

The effect of previous employment experience and entrepreneurship exposure on entrepreneurship intentions of college level students

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Abstract

Sections of the growing body of literature on the influence of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurship intentions (EI) of students tend to speculate about the effect of students' previous employment experience and entrepreneurship exposure on their intentions to engage in entrepreneurship. Such speculation can be attributed to the indiscriminate treatment of the effect of prior entrepreneurship experiences and being employed on EI and the erroneous assumption that exposure to entrepreneurship education naturally translates into a desire to partake in entrepreneurship activities after undergoing the instructional programme.

The researchers explored whether students with formal employment experience and those exposed to entrepreneurship (e.g. through family business) prior to undergoing entrepreneurship education had EI that are different from that of who had not been employed and/or exposed to entrepreneurship before. Drawing on a quantitative approach and a survey research design, the study examined the effect of entrepreneurship exposure and previous employment experience on the EI and antecedents of the EI of students in an economically challenged country.

The findings of the study revealed that, although an overwhelming majority (80.5%) of students intended to engage in entrepreneurship, significant differences in EI levels persisted between those students who were

employed prior to their entrepreneurship education and those who had not been employed. However, mixed results were reported amongst respondents who had different entrepreneurship backgrounds. A key implication of this study is the need to tailor entrepreneurship education programmes to the needs of participants with different employment and entrepreneurship experiences rather than take a one-size-fit-all approach.

Key phrases

entrepreneurship intentions; previous employment experience; previous entrepreneurship exposure

1. INTRODUCTION

The social, political, technological and economic changes encountered by global economies post the year 2000 have unleashed severe challenges such as unemployment, poverty and stunted economic growth (Herrington & Kelley 2012:Internet). The promotion of entrepreneurship is one of the key central responses that have been made to these challenges. Entrepreneurship, which leads to the creation of new ventures, is frequently credited with creating employment, improving economic growth of individual nations, enhancing innovation and eradicating poverty (Arogundade 2011:26; Ayoade & Agwu 2016:2; Efe 2014:124). For instance, entrepreneurship is considered as an important vehicle for wealth creation, poverty reduction, ensuring social-economic empowerment, sustained self and national development (Efe 2014:124). Thus, the need to develop new businesses to counter the growing poverty and social inequality levels is paramount.

This need for entrepreneurship is indeed exemplified in the case of Zimbabwe, where the unemployment levels oscillated around 80% in 2014 (Bhebhe & Mahapa 2014:67), 72.3% of the national population is living below the poverty datum line (World Bank 2017: Internet), and the national economy has shrunk by 2.3% between 2014 and 2015 (African Development Bank 2017:Internet). Approximately 30 000 students graduate annually from Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning to escalate further the already existing 80% unemployment rate in the 13 million national population (Moyo 2016:Internet). Mananavire (2016:Internet) bemoans that instead of creating the 2.2 million jobs the current ruling party administration promised in the 2013 hotly contested national elections, the current regime has presided over an economically distressed economy, characterised by large company closures, and over 700 000 employees losing their jobs in a few years leading to 2016. Hence, the reality of university and colleges continual churning of unemployed graduates

who further compound the joblessness scenario has compelled some scholars (Agi & Yellowe 2013:1; Dumbu 2014:101; Garwe 2014:2; Njaya 2015:98) to advance entrepreneurship education's impartation of appropriate entrepreneurship skills, knowledge and attitudes as the panacea to this bleak socio-economic condition affecting the country.

There is a renewed interest in entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe, whose impact has been severely limited. The government established a Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprise Development, advancement of the Indigenisation Policy in 2009 and the compulsory introduction of entrepreneurship programmes at universities and colleges in 2011, in an attempt to expose students and graduates to entrepreneurship, yet the orientation remains low (Hosho, Muguti & Muzividzi 2013:Internet; Mauchi, Karambakuwa, Gopo & Kosmas 2011:1309).

Both the existence of high unemployment rates and poverty levels cast doubts on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in fostering EI of university students. While there is a growing body of research affirming a positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and EI (Arogundade 2011:26; Boyd & Vozikis 1994:64; Gerba 2012:259), Pittaway and Cope's (2007:479) research highlights that the impact of entrepreneurship education on EI is contingent to contextual factors. Contextual factors are not homogenous across countries and as such the effects of entrepreneurship education on EI are bound to invariably shift across various contexts. Hence, Bae, Qian, Miao and Fiet (2014:221) emphasise the need to pay attention to such contingencies in the developing world context.

Another dimension which is unclear is whether previous employment experience influences the tertiary entrepreneurship students' decision to start new businesses. The lack of clarity stems from the observation that the philosophy of self-reliance and entrepreneurship skills are not included in the majority of African tertiary education programmes (Ayoade & Agwu 2016:2; Efe 2014:126). In addition, there exists, among entrepreneurship researchers, an indiscriminate treatment of various forms of employment, especially self-employment and organisational employment (Kolvereid 1996:23-32).

