

Influence of Self-Efficacy on Entrepreneurial Intentions among Undergraduate Students in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have found out that the precursor of entrepreneurial behavior among potential entrepreneurs is entrepreneurial intention hence the attention of this study. The government of Kenya has for a long time struggled with the bulging number of unemployed graduates and the solution to this can be explored in entrepreneurship development intentions and realization among the youth majority of whom are undergraduates. Many studies on entrepreneurial intention among undergraduates have focused mainly on developed countries and less on developing nations like Kenya. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to bridge the gap by investigating influence of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate students in Kenya. The study was anchored on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior that views behavioral intent as an immediate determinant of planned behavior. The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate for capturing data at a single point in time from a large population. The study had a population of 40,000 students from the selected university students out of which, 1% (400) was picked as the study sample size through a multistage sampling technique. Of these 336 students responded to the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Inferential statistics were used in the analysis. The students generally reported high levels of self-efficacy and strong intentions to engage in entrepreneurship as a career pathway. The study found that self-efficacy positively impact entrepreneurial intentions. The study recommends that programs aimed at building students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy should be prioritized. Students should also be encouraged to undertake small-scale business projects during their studies.

Keywords: Self-Efficacy, Entrepreneurial Intentions, Undergraduate Students

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a critical driver of innovation, job creation, and economic development across the globe. In emerging economies such as Kenya, entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in addressing unemployment and enhancing economic resilience. The decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities is, however, influenced by an individual's psychological readiness and belief in their capability to execute entrepreneurial tasks successfully. This psychological factor, self-efficacy has been widely acknowledged as one of the most significant predictors of entrepreneurial intention (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000; Zhao, Seibert & Hills, 2005).

Entrepreneurial intentions refer to a person's conscious state of mind that directs attention, experience, and behavior toward starting a new business (Krueger et al., 2000). According to Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), entrepreneurial intentions are shaped by three major components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Self-efficacy represents the perceived behavioral control component within TPB, it reflects the extent to which an individual believes in their ability to perform tasks necessary for launching and managing a business. Therefore, individuals with higher self-efficacy are more confident in handling entrepreneurial challenges and are consequently more likely to develop strong entrepreneurial intentions (Bandura, 1997; Chen, Greene & Crick, 1998).

The Concept of Self-Efficacy in Entrepreneurship

The concept of self-efficacy was first introduced by Bandura (1977) as part of his social cognitive theory, emphasizing that human behavior is shaped by the interaction between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. In entrepreneurship, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to mobilize the cognitive and motivational resources necessary to perform entrepreneurial roles successfully (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994). High entrepreneurial self-efficacy enhances perseverance, resilience, and opportunity recognition, which are critical for successful business creation (Zhao et al., 2005).

Empirical studies consistently support the link between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention. Krueger and Brazeal (1994) identified self-efficacy as a catalyst for entrepreneurial potential, while Chen et al. (1998) found that students with higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy were more inclined to start their own businesses. Similarly, Liñán and Chen (2009) concluded that perceived behavioral control, closely tied to self-efficacy, significantly influences entrepreneurial intention across different cultural contexts.

Self-Efficacy and the Entrepreneurial Context in Kenya

In Kenya, the high rate of graduate unemployment underscores the urgency of understanding factors that motivate university students toward entrepreneurship. According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, youth unemployment among individuals aged 18–34 years stands at approximately 38.9%, translating to more than five million jobless youths. With about 800,000 graduates entering the labor market each year, only a fraction secure formal employment (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2023). These statistics reveal the importance of fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and self-belief among young people as a strategy for self-employment and job creation.

Despite growing government and institutional support for entrepreneurship education, many university graduates in Kenya still exhibit low entrepreneurial uptake. Research suggests that this gap may stem less from lack of knowledge and more from low entrepreneurial self-efficacy, the confidence to act on one's business ideas (Muthee & Thomas, 2020). Without a strong belief in their capabilities, students may hesitate to translate entrepreneurial awareness into intention or action, despite possessing adequate technical knowledge (Linan et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding the role of self-efficacy among Kenyan university students can help policymakers and educators design interventions that strengthen confidence and competence in entrepreneurship.

Statement of the problem

Entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a crucial engine for economic growth, job creation, and innovation in developing countries such as Kenya. However, despite numerous policy efforts and educational programs aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among young people, the rate of business start-ups by university graduates remains relatively low. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), youth unemployment stands at approximately 38.9%, with university graduates forming a significant proportion of the jobless population. Each year, thousands of graduates enter the labor market with limited opportunities for formal employment, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen entrepreneurial motivation and capacity as a sustainable alternative for job creation.

