

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS OF THE YOUTH IN SOUTH AFRICA? Preliminary results of a pilot study

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Abstract

The focus on developing youth entrepreneurship has increased the world over, given the potential for entrepreneurship to facilitate economic participation by the youth. Furthermore, some empirical studies suggest that young people are increasingly making the decision to pursue self-employment as a work option at an earlier age. This paper describes the results of a pilot study designed to examine entrepreneurial intentions among the youth in South Africa. The survey instrument, the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ) is used to collect personal data as well as data on the constructs of entrepreneurial intention using 7-point Likert scales. Data analysis of the pilot study is limited to descriptive analysis of 96 completed questionnaires largely using frequency distribution. The results give some insights about entrepreneurial intentions among some South African youth but only further empirical analysis would begin to provide insights on relationships and differences between groups. Thus, results of the pilot study suggest that a larger study may yield a better representation of entrepreneurial intentions of South African youth. However, the results of this pilot study provide some valuable insights for policy makers, entrepreneurship educators and youth development practitioners interested in accelerating youth entrepreneurship.

Keywords: youth entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial intention, intention models

1. INTRODUCTION

The South African Development Indicators for 2009 reveal that 47.8 per cent of unemployed people were 15-24 years of age with a further 27.6 per cent in the 25-34 years of age bracket; a total of just over 75 per cent of the unemployed people (Development Indicators, 2009). Of significance is that these people fall within the youth category. Thus, while government programmes such as the Extended Public Works Programme, the National Youth Service and sector-focused learnerships have seen the creation of economic opportunities, they alone cannot reduce the levels of unemployment among the South African youth. Lewis and Massey (2003) suggest that some governments, including that of South Africa, have begun to develop policies that provide support to young people with entrepreneurial intent and some have already acted upon this intent to facilitate youth entrepreneurship.

Regardless of the route to entrepreneurship, Gupta and Bhawe (2007) state there is general consensus among researchers that intention models best predict an individual's intention to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Thus, while it is largely accepted that entrepreneurship can contribute to the development of economies, the bigger question is how entrepreneurship and in particular youth entrepreneurship, can be developed in different economies. To begin to answer this question, this paper asks: 'What do we know about the entrepreneurial intentions of youth in South Africa?' Thus, while some invaluable research has been conducted on different issues related to youth entrepreneurship in South Africa (see Ijeoma & Ndedi, 2008; Chigunta *et al.*, 2005); there is limited research that has focused on the entrepreneurial intentions of South African youth.

The objective of this paper is to describe findings on youth: attitudes to entrepreneurial activity, perceptions about how society values entrepreneurship, self-assessment of entrepreneurial skills, knowledge about sources of assistance for entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial objectives. Furthermore, this paper seeks to explore the broader use of the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ) beyond its largely popular administration to final-year students at tertiary institutions to include unemployed youth and employed youth as well.

This paper begins by providing an overview of literature on entrepreneurship and the youth and entrepreneurial intentions, followed by a description of the pilot study and methodology. The results of the pilot study are then presented and discussed. The paper ends with some conclusions about the pilot study, highlighting implications of the study and some recommendations for a larger study.

2. OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Entrepreneurship and the youth

While there is no consensus on the definition of entrepreneurship, researchers provide different definitions of the phenomenon. For example, Van Aardt, Van Aardt and Bezuidenhout (2000) define entrepreneurship in terms of initiating, building and expanding a venture with the intention of staying in the marketplace for an extended period. The definition provided by Van Aardt *et al.* (2000) demonstrates the difficulty of presenting one definition of entrepreneurship. Their (Van Aardt *et al.*, 2000) definition contains elements of creating an enterprise, creation of change and creation of growth, suggesting that entrepreneurship is not a once-off process. Stevenson (1997:8) defines entrepreneurship as “the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled”, highlighting the risk element associated with the creation of wealth approach to defining the phenomenon. Thus, while Chigunta *et al.* (2005) caution that entrepreneurship should not be seen as a wide-ranging solution to address society’s ‘social ills’, there is evidence that entrepreneurship development does yield some benefits within a country.

