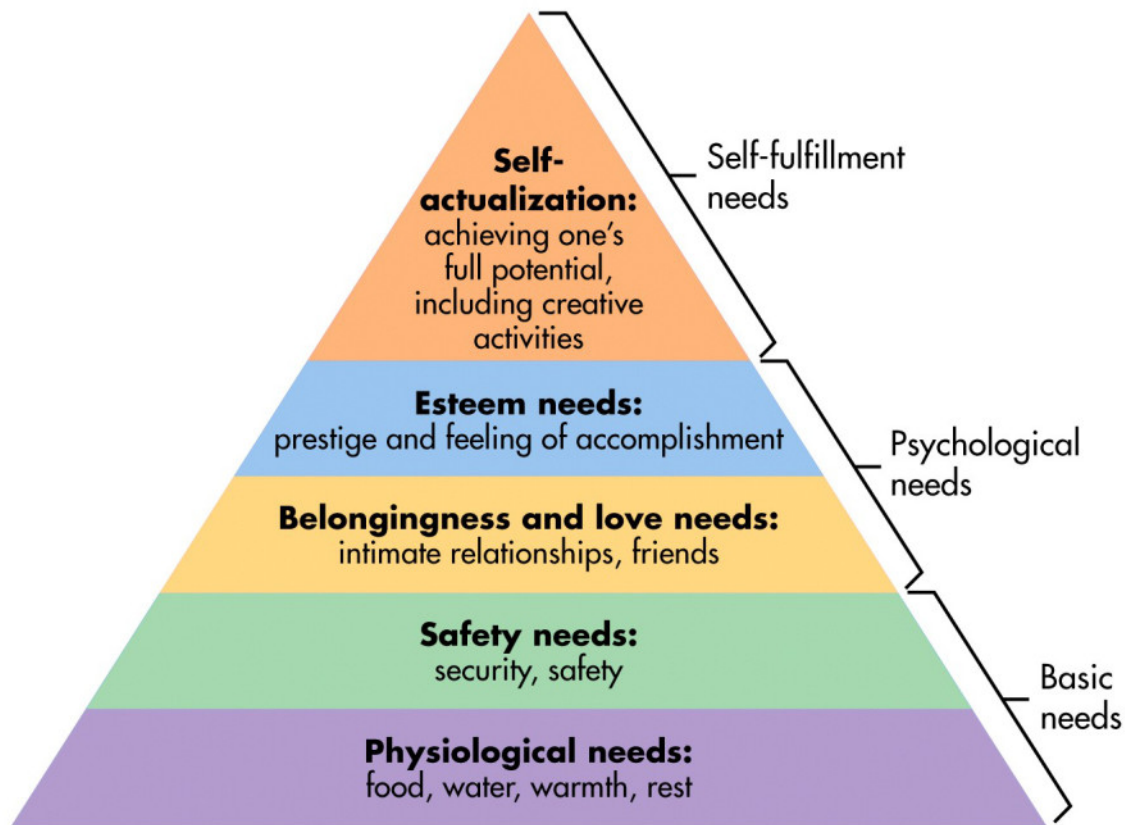


Figure 1: Maslow's Need Hierarchy. Source: Mcleod (2018).

The first level of need encompasses basic human needs. It is argued that some people engage in entrepreneurial activities for the sake of survival. Choto, Tengeh and Iwu (2014) found the reasons for entrepreneurial uptake to include the necessity to 'put bread on the table'. Safety needs are consistent with the need to provide for one's security. In the same vein, the need for belonging can lure one to pursue desires to become entrepreneurial. Both need levels suggest that the intention to be accepted and gain respect from one's community may inspire one to pursue an enterprise. These are revealed in the works of Nxopo and Iwu (2015), who noted that the patriarchal nature of African communities stifled women's desire to become entrepreneurial. Africa's patriarchal systems tend to deprive women of the opportunity to become independent and, by so doing, relegate them to domesticity (Etim & Iwu, 2019). With regard to self-esteem and self-actualisation, Brunel, Laviolette and Radu-Lefebvre (2017) found that students' self-esteem significantly influenced their self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, the desire to become self-employed was a motivating factor for the participants in the study by Martínez and Milone (2016).