The limited research that examine the relationship between an individual's socialisation into different professional cultures and their subsequent EI (Kautonen, Luoto & Tornikoski 2010:583) and the influence of past work experience and educational course of professional

students on their decision to take up entrepreneurship as a career choice (Sharma & Madan 2014:1) was conducted in an economically stable, advanced country (Finland), and a middle income economy (India). In addition, Simon (1979:353, 354) considers past experience as playing a role in career goal setting and decision making such as engagement in entrepreneurship, while Sharma and Madan (2014:12) on the contrary found no relationship between the work experience (typically less than 3 years) and entrepreneurship inclination. In view of these controversies between previous research experience and entrepreneurship pursuits and the inconclusiveness of evidence on the entrepreneurship exposure (e.g. through education)-EI relationship in distressed economies, this study sought to address the following research questions:

- Do the respondents exposed to entrepreneurship education intend to embark on entrepreneurship career paths on completing their studies?
- Are there any statistically significant differences in the EI and antecedents of EI among people of different formal employment backgrounds?
- Are there any statistically significant differences in the EI and antecedents of EI among people of different previous entrepreneurship exposure?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The link between entrepreneurship education, EI and entrepreneurship activity is not simple to comprehend. Neither is it linear as it seems. This is because the noticeable effects of entrepreneurship education, such as new business creation, are delayed occurrences (Fayolle 2000:170). These effects are not conveniently attributable to the input of entrepreneurship education because there are other intervening factors that may arise between the time of completing such an instructional programme and setting up a business enterprise.

More so, the entrepreneurship education-EI relationship tends to be mediated by myriad of personal demographics (e.g. gender, age, race) (Gerba 2012:258; Kautonen *et al.* 2010:583) psychological (entrepreneurship efficacy; entrepreneurship feasibility, perceived desirability, self-esteem) (Boyd & Vozikis 1994:63-66; Krueger 1993:5-7) and personality attributes (e.g. optimism, innovativeness, risk-taking propensity) (Ozaralli & Rivenburgh 2016:1); and contextual factors (e.g. family background, national culture) (Carr & Sequeira

2007:1090, 1095; Sajjad, Shafi & Dad 2012:32). These issues have already been subject to intense scrutiny in previous studies, as a result, the purpose of the current study is to focus on the effect of past employment experience and entrepreneurship exposure on the EI and antecedents of EI of students who have undergone entrepreneurship education.

Various reasons explain this research focus. The interest in this relationship arises from the increasing diversity of students that are entering Zimbabwean higher education due to massification and the different pathways afforded to students (some working full time and studying part time, lifelong learners, mature entry students) (Kariwo 2007:45). In addition, there is an increasing compulsion for children from middle class families to pursue entrepreneurship exploits (especially survivalist entrepreneurship) after tertiary education due to the challenging economic climate in the country (Ndofirepi 2016:5; Rambe & Ndofirepi 2016:169).

The subsequent sections of this literature are devoted to the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship exposure, and previous employment experience and their association with EI.

2.1 The theory of planned behaviour

The TPB, an offshoot of Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980:6) theory of reasoned action, proclaims that most of human actions are deliberate and calculated (Ajzen 1991:181). In other words, human behaviour is a direct outcome of intentions which themselves are fore-shadowed by three key factors i.e. attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC). In total, the theory has five constructs (attitude, subjective norms, PBC, intention and behaviour).

The current study, which considers the opinion that entrepreneurship behaviour is an outcome of intention, adopts the TPB as its guiding theoretical framework. The four constructs of the TPB, intention, attitude, subjective norms and PBC, are measured to ascertain if there are any statistically significant differences among entrepreneurship students who have prior formal employment and/or entrepreneurship exposure and those who do not. The three antecedents of intention are also included in this study since EI is directly influenced by these factors (Ajzen 1991:179). Each of these four constructs is clarified in the ensuing discussion.

Attitudes pertain to one's outlook towards carrying out a particular behaviour. The outlook can either be favourable or unfavourable, subject to the influence of both internal and external factors. Subjective norms relate to the influence felt regarding undertaking a particular behaviour emanating from the opinions of those in one's social circles (e.g. family, friends and fellow employees).

PBC concerns itself with the perceived ease or difficulty of executing a particular course of action. In this study, EI is characterised as intention referring to an individual's readiness to start a business enterprise in the near future. Surveys such as that conducted by Krueger and Carsrud (1993:315) have shown that the TPB is amenable for use in analysing the evolution and emergence of EI as well as how other factors affect this process, hence its adoption in the current study.

