

Youth, Unemployment, and New Ventures: Exploring Entrepreneurial Intentions among Bangladeshi University Students

Rebeka Sultana Chowdhury

Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, North East University Bangladesh, Sylhet, Bangladesh.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100330>

Received: 24 November 2025; Accepted: 30 November 2025; Published: 10 December 2025

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing entrepreneurial intention among Bangladeshi university students. A descriptive quantitative research design was used, and primary data were obtained by using a self-structured questionnaire administered to 100 students from various disciplines. Twenty-eight items were measured in a five-point Likert scale for this instrument, and the dimensions included six factors that are entrepreneurial awareness and knowledge, entrepreneurial attitude and interest, motivational factors, barriers to entrepreneurship, opportunities, support and environment, and entrepreneurial intention. Reliability analysis indicated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.785$). The findings reveal that students have a moderate level of entrepreneurial awareness and knowledge, whereas they showed strong positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship, high motivation (particularly a desire for independence and financial autonomy), and relatively high entrepreneurial intention and confidence. At the same time, they also remark substantial barriers, especially financial constraints, fear of failure, lack of practical knowledge, and bureaucratic problems, together with weak institutional and policy support in terms of university education, government programs, mentorship, and investor access. Overall, the results indicate that students are psychologically prepared and motivated to engage in entrepreneurship, but the surrounding entrepreneurial ecosystem remains underdeveloped. The study highlights the need for more practice-oriented entrepreneurship education, improved access to finance, and stronger university–government–industry collaboration to be able to make the most out of the entrepreneurial potential of young Bangladeshis.

Keywords–Entrepreneurial intention; University students; Bangladesh; Entrepreneurship education

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has seen a remarkable growth in the economy during recent decades, but the youth unemployment continues to be a challenge. According to the World Bank (2021), a higher proportion of the young population aged 15–24 is still unemployed or underemployed, even though more access to higher education has been provided. This disparity of educational level and labor market absorption brought up the problems of economic inefficiency and social issues. Entrepreneurship has been identified as a possible way to solve this problem, not only by creating jobs for experienced graduates, but also through stimulating innovation, economic development and social value creation (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2023/2024). Universities as a source of knowledge and innovation also have an important role in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset, attitude, and intentions among students (Huq, Huque, & Rana, 2016; Ferdousi, Rahman, & Qamruzzaman, 2025).

Entrepreneurial intention evolves as a conscious state of mind that leads to entrepreneurial behavior (Bird, 1988) and is influenced by various factors. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is a useful framework for understanding how attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms collectively shape entrepreneurial intentions. Knowledge of entrepreneurship and attitude towards an entrepreneurial career, motivational constructs, perceived barriers, and availability of support and opportunities can predict whether students are more likely to get from intention to action (Arokiasamy, Maheshwari, & Kha, 2022; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2024).

Previous studies carried out in Bangladesh and other developing countries also noted the significant contribution of university education, mentorship for entrepreneurship development, family support to entrepreneurial intentions, and access to financial resources (Hossain et al., 2023; Shahriar et al., 2024; Su et al., 2021). Nevertheless, studies may examine isolated determinants or aspects of entrepreneurship, restricting a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between cognitive, attitudinal, motivational, environmental, and structural factors as they affect students' intentions. Furthermore, gender, age, level of education, department, and family business background can moderate these relationships; thus, context-specific studies are important (Huq et al., 2016; Mony et al., 2025).

The study fills this research gap by examining the complete drivers of entrepreneurial intention through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire covers six key elements, including entrepreneurial awareness and knowledge, entrepreneurial attitude and interest, motivational factors, barriers to entrepreneurship, opportunities, support, and environment, and entrepreneurial intention. The research, by analyzing the relative importance of these factors, can provide evidence base from which universities, policymakers, and others interested in encouraging entrepreneurship as a viable career route might engage to support tackling the issue of youth unemployment in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Awareness and Knowledge

Awareness and practical knowledge regarding entrepreneurship (e.g., what is Entrepreneurship, how to establish and manage a small business operation, financial management skills, sources of finance, media use with entrepreneurial content) can help to develop the realistic intention. The evidence shows that understanding and exposure to entrepreneurial content improve perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy, which are determinants of intention in Ajzen's model (Arokiasamy et al., 2022; Ningrum, Andayani, & Dwiputri, 2025). Research in Bangladesh has indicated that students possessing higher levels of entrepreneurship knowledge and training are more inclined to consider becoming an entrepreneur (Huq et al., 2016; Ferdousi, Rahman & Qamruzzaman, 2025). The items included in the questionnaire (e.g., startup operation knowledge, financial skills, funding sources awareness, and following entrepreneurship media) are an indication of this concept and correlate with the cognitive precursors of intention (Mujtaba et al., 2025).