The South African government acknowledges that the small business sector is a key driver and contributor to economic growth at both national and regional levels (Rogerson, 1997; Kesper, 2000; Morris & Brennan, 2000). In recognition of the sector’s potential to achieve these national objectives, the South African government has committed itself to its growth. It has been suggested that creating an enabling culture through government policies, procedures and small business practices can facilitate a business environment that can be supportive to entrepreneurial activity and demand, thus encouraging more start-up business activity and regional economic development (Morris & Brennan, 2000). To this end, the South African Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has developed the Integrated Strategy on the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Small Enterprises (2005). The strategy is underpinned by three strategic pillars: increasing the supply for financial and non-financial support services, creating demand for small enterprise products and services and reducing small enterprise regulatory constraints (DTI, 2005).

The DTI has gone further and has developed a draft National Youth Economic Empowerment Strategy and Implementation Framework 2009-2019. The draft framework focuses on broad youth-related economic empowerment issues. The draft framework outlines, as part of its mission, its aim of fostering “human capital development with a special focus on youth entrepreneurship, business management and technical skills” (DTI, 2009:11). Research

suggests that in South Africa, young people regard entrepreneurship as a ‘stop-gap’ measure while looking for formal employment (Chigunta *et al.*, 2005).

3. ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS

Several entrepreneurial intention models have emerged over the years (see Shapero, 1982, 1985; Krueger, 2000) and are considered well accepted to explain entrepreneurial intentions (Drennan & Saleh, 2008). These models suggest that one’s entrepreneurial intention is influenced by firstly, the perception of the extent to which it is desirable to become an entrepreneur. Secondly, entrepreneurial intention is influenced by perceptions of feasibility, which focus on one’s ability to adopt entrepreneurial behaviour, given the prevailing entrepreneurship environmental conditions. The factors that influence entrepreneurship development include political-legal and economic conditions and infrastructure development, among others. Finally, social and cultural norms about entrepreneurship are considered to influence one’s decision to become an entrepreneur and these are largely influenced by one’s family and friends. Previous research (Linan & Chen, 2009; Krueger, 2003; Krueger & Reilly, 2000) has established that one’s perceptions of desirability and feasibility are associated with the intention to engage in entrepreneurial activity. However, it is important to note that attitudes to entrepreneurial behaviour vary across countries and cultural contexts (Chigunta *et al.*, 2005).

4. METHOD

4.1 Sample

The objective of the study was to examine the entrepreneurial intentions of youth and thus, purposeful sampling was used to identify individuals to participate in the study. Individuals were identified with the assistance of a local youth chamber of commerce, as well as a career centre within a local institution of higher learning assisting unemployed graduates.

4.2 Survey instrument

The current study is part of a larger study focusing on the entrepreneurial intention of young people. The EIQ (Linan *et al.*, 2006) was the data collection instrument for this study. The EIQ has been validated through a series of studies by Linan and Chen (2009) that were conducted in different countries and cultural settings, but there is limited evidence of its use in the South African context. Thus, permission was sought from the developers of the EIQ to use the instrument in South Africa and this permission was granted. The EIQ has been developed to survey the entrepreneurial intention of individuals by collecting information on entrepreneurial activity, social norms, education and experience, entrepreneurial abilities/skill sets, entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial objectives and creation of an enterprise. Thus, the items included in these areas are measured using 7-point Likert scales; ordinal scales as well as dichotomic answers where necessary. Personal data and contact data (to facilitate a longitudinal study) have also been collected using the instrument.

4.3 Pilot studies

The EIQ was first piloted on 30 unemployed graduates attending a new venture course at a higher education institution in Johannesburg. The EIQ was slightly modified to obtain context-related information considered useful to understanding entrepreneurial intention among young South Africans. The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the length of time it took to complete the questionnaire and the extent of completeness using the original

presentation of the instrument, as well as to get feedback from respondents. A total of 25 questionnaires were returned and further changes were made to reflect South African classifications in areas such as education, small business categories, age and household categories.