2.2 Entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship intentions

The concept of entrepreneurship education is complex because of the diversity of issues that it encompasses. Nonetheless, Bae *et al.* (2014:218) define the concept as "any instructional programme which seeks to entrench values, spirit and skills that promote new venture creation." Thus, entrepreneurship education comprises teaching and learning arrangements of diverse duration and target audiences. Entrepreneurship education is often linked with the improvement in entrepreneurship activity within economies (Edoho 2015:127; Mwasalwiba, Groenewegen & Wakkee 2014:136; Ndedi 2013:126; Weber, Von Graevenitz & Harhoff 2009:1).

A number of studies indicate that entrepreneurs with university degrees are more successful than non-graduates (Levie, Hart & Anyadike-Danes 2009:12), with empirical evidence from the developed world suggesting that degree-holders invest more in their business ventures and create more jobs (Astebro, Bazzazian & Braguinsky 2012:663; Martínez, Mora & Vila 2007:100). In addition, there are suggestions that more knowledgeable and educated individuals are more inclined to discern entrepreneurship opportunities, and less averse to risk because they are confident that any failure as entrepreneurs can always be followed with a re-entry into the labour market (Shane & Venkataraman 2000:217-236).

This observation corroborates that of Bae *et al.* (2014:220) stating that entrepreneurship education enhances the entrepreneurship human capital of individuals, with those exposed

to entrepreneurship education more likely to engage in entrepreneurship than those who are not.

However, results from evidence-based research contest the overwhelming belief that entrepreneurship education encourages individuals to engage in entrepreneurship careers. Results from Martin, McNally and Kay's (2013:211-224) meta-analytic study on the impact of entrepreneurship education on EI revealed, on average/weighted, a weak ($r=0.137$) positive correlation. These findings are supported by those of Bae *et al.* (2014:228), who meta-analysed 73 studies relating to the entrepreneurship education-EI relationship, and noted a small but significant correlation ($r=0.143$).

In addition, a study by Hosho *et al.* (2013:Internet) carried out at a Zimbabwean university revealed that most respondents who had completed an entrepreneurship module were negatively predisposed towards entrepreneurship after completing the instructional programme.

The introduction of moderating factors, however, makes the relationship insignificant. There are also some propositions that the influence of entrepreneurship education on the EI of those exposed to entrepreneurship through family business, friends and relatives is lesser compared to those who do not have such exposure (Zellweger, Sieger & Halter 2011:527). Thus, the suggestion here is that the effect of entrepreneurship education on EI is conditional to other moderating and/or mediating factors.

Generally, impact studies demonstrate an inconsistent and inconclusive picture of the effect of entrepreneurship education on EI (Bakotic & Kruzic 2010:209; Escudero, Barahona & Leitao 2009:198; Hill 2011:3; Mwasalwiba 2012:72; Olomi & Sinyamule 2009:103). The above-cited studies, however, utilised assorted models and methodologies and their divergent findings can be attributed to the varying entrepreneurship education programmes involved, some of which were optional while others were compulsory.

It is worth noting that the studies that discovered a negative association between the entrepreneurship education programme and EI of graduates were done on students in compulsory entrepreneurship education programmes and incorporated disoriented and unenthusiastic entrepreneurship students (Oosterbeek, Van Praag & Ijsselstein 2010:442; Singh & Verma 2010:61-73; Von Graevenitz, Harhoff & Weber 2010:90). Such programmes can be equated with the compulsory and year-long entrepreneurship skills development

(ESD) subject offered at all Zimbabwean polytechnics. However, the question on the definite impact of entrepreneurship education has not been conclusively answered here.

2.3 Prior entrepreneurship exposure and entrepreneurship intentions

Entrepreneurship activity by family members influences individuals positively to engage in entrepreneurship careers (Altinay, Madanoglu, Daniele & Lashley 2012:489-499). According to Zhang, Duysters and Cloodt (2014:623), exposure to entrepreneurship through friends, relatives and employers enhances the EI of individuals. This is achieved through the role models and diffusion of information and behavioural skills necessary for entrepreneurship. This resonates with the social learning theory, which postulates that individuals learn through observation and imitation of those around them (Hayes 2006:217).

In addition, the opinions of the people in one's social circles enhance the EI of individuals through the financial and moral support which they offer to would-be entrepreneurs. Thus, students from entrepreneurial families are most likely to engage in entrepreneurship than those who are not. Nonetheless, a recent study by (Malebana & Swanepoel 2015:103) failed to provide significant evidence in support of such a relationship.

Other scholars contend that the individuals' exposure to entrepreneurship in the earlier stages of life increases their chances of engaging in some form of entrepreneurship in the later stages of life (Gerba 2012:258; Keat, Selvarajah & Meyer 2011:206; Laspita, Breugst, Heblich & Patzelt 2012:214). The above supposition follows real-life observations of a high prevalence of entrepreneurship activity among individuals whose parents have been self-employed or whose families own and manages a business enterprise (Henley 2007:253). Hence, the existence of prominent proximal role models plays a critical role in determining young people's EI.