McClelland's Need Theory is another well-known need-based theory of motivation. McClelland believes that culture, environment and experiences create needs that can be acquired. McClelland suggests that people behave differently based on the needs acquired, compared to those without a need. Three main needs form the basis of this theory namely achievement, power and affiliation (Mourão, & Schneider Locatelli, 2020; Lloyd, 2019; Kusumawijaya, 2019).

The first need is the need for achievement, which is the need to succeed in whatever one sets out to achieve in accordance with certain standards. McClelland found that people perform better when they have a higher need for achievement. Some characteristics of people with a higher need to achieve will include problem solving and leadership, taking calculated risks, and passion for whatever they set to achieve. These characteristics are similar to those of entrepreneurs (Kapil & Khanna, 2018). The second need is the need for power. Individuals with this need desire to create an impression on others, with the main aim of influencing people and making a difference. Individuals with a high need for power are inclined to control people and activities. In essence, students may opt for entrepreneurship as a career option because they want to be in control. The last need is the need for affiliation. This need is defined as the desire to have a cordial relationship with people, and is similar to Maslow's social needs. Individuals with a need for affiliation often want to impress or seek the approval of the people around them. Furthermore, these individuals tend to succumb to the wishes of those they value most, be it their family or friends. More so, they consider the feelings of other people before they embark on any action. Individuals with this kind of characteristic tend to become social entrepreneurs.

Methodology

Adopting the quantitative research methodology to establish how students perceive entrepreneurship, primary data for this study was obtained with the use of a structured questionnaire that was completed by two hundred and twenty (220) registered students at a university in South Africa. The students who were chosen for this study were those who had completed a preliminary module in a business management/entrepreneurship related subject. The majority (85.0%) of the participants in the study were from the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences.

To identify insights and differences in perceptions of entrepreneurship among the participants, questions regarding their disciplines, level of studies, anticipated date

of completion of their studies, and racial categories, among others, were included. A non-probability technique in the form of a convenience sampling method was adopted in selecting the participants. Fox and Bayat (2007) note that the units of analysis of non-probability sampling do not have equal chances of being included in a sample. Despite this, the method is frequently used as it is convenient, given that it relies on subjects who are available and willing to participate in a study (Fox & Bayat, 2007; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016; Ramukumba, 2019).

To ensure that the study complied with ethical requirements of research, consent to participate in the study was sought. The participants had to agree to participate in the study; they were not in any way coerced to participate. Efforts were made by the researchers to ensure that the subjects were fully aware of their rights, which included the right to withdraw from the study at any given time, voluntary participation, and that their responses would not be identifiable. These principles of research ethics were explained to each participant before they participated in the study.

Chi-square, normally used for measuring statistical significance as well as to check cross tabulated variables (Welman & Kruger, 2001), was used in the study. This test indicates the existence or non-existence of a relationship among variables. It is sometimes known as ‘Chi-square test of association’. In most cases, the significance level is determined when the statistical tests are run. Generally, the smaller the significance level reported, the more conclusive the results. Social scientists usually establish a cut-off point at $p = 0,05$, which represents the 5% level, suggesting that there is a 5% chance that the study’s results were a result of chance (Sarantakos, 2007).

Following the methodological precedence in previous studies (see Essel, Min, Essel, & Dumor, K. 2020; Arturo, 2017; Boermans, & Willebrands, 2017; Khuong & An, 2016) the study examined students’ perceptions of entrepreneurship as a career option by focusing on how students perceive entrepreneurship as a career; whether their perception of entrepreneurship will result in an entrepreneurial uptake, and what may persuade a student to take up an entrepreneurial initiative.

Presentation of findings

Respondents’ profile

Out of the 220 respondents that participated in the study, 70.8% were males whilst 29.2% were females (See Table 1). These students were enrolled into various programs

of study. The qualifications they were pursuing were National Diploma (44.1%), Bachelor degrees (55.0%), and Masters degrees (0.9%). The age distribution of the respondents shows that 45.4% were under the age of 21, with 37.3% aged between 21 – 24 years, and those who were older than 24 years constituted 17.3% of the study participants.