The researcher then decided to do a second pilot study on broader groupings of selected young people residing in Gauteng to include people with different educational levels as well as employment status. This was also driven by the observation that the EIQ had largely been administered to final-year students in tertiary institutions. Thus, a second pilot study would provide insights into the usability of the instrument in these different contexts. As it is the intention of the researcher to conduct a national study using this instrument, it was further decided to include an online version of the instrument in an effort to reach another category of young people. A total of 54 questionnaires were completed online with a further 107 distributed to respondents, bringing the total number of questionnaires completed to 161 in the second pilot study between September 2009 and November 2009.

4.4 Analysis of responses

As stated earlier, this study is part of a larger study focusing on entrepreneurial intention; analysis of responses will be restricted to descriptive analysis, namely frequency distribution. The analysis of the questionnaires is based on the second pilot study. While a total of 161 questionnaires were completed, the final number of questionnaires analysed for this study was 96, of which 43 were questionnaires completed online while the rest were given to respondents to complete. A total of 13 questionnaires were not considered, as the respondents were older than 35 years of age and the remainder was not used because of a high level of incompleteness.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Description of the characteristics of respondents

The results show that there were slightly more female respondents (54%) and almost 95 per cent of the respondents were black. About 26 per cent of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 23 years, followed by about 21 per cent between the ages of 27 and 29 and about 20 per cent between the ages of 30 and 32. Guided by the South African definition of youth in terms of age, questionnaires completed by respondents who indicated that they were over the age of 35 years were not used for the analysis. The data indicated that about 20 per cent of the respondents had household sizes of five, with a further 18 per cent with a household size of three people and 11 per cent indicating a household size of 10. The majority (24%) of the respondents indicated that their gross household monthly income was between R1601 and R3 200, followed by 14 per cent indicating household income of between R1 and R1 600 and a further 11 per cent indicating household income of between R6401 – R12 800, with less than one per cent of the respondents indicating household income of R51 201 or more.

In addition, data on education and experience also revealed that 48 respondents (50%) had participated in various entrepreneurial activities at high school, tertiary levels and other platforms. This finding suggests that young people are being exposed to entrepreneurship-related programmes and thus, in turn, attitudes are being influenced to promote the high attraction of self-employment and entrepreneurship as a work option. The highest level of qualification of the respondents varied, with 10 (10%) indicating matriculation as the highest

qualification, 36 (38%) respondents possessing bachelor degrees and 38 (40%) having completed some certificate course.

Forty-eight (50%) of the respondents indicated that they were paid employees while 10 (10%) indicated that they were self-employed, with a further seven indicating that they were full-time students and 25 (26%) indicating that they were currently not employed. While the results show that 10 respondents were self-employed, at least another 20 respondents had at some point been self-employed, operating in a spectrum of industry and services. Examples of self-employed activities included selling perfume, running an advertising company and running an events company, to name a few.

5.2 Entrepreneurial attitude and intentions

About 52 per cent of the respondents indicated maximum attraction to being an entrepreneur as a work option, taking into account both the advantages and disadvantages associated with entrepreneurship. Furthermore, about 80 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had seriously considered becoming an entrepreneur. Table 1 presents the results of selected statements regarding the level of agreement with statements about entrepreneurial activity. Results reveal that 49 respondents indicated that they had a high intention of starting a business, of which 26 were female respondents and 23 were male respondents. Researchers (Díaz-García & Jiménez-Moreno, 2009; Wilson et al., 2007) note that men tend to have higher levels of entrepreneurial intentions than women. The findings of the pilot study indicate that that females are equally intent on starting a business in the future; however, this must be interpreted with caution, given the non-representation of the sample.

Of interest is the result that shows that while the intention to start a business is there, only 22 per cent of the respondents were in total agreement that they knew about all the practical details needed to start a business. About 73 per cent of the respondents were in total agreement that if they had the opportunity and resources they would love to start a business and in addition, 54 per cent of the respondents indicated that being an entrepreneur would give them great satisfaction.