Findings from other studies regarding the role of role models and the determination of EI are instructive. Carr and Sequeira (2007:1095) investigated the effects of prior family business exposure as an intergenerational influence on entrepreneurship intentions mediated by attitudes towards business start-up, perceived family support, and entrepreneurship self-efficacy (ESE). Their study concludes that prior family business exposure had significant direct and indirect effects on entrepreneurship intent, through the mediation variables of attitudes towards business ownership, perceived family support, and ESE.

Krueger (1993:10), who examined the impact of prior entrepreneurship exposure on perceptions of new venture feasibility and desirability, argues that the breadth and quality of exposure to business experience should be a better predictor of attitudes toward starting a new venture than any single type of experience. We infer this to mean that more resourceful and well informed experiences regarding business tend to trigger attitudes towards new venture creation and positive perceptions of the feasibility of the business.

The matrix gets more complicated as not all individuals raised in entrepreneurship benefit from entrepreneurship exposure or end up creating their own ventures. Hence, while entrepreneurs have entrepreneurship parents, the entrepreneurs' children do not necessarily become entrepreneurs themselves (Brockhaus & Horwitz 1986:25; Krueger 1993:10).

It is important to highlight that certain psychological dispositions may mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship exposure and entrepreneurship intentions. As Krueger (1993:17) suggests, the impact of prior entrepreneurship exposure on intentions is indirect and operates through perceived feasibility, desirability and propensity.

These moderating and/mediating variables are, at times, subject to the influence of other outside factors that are linked to the entrepreneurship process. For instance, in situations perceived to be very risky, self-efficacy is considered to have a significant influence and positive implications for venture creation on the perception of entrepreneurship feasibility (Krueger & Dickson 1994:385; Sajjad *et al.* 2012:31).

In addition, negative psychological costs of failure, such as personal embarrassment, the loss of self-esteem, and the fear of having to find alternative employment (Boyd & Vozikis 1994:70; Campbell 1992:21) may serve as key differentiating factors separating those individuals who are willing to engage in entrepreneurship in the near future and those who are not.

2.4 Previous employment experience and entrepreneurship intentions of students

Another highly contested research topic is whether previous employment experience shapes an individual's orientation to engage in entrepreneurship (Boyd & Vozikis 1994:71; Kautonen *et al.* 2010:586; Sharma & Madan 2014:12). Yet despite the increasing research into the challenges associated with the transition from professional to managerial roles within the

organisation, there has been limited robust investigation into how experience in one career track (e.g., managerial, professional.) affects performance in another career form such as entrepreneurship (Boyd & Vozikis 1994:71).

Fatoki's (2014:294) study on the EI of South African business students observes that students with previous work experience have a higher level of entrepreneurship intention than students without previous work experience.

This view is contrary to Viviers, Solomon and Venter's (2011:46) observation that the memories of formal employment and "...the security and fringe benefits thereof" can sway students away from pursuing entrepreneurship careers.

Yet the relationship between past employment history and entrepreneurship intentions may be mediated by the age of individuals. For instance, Kautonen *et al.*'s (2010:583) exploratory research on the relationship between an individual's socialisation into different professional cultures and their subsequent entrepreneurship intentions reveals age-based differences in results.

Kautonen *et al.* (2010:583) report that ageing groups (those aged above 50 years) that have exhausted their careers in 'blue-collar' industrial work have lower entrepreneurship inclinations than the working-age counterparts.

Kautonen *et al.*'s (2010:586-587) investigation into the influence of work history on entrepreneurship intentions reveals that a work history in the public sector or small businesses does not seem to affect subsequent entrepreneurship intentions. Similarly, Sharma and Madan's (2014:1,12) investigation into the individual factors that influence youth entrepreneurship in India reveals that past self-employment experience has a negative impact on student's entrepreneurship inclination. Their study also reports that there was no relationship between the work experience (typically less than 3 years) and entrepreneurship inclination.

We can, therefore, infer that the depth of experience (in terms of number of years) is implicated in students' decisions to engage in entrepreneurship. Mazzarol, Volery, Doss and Thein (1999:48) established that previous employment in government has a negative influence on the entrepreneurship students' willingness to participate in entrepreneurship

due to government employees' lack of exposure to a work environment and organisational culture that is entrepreneurially-oriented.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative research approach was used in order to address the research objectives. This research approach is deductive theory-based and focuses primarily on testing theories and specific research hypotheses (Kalaian 2008:725). Such hypotheses relate to finding differences and relationships using numeric data and statistical methods to make specific conclusions about the phenomena.

This approach was adopted because it suits the objective of collecting summarised data on EI and specific demographic data from a large number of respondents at a particular point in time. Apart from that, the appropriateness of this approach lies in the reliability of results it produces and their generalisation to the relevant target population.

3.1 Population and sampling method

The target population for this study were 412 National Certificate level students who were about to complete a compulsory introductory course in entrepreneurship at a polytechnic college in Zimbabwe.