Entrepreneurial Attitude and Interest

Attitude—value activity (positive and negative judgments of entrepreneurship), and intrinsic interest (the pleasure individuals derive from autonomy, their willingness to take risks and the degree to which they believe that 'entrepreneurship is a worthwhile endeavour' in terms of benefit for society) are major determinants of intention (Ajzen, 1991; Bird, 1988). Evidence from meta-analyses and reviews showed that attitude is one of the most stable predictors of entrepreneurial intention across countries (Arokiasamy et al., 2022; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2024). In Bangladesh, students who perceive entrepreneurship as satisfying and enjoy being their own boss demonstrate higher intentions (Hossain et al., 2023; Shahriar et al., 2024). Items (after graduation interest, perception of fulfillment, desire for autonomy, the risk tolerance level and entrepreneurial social value) tap into attitudinal and affective dimensions aligned with previously defined entrepreneur motivation.

Motivational Factors

Motivational Factors include push factors (such as dissatisfaction with a job, unemployment) and pull factors (desire for freedom or independence, financial freedom, wanting to commercialize ideas from research or development, and social encouragement). The former study found that financial motives and the desire for independence are strong motivators, while contextual push factors (limited formal-sector opportunities) often urge necessity entrepreneurship (Mujtaba et al., 2025; Ye & Yee, 2023). Country-specific work reveals that family support and the presence of role models or family business background could enhance motivation in Bangladesh (Huq et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2023). Section D items (independence, financial freedom, dissatisfaction with job, desire to implement ideas, encouragement from friends/family) are personal and contextual drivers of intention development.

Barriers to Entrepreneurship

Perceived barriers- capital constraints, fear of failure, lack of prior experience, administrative complexity, and job security preference —deflate entrepreneurial intention by constraining perceived feasibility while inflating perceived risk (Pham & Pham, 2024; Ningrum et al., 2025). Empirical evidence from developing countries, including Bangladesh, highlights that the lack of access to finance and inadequate hands-on experience are two major constraints in this regard (Shahriar et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2023). Section E explicitly measures these barriers by modelling them as negative predictors of intention, which allows differentiation between structural constraints and internal dispositions.

Opportunities, Support, and Environment

The supportive university ecosystems (courses, practical training, mentorship, and networks) and positive institutional policies (government programs and incentives) not only influence students' opportunity perception but also lower the cost of venturing while reducing the uncertainty that is associated with new venture creation (Su et al., 2021; Maheshwari, Kha & Arokiasamy, 2023). Recent studies in Bangladesh reveal that university support and entrepreneurship programs act as a mediating factor between intent and subsequent nascent entrepreneurship (Mony et al., 2025; Ferdousi et al., 2025). Section F includes variables such as university training, mentorship availability, government support perception, perceived market opportunity and access to mentors/investors—factors that have also been consistently found to increase perceived behavioral control and intention in prior work (Mujtaba et al., 2025; Liu, Alias, & Hamid, 2025).

Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention is measured in section G (taking behaviour-specific preparation, persistence despite obstacles, confidence under support). Theoretical and empirical literature present intention as the proximal antecedent to entrepreneurial behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Bird, 1988), and systematic reviews report predictive efficacy of intention measures future entrepreneurial activity (Arokiasamy et al., 2022; Xanthopoulou & Sahinidis, 2024). Studies conducted in Bangladesh reveal that intention is determined by not only individual-level constructs (i.e., knowledge, attitude, and motivation), but also by contextual supports (Shahriar et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2023). By measuring preparatory behaviors (such as saving, skill development) along with attitudinal intent, a connection to the probable future course of action can be more firmly established.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the variables affecting the entrepreneurial intention of university students have been measured. That's why descriptive(quantitative) research has been conducted to gain initial insight into the factors that can affect the entrepreneurial intention of university students. Primary data were gathered using a self-structured questionnaire. Two sections constructed the questionnaire. The demographic profile of respondents is shown in the first section. The second part of the study was component analysis, in which six criteria were identified as the substance that was used to measure university students' entrepreneurial intention. This part generated twenty-eight questions from these six factors. A preliminary study was carried out on 10 respondents to test the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire. For carrying out the survey, Convenience sampling method was used to select the participants, ensuring that the sample represented various academic disciplines and year groups. A total of 130 questionnaires were sent to university students in Sylhet city, but after excluding the questionnaires that had missing data, 100 questionnaires became available for further analysis. Participants gave their feedback through a five-point Likert scale in the study. The respondents marked up the points that, in their view, are the strongest and most reasonable. Participants are asked to indicate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with these statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree".

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The following table exhibits the respondents' demographic profile.

Table-1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Categories	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Gender	Male	51.0	51.0
	Female	49.0	100.0
Age	Below 20 years	17.0	17.0
	20-23 years	58.0	75.0
	24-27 years	25.0	100.0
Study Level	Undergraduate	98.0	98.0
	Graduate	1.0	99.0
	Postgraduate	1.0	100.0
Department	Business Administration	47.0	47.0
	Law & Justice	22.0	69.0
	Computer Science & Engineering	17.0	86.0
	English	14.0	100.0
Family Business Background	Yes	48.0	48.0
	No	52.0	100.0

The table summarizes the demographic profile of the respondents, with a nearly equal gender distribution (51% male and 49% female). The majority of the participants were between the ages of 20-23 (58%), followed by those aged 24–27 (25%) and below 20 (17%). The sample represented largely undergraduate students (98%), and only 1% each at the graduate and postgraduate levels. 47% of the respondents were from Business Administration, followed by Law & Justice (22%), Computer and Engineering Science (17%), and English (14%). 48% of the participants indicated that they had a family business background, while 52% did not.

Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	No. of items
.785	.794	28

The questionnaires included 28 questions in this study. Reliability analysis indicates that the measurement scale demonstrates an acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .785$ and slightly higher for standardized items = 0.794). Both are higher than the generally accepted cutoff of 0.70, suggesting that the 28 items employed in this study are reliably measuring the intended constructs. Therefore, the questionnaire used in this study was reliable for collecting information.

Factor-Wise Descriptive Statistics of Students' Entrepreneurial Orientation

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Awareness, Attitude, and Motivation

Factor	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Entrepreneurial Awareness and Knowledge	Understanding Entrepreneurship Meaning	3.73	1.033	1.068
	Business Startup Knowledge	3.58	.987	.973
	Financial Management Skills	3.39	.973	.947
	Startup Funding Awareness	3.41	.986	.972
	Entrepreneurship Content Engagement	3.76	.933	.871
Entrepreneurial Attitude and Interest	Entrepreneurial Career Interest	3.98	.804	.646
	Fulfilling Career Option	4.05	.845	.715
	Preference for Independence	4.14	.964	.930
	Risk-Taking Attitude	3.91	.911	.830
	Societal Contribution View	3.96	1.063	1.130
Motivational Factors	Desire Independence & Self-Control	4.19	.907	.822
	Superior Financial Autonomy	4.14	.921	.849
	Job Dissatisfaction Factor	3.86	.995	.990
	Innovation Implementation Drive	3.94	1.043	1.087
	Social Support Influence	3.97	1.150	1.322

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of some factors influencing entrepreneurship, including barriers, opportunities, and entrepreneurial intentions, by indicating the means, standard deviations, and variance of factors.

The results provide several key aspects of the entrepreneurial perceptions and intentions of students. First, the factor Entrepreneurial Awareness and Knowledge suggest that students have a moderate level of knowledge on such basic entrepreneurial concepts. The mean scores show a moderate understanding of what entrepreneurship means (3.73), with fairly good knowledge about how to start a business (3.58) and some knowledge of financial management skills necessary when starting up businesses in general, including managing how to finance the startup process (3.39; 3.41, respectively). Respondents are familiar with basic entrepreneurial concepts but may need deeper practical exposure. Their highest mean score for this factor, engagement with entrepreneurship-related content (3.76), indicates that there is an enthusiasm for learning despite not having enough practical understanding.