5.3 Social and cultural perceptions

Table 2 shows the results of the respondents' perceptions about the value that society places on entrepreneurship. It is interesting to note that only 24 per cent of the respondents were in total agreement with the statement that their immediate family values entrepreneurial activity above other activities and careers, with 23 per cent of the respondents being neutral. A similar trend was found with regard to the statement that the culture in South Africa was favourable towards entrepreneurial activity. This result appears to be backed up by 29 per cent of the respondents indicating that they were in total disagreement with the statement that most people in South African considered it unacceptable to be an entrepreneur.

In support of an earlier result, where a number of respondents indicated that they were attracted to being an entrepreneur, 33 per cent of the respondents considered entrepreneurial activity to be worthwhile, despite the risks. Another interesting result is that 21 respondents (22%) were neutral about whether or not they agreed with the statement that entrepreneurs take advantage of others.

5.4 Self-assessment of entrepreneurial skills

Overall, the respondents indicated that they had high entrepreneurial abilities and skills to carry out tasks related to entrepreneurial activity (see Table 3). The results of the pilot study

revealed that over 75 per cent, which is the combined total of respondents who indicated 5, 6 or 7 in their self-assessment of their entrepreneurial abilities/skills, believed that they had the higher aptitude levels required to recognise opportunities. Similar results were observed concerning respondents who indicated that they had creativity skills, problem-solving skills, leadership and communication skills and networking skills.

5.5 Knowledge and experience

At least 77 (81%) respondents personally knew an entrepreneur. Furthermore, respondents were asked to indicate their level of knowledge about sources of assistance for entrepreneurs (see Table 4). Lewis and Massey (2003) suggest that sources of assistance for individuals play a crucial role in the entrepreneurship process. The results of this pilot study suggest that while the youth are largely interested in becoming entrepreneurs, they do not appear to know much about the sources of assistance available for entrepreneurs. For example, only 16 of the respondents had complete knowledge of private associations such as chambers of commerce. It is interesting to note that quite a high number indicate that they do not have significant networking skills and ability to make professional contact with people who could perhaps provide information on sources of assistance for entrepreneurs to young entrepreneurs.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents in this pilot consider themselves to have high levels of entrepreneurial abilities and skills, only about 15 per cent of the respondents had complete knowledge about specific training for young entrepreneurs. Research suggests that entrepreneurship education may play an important role in facilitating entrepreneurship development (Deakins & Freel, 2006). Ijeoma and Ndedi (2008) go a step further and suggest that entrepreneurship courses should be offered in all courses in tertiary institutions, as they believe that this would assist students to recognise any opportunities.

Of all the sources of assistance, 28 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had complete knowledge of public support bodies such as the Department of Trade and Industry, SEDA, Khula and the National Youth Development Agency. However, fewer respondents had complete knowledge about loans with favourable terms or technical aid for business start-ups, with 19 respondents being neutral about their level of knowledge about business centres. These results raise critical issues on the nature of communication and packaging of entrepreneurship development programmes and business development support, but further research would be needed to understand the issues in more depth.

5.6 Entrepreneurial objectives

In terms of entrepreneurial objectives, respondents were asked to indicate the size of the enterprise they would like to achieve in terms of employees, should they ever start a business. The most common choice was that of being a small enterprise employing fewer than 50 people (22 respondents), followed by 19 respondents indicating they would want to be a very small enterprise employing fewer than 20 people and 13 respondents indicating they would prefer to have a micro-enterprise employing fewer than five employees. It was interesting to note that 16 respondents indicated that they would want to be a large enterprise employing more than 200 employees and only seven respondents indicated that they would want to have no employees. These findings may suggest that the respondents want to contribute to employment creation.