We chose students as an appropriate target population because the objective of the study was not to ascertain the actual entrepreneurship behaviour of respondents but rather EI. As such, seasoned businesspersons were not suitable candidates for this study. The students who were being prepared for both entrepreneurship and formal employment careers, amid high levels of joblessness in Zimbabwe, were thus ideal for such a study.

A sample of 200 students was recruited from this target population using a simple random technique. These were selected from a sampling frame of consecutively numbered students' class name lists. An online random number generator was then used to pick sample elements until the required sample size was derived.

A suitable sample size was deduced using statistical tables for determining the sample size which were developed by Strydom and De Vos (2005:192). A total of 152 out of the 200 questionnaires distributed to the sampled students were returned completed and usable.

3.2 Data collection

Data was collected from the sampled respondents using a structured and pre-validated questionnaire characterised by close-ended questions only. These questions were adapted from Malebana (2012:396) as well as Linan and Chen (2009:616).

Section A of the questionnaire comprised questions soliciting demographic data like gender, age, marital status, highest qualification, current field of study, previous employment and entrepreneurship experience.

Section B consisted of Likert-type scale statements which were used to gather data on the respondents' perceptions on the variables, EI, attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms and PBC. The scale used a range of alternative responses indicating a level of agreement or disagreement. The number of alternative responses per statement was up to a maximum of five. The reliability of the questionnaire items was tested using the Cronbach alpha test. The purpose of this procedure is to evaluate the internal consistency of responses among a group of questions. George and Mallery (2016:232) propose the following scale for assessing the alpha value: > 0.9 excellent, > 0.8 good, > 0.7 acceptable, > 0.6 questionable, > 0.5 poor, ≤ 0.5 unacceptable. The results of the reliability tests are presented in Table 1, where the alpha values derived were above 0.7. This means that the reliability of the scales used were acceptable.

TABLE 1: Reliability analysis results

Scale	No. of Items	Alpha coefficient
EI	6	0.91
Attitude towards entrepreneurship	10	0.78
Subjective norms	11	0.86
PBC	16	0.93

Source: Calculated from survey results

4. RESULTS

The demographic details of the study respondents are presented in Table 2. The variables addressed include gender, age, marital status, qualifications and the respondents' study discipline.

As shown in Table 2, males constituted the bulk of the respondents (66.2%) while the remainder were females. In addition, most of the respondents (70.10%) were aged between 21 and 30 years, with the majority of students (80.5%) having never been married. Furthermore, most respondents were high school certificate holders (57.10%), followed by tertiary certificate holders (39.60%). Lastly, the majority of the respondents were pursuing Engineering careers, followed by Business and Applied Sciences.

TABLE 2: Demographic details of respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	102	66.20%
	Female	52	33.80%
Age	Below 21	31	20.10%
	Between 21 – 30	108	70.10%
	Between 31 – 40	14	9.20%
	41-50	1	0.60%
	50 and above	0	0%
Marital status	Never married	124	80.50%
	Married	29	18.90%
	Divorced/separated/widowed	1	0.60%
Highest qualification level	High school/ matric	88	57.10%
	Tertiary certificate	61	39.70%
	Diploma/degree	4	2.60%
	Other	1	0.60%

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Current field of study	Applied sciences	30	19.48%
	Business	31	20.12%
	Engineering	92	59.75%
	Humanities & other	1	0.65%

Source: Calculated from survey results

TABLE 3: Employment status and prior entrepreneurship exposure

	Response	Frequency
Currently employed?	Yes	33.10%
	No	66.90%
Ever been employed before?	Yes	53.90%
	No	46.10%
Currently running a business	Yes	18.20%
	No	81.80%
Any family member/s running a business?	Yes	64.90%
	No	35.10%
Any friends running businesses?	Yes	63%
	No	37%
Any personal connection with an entrepreneur?	Yes	70.80%
	No	29.20%
Ever tried starting a business before?	Yes	51.30%
	No	48.75%

Source: Calculated from survey results

Table 3 demonstrates that 33.10% of the respondents were employed at the time of this study, with 53.90% of the respondents having been employed before, while 18.20% of the respondents were running a business at the time of this investigation. In addition, a total of 64.9% of the respondents had a family member who was running a business at the time of this investigation, 63% had friends who were running businesses, whilst 70.8% had a personal connection with an entrepreneur. About 51.3% of the respondents had, prior to undergoing entrepreneurship education, entertained thoughts of starting a business one day. These statistics suggest that at least half of the respondents had been exposed to either formal employment or entrepreneurship before enrolling for their current courses of study. It would be interesting to note if such prior experiences had any influences on the respondents' current entrepreneurship intentions.