The factor Entrepreneurial Attitude and Interest indicate a strong positive mindset toward entrepreneurship among students, with consistently high mean scores across items. Preference for independence (4.14) and perceiving entrepreneurship as a fulfilling career option (4.05) reflect a positive attitude toward self-

employment. Additionally, high ratings for career interest (3.98), risk-taking attitude (3.91), and the belief that entrepreneurship contributes to society (3.96) indicate that students view entrepreneurship as both personally rewarding and socially valuable.

With respect to Motivational Factors, the data suggest that motivational influences appear as strong predictors of entrepreneurial intentions. The desire for independence and self-control (4.19) and the expectation of financial autonomy (4.14) scored the highest within this factor, suggesting that personal freedom and financial prospects are key motivators. Other factors, such as dissatisfaction with traditional jobs (3.86), a drive to innovate (3.94), and social support from peers or family (3.97), play an important role too, highlighting a combination of personal, economic, and social motivators.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Influencing Factors and Support Systems of Barriers, Opportunities, and Entrepreneurial Intentions

Factor	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Barriers to Entrepreneurship	Financial Constraint Barrier	3.84	1.108	1.227
	Failure Concerns	3.44	1.192	1.421
	Practical Knowledge Deficiency	3.52	1.132	1.282
	Bureaucracy and Corruption	3.63	1.089	1.185
	Job Security Preference	3.34	1.121	1.257
Opportunities, Support, and Environment	University Training Adequacy	2.99	1.330	1.768
	Mentorship Network Access	3.06	1.286	1.653
	Government Support Programs	2.91	1.386	1.921
	Market Opportunity Awareness	3.52	1.078	1.161
	Investor Accessibility Ease	3.30	1.202	1.444
Entrepreneurial Intention	Business Preparation Effort	3.97	1.068	1.141
	Persistence Under Challenge	3.80	.943	.889
	Startup Confidence Level	4.19	.861	.741

Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics of various factors influencing entrepreneurial awareness, attitude, and motivation, including their mean values, standard deviations, and variances.

The factor Barriers to Entrepreneurship indicates that students face several notable obstacles to engaging in entrepreneurship. Financial constraints (3.84) emerged as the most prominent barrier, followed by practical knowledge gaps (3.52) and bureaucratic challenges, including corruption (3.63). Fear of failure (3.44) and a preference for job security (3.34) further indicate that risk aversion and uncertainty continue to hinder entrepreneurial decision-making among students.

The factor Opportunities, Support, and Environment highlight a perceived inadequacy in institutional and ecosystem support. Students rated opportunities and external support relatively lower compared to other factors. University training adequacy (2.99) and government support programs (2.91) received the lowest mean scores, indicating dissatisfaction with institutional and policy-level support. Access to mentorship networks (3.06) and investor availability (3.30) were also rated moderately low, pointing to a need for more ecosystem support. Market opportunity awareness (3.52) was the only item displaying a relatively higher score, but still moderate, thus depicting that students are aware of potential markets but do not have the structures to exploit them.

Lastly, despite some barriers and limited institutional support, the factor Entrepreneurial Intention reflects strong determination and optimism among students regarding entrepreneurship. High mean scores for startup confidence (4.19), business preparation efforts (3.97), and persistence under challenges (3.80) imply that many respondents are determined as well as positive in the pursuit of being entrepreneurs. The results indicate a strong positive relationship between inner motivation and positive attitude and students' level of preparedness for entrepreneurship activity.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the factors shaping entrepreneurial intention among Bangladeshi university students and found that, although students possess only moderate entrepreneurial awareness and knowledge, they display strong positive attitudes, high motivation, and strong intentions toward starting a business. At the same time, financial constraints, fear of failure, lack of practical experience, and weak institutional and policy support—particularly in terms of university education, government programs, mentorship on how to launch a start-up, and gain access to investors—act as significant barriers to transforming intention into action. These findings suggest that the main challenge is not a lack of interest or willingness among students, but rather an underdeveloped entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is high time for universities and policymakers to focus on more practical entrepreneurship education, targeted financial and mentoring support, and deregulations to realize the potential of Bangladeshi youth in creating a vibrant start-up ecosystem, while tackling the widespread problems of unemployment and underemployment.

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