The respondents generally regarded the statements about the factors that contribute to entrepreneurial success as extremely important (see Table 5). For example, 75 per cent of the respondents regarded doing the kind of job that they really enjoy as extremely important and

similarly, 69 per cent of the respondents considered keeping the business alive as extremely important.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary results of this pilot study reveal that the young people have entrepreneurial intentions and support research (Lewis & Massey, 2003), which suggests that more young people are viewing entrepreneurship and self-employment as a work option. This is supported by some results that show, for example, that at least half of the respondents have participated in some form of entrepreneurial activities and some respondents have also owned a small business or been self-employed. However, further data analysis will help to answer the question of what relationships exist between the various constructs of entrepreneurial intention and what the implication is for developing youth entrepreneurship in South Africa.

The limitations of this study include the small sample, very limited representation from other population groups and limited geographic focus, which thus does not allow for generalisations to be made about entrepreneurial intentions of South African youth. Furthermore, the current paper does not differentiate between different groups (e.g. unemployed youth, young unemployed graduates, young paid employees etc). In addition, this paper's analysis is limited to frequency distributions and does not address any relationships or correlations which would begin to present a more robust analysis of the findings. However, the contribution of this pilot study is that it begins to focus on the entrepreneurial intentions of young South Africans and that extends the usability of the instrument to beyond final year students, as it includes other youth groups highlighted earlier.

While the study is a pilot study, it does begin to raise questions which may have implications for policy makers, entrepreneurship educators and youth development practitioners. Firstly, for example, the respondents indicate a variety of entrepreneurial activities that they have participated in; this then raises questions of, for example, whether entrepreneurship education needs to be limited to formal academic courses or is a blend of approaches required, as well as who needs the training and when it should be provided. Secondly, a high number of respondents in this pilot study indicated that they had considered becoming an entrepreneur and that if they had the opportunity and resources, they would start a business. However, the findings suggest that overall, the respondents do not know much about sources of assistance for entrepreneurs; thus, the question is what needs to be done to improve this situation. Thirdly, given the entrepreneurial objectives of the respondents of this study, there are implications from a policy, support and development perspective. Questions need to be asked and addressed as to what needs to be done to assist young people to become job creators. Thus, from these few examples and limited statistical analysis, we can begin to see that a number of issues may emerge which would need to be addressed accordingly.

Thus, to address the limitations of the pilot study, as well as develop a better understanding of differences in entrepreneurial intentions (if any) among the different groups (tertiary students, unemployed youth, young unemployed graduates, young paid employees etc), a more extensive study will be required. It is recommended that in terms of data collection methods in the wider study, both an online survey and a paper-based survey should be used. This is largely driven by the reality that not everyone has access to the Internet to be able to participate in the survey. In addition, given the broader scope of the target population for the more extensive study, it is practical as well as cheaper to provide the option of individuals participating online. However, both approaches have shortcomings and it is hoped that this

dual approach will offset the shortcomings of each one. Further refinement of the instrument is needed to facilitate completion and capture of the important data, namely the personal data questions as well as those from a presentation perspective. In addition, while this study included some self-employed youth, it is envisioned that the larger study will not include this category and that a different instrument should rather be developed to accommodate that category of youth.

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Table 1: Entrepreneurial attitude and intentions (Percentage)

Statement	Total Disagreement			Neutral			Total Agreement
Starting a firm and keeping it viable would be easy for me	8.3	7.3	16.7	27.1	21.9	7.3	9.4
I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur	11.5	1.0	4.2	13.5	8.3	18.8	39.6
I believe I would be completely unable to start a business	57.3	10.4	8.3	3.1	7.3	3.1	8.3
I will make every effort to start and run my own business	7.3	2.1	4.2	3.1	14.6	23.0	43.8
I am able to control the creation process of a new business	6.3	1.0	7.3	16.7	25.0	20.9	23
I have serious doubts about ever starting my own business	10.4	17.7	5.2	9.4	9.4	6.25	7.3
If I had the opportunity and resources, I would love to start a business	4.2	1.0	2.1	1.0	6.3	11.5	73.0
I am determined to create a business venture in the future	4.2	1.0	4.2	5.2	10.4	17.8	56.3
If I tried to start a business, I would have a high chance of being successful	2.1	3.1	2.1	11.5	17.7	25	37.5
Being an entrepreneur would give me great satisfaction	3.1	2.1	1.0	7.3	14.6	17.8	54.2
It would be very difficult for me to develop a business idea	34.4	15.6	7.3	15.6	10.4	7.3	7.3
My professional goal is to be an entrepreneur	7.3	1.0	9.4	13.5	14.6	11.5	41.7
Being an entrepreneur implies more advantages than disadvantages to me	7.3	2.1	4.2	11.5	17.8	15.6	41.7
I have a very low intention of ever starting a business	51.0	10.4	7.3	9.4	6.3	6.3	6.3
I know all about the practical details needed to start a business	10.4	6.3	7.3	18.8	23.0	11.5	21.9