Respondents were asked to rate six statements on a Likert scale in order to determine the extent to which respondents intended to engage in entrepreneurship on completion of their current studies. On this scale, "1" represented strong disagreement while "5" represented strong agreement with each of the statements. The results are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Frequency table of respondents' intention to engage in entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship intention	Frequencies						Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
Ready to do anything to become an entrepreneur?	N	12	5	25	41	71	154
	%	7.80%	3.20%	16.20%	26.60%	46.10%	100%
Professional goal is to become an entrepreneur?	N	7	6	30	40	71	154
	%	4.50%	3.90%	19.50%	26%	46.10%	100%
Will make every effort to start and run own business?	N	6	1	12	41	94	154
	%	3.90%	0.60%	7.80%	26.60%	61%	100%

Entrepreneurship intention	Frequencies						Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	
Determined to create a business in the future?	N	6	1	11	52	84	154
	%	3.90%	0.60%	7.10%	33.80%	54.50%	100%
Have a serious thought of starting a business?	N	4	2	19	45	84	154
	%	2.60%	1.30%	12.30%	29.20%	54.50%	100%
Have a firm intention of starting a business someday?	N	7	3	23	51	70	154
	%	4.50%	1.90%	14.90%	33.10%	45.50%	100%

Source: Calculated from survey results

For interpretation purposes, results on those respondents who expressed some level of agreement with the statement were consolidated and the results are shown in Figure 1.

It is evident from the results that the majority of respondents expressed some degree of intention to engage in entrepreneurship in the near future. This is shown by the percentage of respondents who exhibited some degree of agreement with each of the statements that measure EI.

After establishing the extent of the entrepreneurship intentions of the respondents, we set out to ascertain if there were any statistically significant differences in the levels of EI and its antecedents amongst respondents of different entrepreneurship and employment backgrounds. The same students had undergone similar entrepreneurship education, thus, a test for significant group differences is required for such a purpose.

We used the Mann-Whitney U test, a non-parametric test that assesses the presence of significant differences in a continuous or ordinal variable on the basis of a single dichotomous variable. The results were evaluated at the 5% level of significance. Finally, the results of the tests are presented in Table 5.