Students from three faculties of the university participated in this study with the majority (85.0%) coming from the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences. This finding was expected since this is the institution's largest faculty. Students from the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences were from the following departments: Entrepreneurship and Business Management (45.0%), Retail Business Management (21.8%), Accounting (13.0%), Management (4.1%), and Events Management (0.9%). The Faculty of Applied Sciences followed with 13.3%. These were students enrolled in the following subjects: Chemistry (0.5%), Consumer Sciences (1.8%), Conservation & Marine Sciences (2.3%), Environmental and Occupational Studies (0.9%), Food Technology (1.4%), and other subjects. From the Faculty of Informatics and Design, almost two percent (2.0%) of students participated in the study. These students were pursuing studies in the following subjects: Architecture (1.4%) and Graphic Design (0.5%).

Table 1. Descriptive profile of respondents

Variable	%
Age	
< 21 Years	45.4
21 – 24 Years	37.3
> 24 Years	17.3
Faculty of Study/Department	
Business & Management Sciences - e.g. <i>Entrepreneurship and Business Management; Accounting; Events Management; Retail Management</i>	84.8
Information & Design – e.g. <i>Architecture; Graphic Design</i>	1.9
Applied Sciences – e.g. <i>Chemistry; Consumer Science; Environmental & Occupational Studies; Conservation & Marine Sciences; Food Technology</i>	13.3
Gender	
Male	70.8
Female	27.2
Qualification in view	
National diploma	44.1

Bachelor degree	55.0
Masters' degree	0.9

In order for the authors to understand students' inclination towards becoming entrepreneurs, students were asked to indicate if they took any entrepreneurship-specific modules or courses. The findings reveal that the majority (62.2%) of the respondents were those who took entrepreneurship-specific modules. These modules included Business Management (21.4%), Entrepreneurship (15.9%), Entrepreneurship and Financial Accounting (8.2%), Internal Auditing (5.0%), Entrepreneurial Skills (3.2%), Operations Management (2.3%), Project Management (2.3%) and other related study areas.

Students perceptions of entrepreneurship as a career

Results of the study show that most participants (50.5%) associated entrepreneurship with '*creating a business*'. This inclination is in consonance with Low's (1988) position that an entrepreneur is someone who creates a new business. A cohort of students that accounted for 16.4% (36) of the participants perceived entrepreneurship as the art of '*launching and developing a project or an activity*'. Risk taking ability is one of the key traits of entrepreneurs (Hisrich, Peters & Shepherd, 2010) and, from the findings, some participants (13.2%) associated entrepreneurship with '*risk taking*'. Sixteen respondents (7.3%) were of the view that entrepreneurship was simply about '*organising and managing your own business*' while fourteen students (6.4%) associated entrepreneurship with '*developing a new product and service*'. Linked to '*creating a business*', 2.7% of the study's respondents associated entrepreneurship with '*creating a non-profit association or a cooperative*', while 3.2% viewed entrepreneurship as '*increasing your capital and wealth*'.

Barriers to entrepreneurship

Business success rests on the ability to overcome problems and barriers (Olszewska, 2015). Among the most common barriers to entrepreneurship are the absence of business ideas, a narrow knowledge base regarding innovativeness (Venesaar, Kolbre & Piliste, 2007), limited financial assets, insufficient skills, and lack of confidence to start up the venture (Staniewski & Szopinski, 2013). Jafarnejad et al. (2013) are of the view that identifying the barriers which entrepreneurs encounter is of the utmost importance.

When the potential barriers are identified, they can be assessed to provide a useful guide that can be used in making decisions. We also requested the participants to indicate the main barriers to the development of entrepreneurship. Identifying these was important in this study as it may lead to the identification of ways of dealing with the barriers, hence minimising their severity in the development of the business venture. '*A lack of support and assistance*' featured prominently (74.1%) as a barrier to the development of entrepreneurship. From cross tabulation results on this, more males perceive a lack of support and assistance as one of the main barriers to entrepreneurship. Another barrier cited was '*lack of profitable opportunities*' (13.0%), also emanating from mostly male respondents (96 in total), followed by '*lack of financial resources*' from 9.7% of the study participants. Only one female participant (0.5%) believed that '*unfavourable economic conditions*' were a barrier to the development of entrepreneurship. A small number (2.7%) of participants, all males, classified the barriers in the 'other' category. The '*Other*' barriers which were reported by the respondents included '*lack of creativity*', '*lack of skills and finance*', and '*unfavourable economic conditions*'. Most of these barriers have featured in several studies (e.g. Singh Sandhu et al., 2011; Jafarnejad et al. 2013; Sharma, 2018; Cho et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurial intention