Table 2: Perceptions about social and cultural values on entrepreneurship (Percentage)

Statement	Total Disagreement			Neutral			Total Agreement
My immediate family values entrepreneurial activity above other activities and careers	8.3	3.1	9.4	23.0	18.8	12.5	24.0
The culture in my country is highly favourable towards entrepreneurial activity	7.3	10.4	6.3	20.9	18.8	12.5	23.0
The entrepreneur's role in the economy is generally undervalued in my country	21.9	7.3	12.5	19.8	19.8	9.4	11.5
My friends value entrepreneurial activity above other activities and careers	10.4	8.3	10.4	13.5	16.7	12.5	21.8
Most people in my country consider it unacceptable to be an entrepreneur	29.1	15.6	14.6	24.0	23.0	3.1	5.2
In my country, entrepreneurial activity is considered to be worthwhile, despite the risks	3.1	5.2	7.3	12.5	7.3	15.6	33.3
My colleagues value entrepreneurial activity above other activities and careers	5.2	5.2	15.6	18.8	17.7	15.6	20.8

Table 3: Self-assessment of entrepreneurial skills (Percentage)

Statement	No aptitude at all			Neutral			Very high aptitude
Recognition of opportunity	2.1	3.1	3.1	15.6	24.0	23.0	28.1
Creativity	1.0	2.1	2.1	8.3	20.9	29.2	35.4
Problem-solving skills	2.1	1.0	4.2	6.3	13.5	35.4	36.5
Leadership and communication skills	2.1	0.0	1.0	4.2	13.5	37.5	41.2
Development of new products and services	2.1	5.2	6.3	13.5	25.0	17.8	29.2
Networking skills and making professional contacts	2.1	3.1	2.1	14.6	25.0	19.8	32.3

Table 4: Knowledge about sources of assistance (Percentage)

Statement	No knowledge			Neutral			Complete knowledge
Private associations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce)	13.5	18.8	9.4	13.5	17.7	7.3	16.7
Public support bodies (e.g. the DTI, SEDA, Khula, National Youth Development Agency etc)	6.3	4.2	6.3	16.7	17.7	18.8	28.1
Specific training for young entrepreneurs	16.7	11.5	12.5	14.6	17.7	9.4	14.6
Loans in specially favourable terms	16.7	12.5	13.5	16.7	17.7	14.6	6.3
Technical aid for business start-ups	16.7	10.4	18.8	17.7	12.5	14.6	5.2
Business centres	17.7	10.4	11.5	19.8	15.6	9.4	12.5

Table 5: Entrepreneurial objectives (Percentage)

Statement	Not at all important			Neutral			Extremely important
Competing effectively in world markets	1.0	1.0	5.2	10.4	15.7	20.8	42.7
Reaching a high level of income	0.0	0.0	1.0	7.3	23.0	21.9	44.8
Doing the kind of job I really enjoy	1.0	0.0	0.0	3.1	7.3	10.4	75.0
Achieving social recognition	2.1	0.0	3.1	9.4	23.0	18.8	40.7
Helping to solve the problems of my community	0.0	0.0	1.0	6.3	18.8	16.7	55.2
Keeping the business alive	1.0	0.0	1.0	3.1	4.2	14.6	68.8
Keeping a path of positive growth	0.0	1.0	1.0	3.1	6.3	14.6	71.9