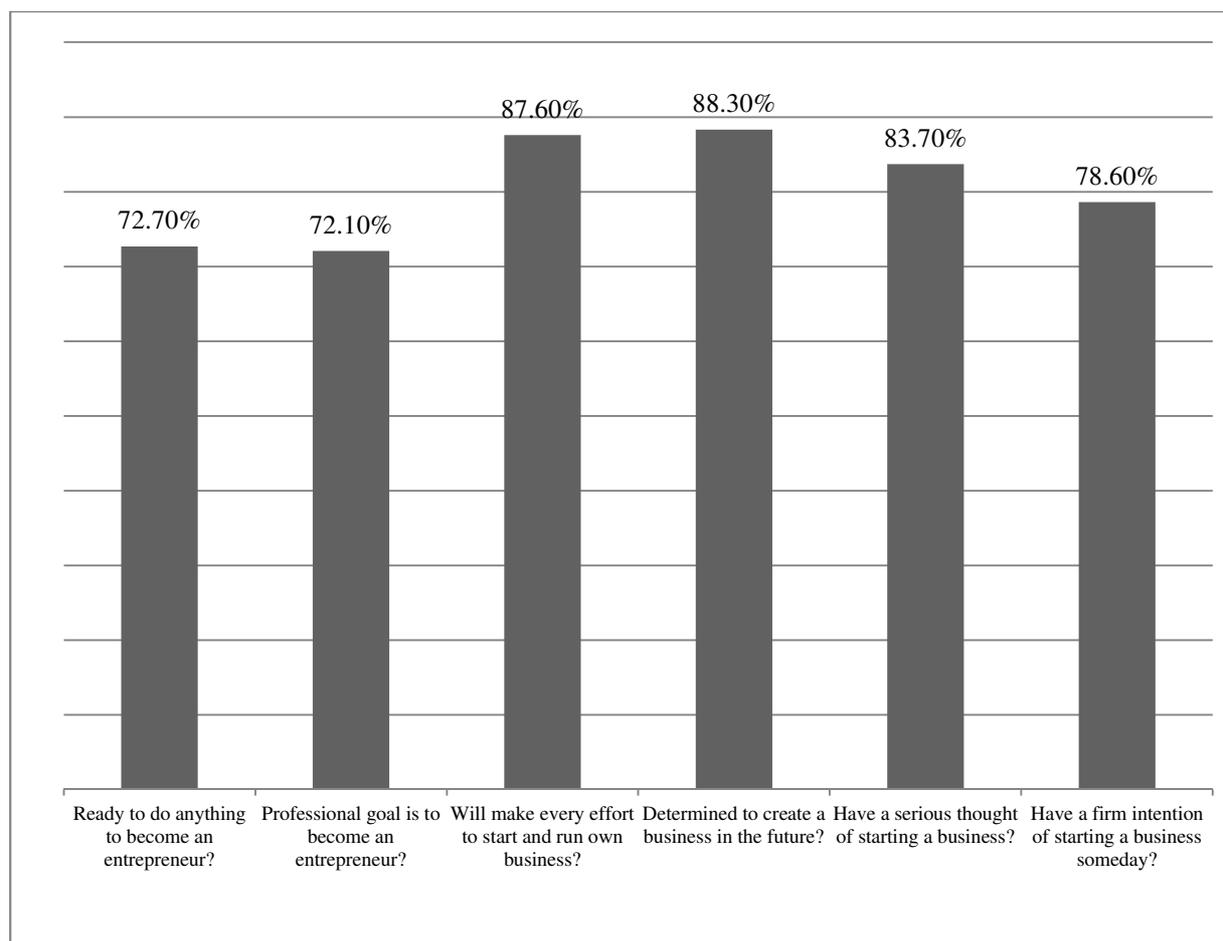


FIGURE 1: Intention to engage in entrepreneurship

Source: Calculated from survey results

The results show that there were no significant differences in the mean scores for EI, attitude towards entrepreneurship and PBC between respondents who were currently employed and those who were not. However, a difference was observed for subjective norms ($p < 0.05$).

Significant differences in the mean scores ($p < 0.05$) were noted for EI regarding whether one had previous employment experience or not. Nevertheless, no such differences were noted for attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms and PBC. In addition, no significant differences were noted in the mean scores for EI, attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms and PBC on the basis of whether one was currently running a business, had a friend or close connection who were running a business or not.

TABLE 5: Mann-Whitney U test results for EI, attitude, subjective norms and PBC

	Mean score (EI)			Mean score (Attitude)			Mean score (Subjective norms)			Mean score (PBC)		
	Yes	No	p-value	Yes	No	p-value	Yes	No	p-value	Yes	No	p-value
Currently employed?	78.92	76.80	0.80	80.83	76.80	0.50	89.36	71	0.02	82.28	74.36	0.30
Ever been employed before?	70.8	85.33	0.04	74.04	81.54	0.29	71.13	83.96	0.073	76.56	77.52	0.90
Currently running a business	90.16	75.05	0.08	85.70	75.07	0.24	73.96	77.05	0.74	73.96	77.05	0.97
Any family member running a business?	78.77	73.75	0.5	77.27	76.5	0.916	74.59	79.97	0.47	82.11	66.02	0.03
Any friends running businesses?	78.15	76.39	0.81	79.85	73.50	0.386	77.16	76.73	0.95	78.53	74.36	0.58
Any personal connection with an entrepreneur ?	77.56	75.56	0.802	40.02	27.36	0.80	74.77	80.61	0.452	76.13	77.41	0.87

Ever tried starting a business before?	77.67	45.24	0.00	77.96	44	0.00	72.98	62.65	0.234	73.61	60	0.03
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Source: Calculated from survey results

Further significant differences were in the mean scores for PBC based on whether one had a family member running a business or not. Lastly, significant differences were revealed in mean scores for EI ($p < 0.05$), attitude towards entrepreneurship ($p < 0.05$) and PBC ($p < 0.05$) on the basis of whether respondents had attempted to start a business prior to being exposed to entrepreneurship education. However, no such differences were observed for subjective norms and PBC.

5. DISCUSSION

Part of the study aims was to ascertain whether students who had undergone entrepreneurship education intended to engage in entrepreneurship careers in the near future. The study also intended to establish whether any statistically significant differences existed in the mean scores for EI and antecedents of EI among people of different formal employment back grounds. Lastly, the study sought to ascertain any statistically significant differences in the mean score for EI and antecedents of EI among people of different previous entrepreneurship experiences. These research questions are dealt with below.

5.1 Research question 1

The results of the study revealed that 70% of the respondents expressed some degree of agreement with each of the questionnaire items relating to the intention to engage in entrepreneurship (see Figure 1 and Table 4). An averaging of these mean scores shows that about 80.5% of the respondents intended to engage in entrepreneurship. Such findings are not surprising within a Zimbabwean context as most school-leavers and college graduates from struggling economies are more inclined to entrepreneurship and self-employment due to the scarcity of alternative formal employment opportunities (Bhebhe & Mahapa 2014:67).

Hence, it is expected that the Zimbabwean respondents would show higher levels of EI. However, the findings from a study on final year business students at a Zimbabwean university carried out by Hosho *et al.* (2013:Internet) contradict the aforementioned as they reveal that a majority of the respondents were negatively predisposed towards entrepreneurship upon their exposure to entrepreneurship education.

5.2 Research question 2

The results reveal significant differences in EI levels of respondents who had been employed prior to being exposed to entrepreneurship education and those who had not. Those who had been employed before had a lower score compared to those who had not. A plausible explanation for such an outcome is that although entrepreneurship education maybe having a positive impact on all students, those with previous formal employment experience may still have positive memories of previous formal employment and its mostly guaranteed rewards (Viviers *et al.* 2011:46).