Cognizant of how competitive the job market has become and of the fewer job opportunities therein, finding formal employment has become an arduous prospect. It is against this reality that entrepreneurship has been touted as a viable avenue for job creation and increased economic activity (Jafarnejad et al., 2013; Mustapha & Selvaraju, 2015; Potishuk & Kratzer, 2017; Kabir, Haque & Sarwar 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that Moore et al. (2019) posit that students should begin to cultivate an 'entrepreneurial mindset' while still pursuing their studies. The premise for the argument may be that developing such a mindset could help to cushion the stress concomitant with not getting a job after completing their studies. To gauge whether or not students would like to become entrepreneurs, they were asked to state if they wish to start their own business or become self-employed while still studying. A large proportion of participants (65.5%) answered in the affirmative, 32.3% indicated a '*No*' which implies a lack of desire to start a business, while five participants (2.3%) were unsure and indicated '*I don't know*'.

It was clear from the findings that an overwhelming majority (80.3%) would like to become entrepreneurs after obtaining their qualifications. In contrast, 2.4% indicated that they did not wish to become entrepreneurs, while 17.3% of the respondents were unsure of what path they would follow post-graduation. Interestingly, Agbim et al. (2013) found in their study that only a small percentage of graduates ultimately become entrepreneurs after graduation, which could be an indication of existing differences between expectations and reality. Despite intending to become entrepreneurs, the study participants wish to have a career in various sectors, including in a large company (35.0%), in a medium and small company (48.2%), and in the public sector (16.8%). To ascertain if students took up an entrepreneurial activity during their study, the question “*During your studies, have you started a new venture, an organization, a business (either at university or outside of the university)*”, elicited a majority (77.7%) of the participants indicating that they started new ventures while the remaining 22.3% were yet to start any entrepreneurial ventures.

Entrepreneurship and work experience

In terms of work experience of the participants, almost half (43.6% or n=96) had no work experience. This was followed by 25.9% representing those who had some work experience in the form of temporary work (seasonal/work placement). The other 30.5% of the respondents had work experience, having worked in a business/other organisation (permanent contract). In trying to check for entrepreneurial intention in relation to experience, those with work experience were asked to indicate the extent to which work experience influenced their intention to embark upon an entrepreneurial career. The responses to this were rated from very positive to very negative on a five-point Likert scale (1=Very Positive, 2=Positive, 3=Neither Positive nor Negative, 4=Negative, and 5=Very Negative). The study’s findings show the response with a mean value of 1.97 with Standard Deviation of 0.789 which implies that the respondents perceive work experience positively as a possible influence for embarking upon an entrepreneurial career. This finding is in agreement with Duval-Couetil and Long’s (2014) study which revealed that students with work experience intended to follow an entrepreneurial career path. In their study, Duval-Couetil and Long (2014) regarded work experience as important because it makes it more feasible for graduates to gain the ‘experience and [perfect] their skills working for others.’

Factors influencing the development of entrepreneurship

The participants were also asked to indicate the factors that influence the development of entrepreneurship in the world economy. The political situation (political system, ideologies, etc.) was one of influences (38.9%) identified by the participants. This was followed by the characteristics of people (i.e. potential entrepreneurs) at 29.2%. More than a quarter (25.9%) of the respondents identified economic conditions (such as level of inflation, tax system, the present state of the economy, etc.) to have a strong influence on the development of entrepreneurship. The educational system (i.e. availability of appropriate courses, recognition of creativity, etc.) was also said to influence the development of entrepreneurship and this was represented by 5.4% of the study participants. One respondent (0.5%) was of the view that support systems (mentoring, advice, personalised support, sponsorship, etc.) also influence entrepreneurial development.

Entrepreneurial personality

Robbins et al. (2013) note that entrepreneurs with a proactive personality are able to 'identify opportunities and act on them ...' and in most cases a proactive personality is associated with entrepreneurial intention. In trying to determine whether the participants had a proactive entrepreneurial personality, they were requested to indicate their responses using a 3-point Likert scale with the options: Agree (A), Neutral (N) and Disagree (D), to which the scores 1, 2 and 3 were allocated, respectively. Table 2 presents aggregate measurements for a proactive entrepreneurial personality among the participating students.

Table 2: Students' proactive entrepreneurial personality

Statements	A %	N %	D %	Mean	Std. deviation
Nothing is more exciting than seeing ideas turn into reality	100	0	0	1.00	0.000
I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life	90.8	9.2	0	1.09	0.290
If I see something that I do not like, I fix it	99.1	0.9	0	1.01	0.095
If I see someone in trouble, I help out in any way I can	93.2	6.8	0	1.07	0.253
I love being a champion for ideas even against others' opposition	100	0	0	1.00	0.000

I feel driven to make a difference in my community, and maybe the world	90.8	9.2	0	1.09	0.290
I enjoy facing and overcoming obstacles to my ideas	90.8	9.2	0	1.09	0.290
Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change	87.6	12.4	0	1.12	0.331
I tend to let others take the initiative to start new projects	87.0	10.3	2.7	1.16	0.433
When I have a problem, I tackle it head-on	100	0	0	1.00	0.000
If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen	91.8	8.2	0	1.56	0.641
I am great at turning problems into opportunities	78.1	21.8	0	1.63	0.820
No matter what the odds are, if I believe in something, I will make it happen	100	0	0	1.00	0.000
I love to challenge the status quo	75.5	24.5	0	1.73	0.831
I can spot a good opportunity long before others can	77.8	22.3	0	1.87	0.750
I am always looking for better ways to do things	62.2	16.4	21.4	2.24	1.327
I excel against others' opposition	57.3	17.3	25.5	2.56	1.198

The means for the students' proactive entrepreneurial personality were calculated to ascertain the importance of the scores. Lower means denote a general strong agreement, whereas higher means signify a higher disagreement rating. As shown in Table 2, the participants generally agreed with the statements relating to the personality which proactive entrepreneurs should possess. All the students who participated in the study agreed (100%) with the following statements '*Nothing is more exciting than seeing ideas turn into reality*' and '*No matter what the odds, if I believe in something, I will make it happen*'. Thom and Winzer (2012) view ideas as the basis of innovation, and when these ideas become a reality, it excites people.

When the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the statement '*If I see someone in trouble, I help out in any way I can*', the majority (69.1%) strongly agreed with the statement, with 24.1% agreeing, whilst a smaller number (6.8%) were unsure, thus taking the neutral position. Minor levels of disagreements were identified from the statements '*I tend to let others take the initiative to start new projects*' (2.7%); '*I am always looking for better ways to do things*' (24.4%), and '*I excel against others' opposition*' (25.5%).

The Chi-square was utilised for testing the independence (or lack thereof) between those who are constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve their lives and those willing to take a certain amount of risk (including personal, financial etc.) to

increase social and professional status. The study's results reveal a statistically significant association between those willing to take risks and those looking to improve lives. The association between these variables was significant: $X^2(2, N=185) = 7.489, p = .024$. The association was moderately strong with Cramer's $V = 0.201$.

Table 3: Chi-square tests for proactive entrepreneurial personality and willingness to take risks

	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2	0.024
Likelihood Ratio	2	0.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	1	0.010

The results of the study as shown in Table 4, indicate that the majority (123 students) agreed that they '*tend to let others take the initiative to start new projects*' and are '*constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve their lives and those willing to take a certain amount of risk*'. In further prompting respondents' preparedness to take a risk, they were asked if they would be willing to take a certain amount of risk, which could be personal and financial, to increase their social and professional status. The study's findings show the majority (69.5%) of the participants confirming that they were willing to take a risk, with a few (14.5%) declaring that they were not risk takers, while the remainder found it difficult to comment and assumed the position '*It's difficult to say*'. A further examination of the association of willingness to take risk and the gender of the participants revealed that males (>100) were more willing to take a certain amount of risk (both personal and financial) to increase their social and professional status compared to females. This finding supports the view by Yordanova and Alexandrova-Boshnakova (2011), who argue that even though the risk perception for male and female is the same, female entrepreneurs are likely to have a lower risk propensity compared to their male counterparts.