It is somewhat surprising, however, that no significant differences were noted on the mean scores of all the three antecedents of EI. Basing on the assumptions of the TPB, it would have been logical to have consistent results for the antecedents of EI as well as the actual EI. The possible influence of entrepreneurship education on this development cannot be discounted. Maybe, the positive effect of entrepreneurship education on the antecedents EI is such that no differences can be observed for people of different previous formal employment experiences.

5.3 Research question 3

The third question in this research considered whether there exist any statistically significant differences in the mean score for EI and antecedents of EI among people of different previous entrepreneurship experiences. Surprisingly, there are no significant differences in the mean scores for EI and its antecedents amongst respondents who had different entrepreneurship backgrounds. One would have expected respondents with prior entrepreneurship exposure, through family, friends and other connections, to have significantly different scores to those with no such exposure. This, therefore, discredits suggestions by some scholars that individuals with prior exposure to entrepreneurship,

through family members, friends and relatives, exhibit higher EI than those with no such exposure (Bae *et al.* 2014:218-220; Henley 2007:275).

However, there are suggestions that entrepreneurship education has a lesser impact on the EI of those exposed to entrepreneurship through their social acquaintances than with those who do not have such exposure (Zellweger *et al.* 2011:527). The reasoning is that the ready access to essential entrepreneurship resources and links makes people from entrepreneurship families less likely to feel the need for entrepreneurship education. Thus, entrepreneurship education may have less influence on the EI of people with entrepreneurship backgrounds than those without. This perhaps explains the lack of significant differences in EI and its antecedents.

The current study however revealed that respondents who had attempted to start businesses before being exposed to entrepreneurship education had significantly higher scores for EI and attitude towards entrepreneurship after their exposure than those who had not done so. This is not surprising considering that the attempts at starting a business gave respondents direct experiences on the difficulties and rewards associated with entrepreneurship (Bae *et al.* 2014:218-222). Thus, exposure to entrepreneurship education builds confidence in the respondents' perceived entrepreneurship capabilities and is some form of refresher course. The bottom line is that the individuals who would have attempted to start businesses will be having a higher EI than those who have no first-hand experience of starting and running a business.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The majority of students demonstrated high entrepreneurship intentions, a condition that did not cohere with the entrepreneurship climate in Zimbabwe, where there is a persistence of informal, survivalist oriented businesses. This raises questions about whether EI always translate into actual growth oriented entrepreneurship.

Perhaps future research should consider longitudinal studies where students who claim to harbour entrepreneurship intentions are pursued three or five years later to establish the actual transformation of intentions into actual entrepreneurship behaviour.

Another interesting dimension is the revelation that students with previous employment exposure displayed lower entrepreneurship intentions than the counterparts without. This underscores the challenges encountered by entrepreneurship educators in the quest to inculcate entrepreneurship tendencies among those students who have past employment experience.

Future studies could explore the non-academic interventions that could be implemented to entice the previously employed students to venture into entrepreneurship. Perhaps, these students' disinterest in entrepreneurship could be attributed to the theoretical nature of entrepreneurship studies and their lack of a hands-on approach, which contradicts the practically oriented nature of employment. As such, future studies may need to interrogate how the integration of an experientially and practically-oriented curriculum (e.g. entrepreneurship practicums, simulations, work based learning) affect student entrepreneurship intentions.

An unexpected finding was that of an absence of statistically significant differences in the mean score for EI and the antecedents of EI among people of different entrepreneurship backgrounds. The lack of statistically significant differences in EI between students with different entrepreneurship experiences suggests that other mediating variables could be at play in this relationship. As such, future studies should interrogate the mediating variables located at the intersection of the EI, EI antecedents and entrepreneurship experience relationship.

7. CONCLUSION

The first aim of this study was to ascertain whether the students who had undergone entrepreneurship education intended to engage in entrepreneurship careers. The results showed a high level of EI amongst all respondents. Although not ruling out the possible effect of high unemployment and an uncertain economic climate currently prevailing in Zimbabwe, it is probable that entrepreneurship education has a positive influence on the EI of college students.

Hence, there is need to offer appropriately tailored entrepreneurship education to students pursuing different areas of study at higher learning institutions, while taking their

entrepreneurial backgrounds into consideration, in order to widen their career options after completing their studies.

The study failed to provide the supporting evidence for the often advanced claim that exposure to entrepreneurship through friends and family members has a significant impact on the EI of individuals. Perhaps further studies in a different geographical or methodological context may help bring closure to this debate.

However, the study proved that entrepreneurship education enhanced the EI of students who had attempted to start a business enterprise before. Thus, this cements the need to tailor entrepreneurship education to the needs of different target audiences rather than take a one-size-fit-all approach.

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