Table 4: Entrepreneurial intention and willingness to take risks

Willingness to take a risk	I intend to let others take the initiative to start new projects	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Total
	Yes	123	13	17	153
	No	32	0	0	32
Total		155	13	17	185

			Male	Female	Total
Would you be willing to take a certain amount of risk (personal, financial) to increase your social and professional status?	Yes		100	53	153
	No		31	1	32
Total			131	54	185

Entrepreneurship is inherently a risk endeavour, especially when compared with working in well-established businesses (Agbim, Oriarewo & Owocho, 2013). Individuals undertaking entrepreneurial activities are noted to be willing to take risk to create incremental wealth (Potishuk & Kratzer, 2017; Kabir, Haque & Sarwar, 2017; Wei, Liu & Sha, 2019). This is achieved through the recognition of opportunities and their exploitation, as well as risk taking and innovation. Interestingly, only a few participants (32) (constituting 20.6%) revealed that they were not willing to take a risk and they do not let others take initiative to start new projects (see Table 4). Our finding that the majority of our participants are inclined towards an entrepreneurial activity on graduation is in line with the results of Samuel, Ernest and Awuah (2013) and Ezeuduji and Ntshangase (2017).

Conclusion, recommendations, future research directions

This study was focused on determining how students perceive entrepreneurship as a career, whether students' perceptions about entrepreneurship might result in entrepreneurial uptake, and what may persuade students to actually become entrepreneurs. In the cohort of students that participated in the study, findings suggest that the perceptions of entrepreneurship predominantly lean towards associating entrepreneurship endeavours with creating a business. This seemingly monolithic perception may have been the case because almost two-thirds of the respondents had taken similar entrepreneurship-specific modules at the University. This notwithstanding, the narrow perception of what entrepreneurship is all about is certainly curious. The finding amplifies the need for the entrepreneurship curriculum to reinforce the fact that entrepreneurship endeavours transcend the act of just setting up businesses. For instance, the pivotal roles of the concepts of creativity and innovation in the field of entrepreneurship (see Mitra, 2017; Ding, 2017; Singh & Gaur, 2018; Tih, Hussain &

Hashim, 2019) have to be given more impetus, especially considering that acquiring these skills - creativity and innovation - is important for the student in adult life as well as in the world of work.

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of students in the respondent population are inclined towards becoming entrepreneurs. Interestingly, more students indicated their willingness to become entrepreneurs after their graduation rather than while they are still studying at the University. This is not completely unexpected as the rigours of academic pursuit can be overwhelming for students (Vanevenhoven & Liguori, 2013; & Gartner, 2017), making them defer important lifelong decisions like becoming an entrepreneur to later dates. Indeed, the fact that almost half of the students that participated in the research has no work experience bears ample testimony to the inclination of the students to focus almost exclusively on their studies. Nonetheless, the prevalence of a proactive entrepreneurial personality in the studied population lends credence to the existence of impressive levels of entrepreneurial intention amongst the students. In fact, students' near-unequivocal agreement with statements gauging their proactive entrepreneurial personality bodes well for future entrepreneurship endeavours, the likes of which would help to combat the scourge of unemployment in South Africa, given the potential of such ventures to create jobs.

Of course, for the prospect of increased uptake of entrepreneurship to crystallise, the barriers to the emergence of entrepreneurs, whether perceived or real, would have to be addressed. In this regard, study respondents hinted that the lack of support and assistance for the establishment and sustenance of entrepreneurial ventures remains a major impediment. It is therefore the opinion of the respondents that this needs to be addressed and the authority for doing so perhaps lies within the political ranks in the country, as well as well-established businesses. This is indicative of the fact that only the requisite will amongst elected public officers would bring about a situation where policies and practices of government in concert with critical role players forge an entrepreneurial ecosystem that is attractive to budding entrepreneurs like the students.

A key limitation of the study is its reliance on data that was collected from a non-probability sample, the implication of which is that the study's findings cannot be generalised. The fact that the respondents were all students of one university and the majority of them had taken courses in entrepreneurship introduces a substantial level of homogeneity in the sample, that reduces the applicability of the results to broader contexts with heterogeneous groups of students. Future studies may therefore make

even more valuable contributions to the body of knowledge by utilising a more diverse respondent sample of students on the basis of a random selection technique.

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