Although entrepreneurship education has been integrated into many Kenyan universities, the translation of knowledge into entrepreneurial action remains weak. For instance, a study by Mugambi and Miriti (2021) at Chuka University found that while a majority of students express interest in entrepreneurship, only a small fraction proceed to establish business ventures after graduation. This gap between intention and action suggests that factors beyond education, particularly psychological factors such as self-efficacy, may play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes.

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and achieve desired outcomes, has been identified in several international studies as a key predictor of entrepreneurial intention (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994; Zhao et al., 2005). In the Kenyan context, however, empirical evidence remains

limited. A recent comparative study involving Moi, Mount Kenya, and Catholic universities revealed a strong correlation between self-efficacy ($r = 0.618$) and entrepreneurial intention, suggesting that students who have greater confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities are more likely to pursue business ventures. Nevertheless, the extent to which self-efficacy influences entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduates across different institutional and socio-economic contexts in Kenya has not been adequately examined.

Understanding the influence of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intention is essential for designing effective interventions that empower students to translate entrepreneurial interest into action. Strengthening self-belief could enhance persistence, creativity, and risk-taking, critical attributes for venture creation and sustainability. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the influence of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate students in Kenya, with the goal of providing insights to guide curriculum development, policy formulation, and institutional support systems that promote youth entrepreneurship.

Objective

To determine the influence of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate students in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), provides the foundational framework for understanding the determinants of entrepreneurial intentions. According to the theory, human behavior is guided by three key antecedents: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude reflects an individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing a given behavior, while subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure from significant others to perform or avoid the behavior. Perceived behavioral control, on the other hand, represents an individual's belief in their ability to execute the behavior successfully under given circumstances. These three components collectively shape a person's intention, which is the immediate precursor to behavior. In the context of entrepreneurship, TPB posits that an individual's decision to start a business is intentional, deliberate, and influenced by personal attitudes, social environment, and confidence in one's ability to perform entrepreneurial tasks.

Within the TPB framework, perceived behavioral control is conceptually linked to self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's confidence in their capacity to undertake entrepreneurial activities (Bandura, 1997; Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). Self-efficacy therefore acts as a psychological driver that shapes the perceived feasibility of entrepreneurship. When students believe they possess the skills, knowledge, and resources to start and manage a business, their perceived control increases, strengthening their entrepreneurial intentions. Conversely, low self-efficacy can weaken these intentions, even when attitudes and social norms are favorable. This makes self-efficacy a critical variable for understanding why some individuals translate entrepreneurial awareness into action while others do not.

Empirical Literature Review

Self-efficacy has been defined as a person's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. It's about confidence in one's own skills and capabilities to achieve desired outcomes and influence events. It should be noted that it is not a fixed personality trait but rather a belief that can vary across different situations and domains in an individual's life and are therefore task specific. Self-efficacy is not just about skills but also believing one can effectively use the skills. This belief influences how people approach challenges, how much effort they put in and how long they persevere in the face of setbacks. Entrepreneurship is characterized with uncertainties and incongruence and thus the need for self-efficacy. Consequently, self-efficacy is considered to be one of the most consistent predictors of entrepreneurial intention which precedes entrepreneurship. According to Bandura's theory, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to take initiative and persist through challenges. A study in Zambia showed that all five dimensions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy were positively and significantly related to entrepreneurial intention (Wang & Mwiya, 2020). In Uganda, Oyugi (2014)

emphasized that self-efficacy is crucial for fostering entrepreneurial mindsets. In a study carried out by Maina (2010) found out that self-efficacy is a key mediator between college experiences and entrepreneurial intention. Students with prior exposure to business environments (family businesses) were found to have higher confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. While Kimathi et al. (2020) study found out that trainer quality and mentorship in TVET institutions significantly boosted students’ self-belief and entrepreneurial readiness.

According to a study by Wu and Wu, (2008) entrepreneurial intention is the driving force behind the creation of new ventures Douglas & Fitzsimmon (2008) study on the other hand identified entrepreneurial intention as the action of an individual’s attitudes toward the outcomes of that actions and individual’s self-efficacy. Other entrepreneurship scholars have indicated a strong relationship between the entrepreneurial intention and the abilities to recognize and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003). Entrepreneurial intentions are said to be central to understanding and adhering to entrepreneurial process as well as being an immediate determinant of entrepreneurial behavior (Van Gelderen et al. 2008 ; Pihie, 2009) leading to the conclusion that entrepreneurial activity is predictable through accurate study of entrepreneurial intentions.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised 40,000 undergraduate students enrolled in selected programs across selected public and private universities in Kenya. The students were chosen because they are at a critical decision-making stage regarding career paths, including entrepreneurship.

A multistage sampling technique was employed. Stage 1 was the purposive selection of five universities (both public and private) across different regions of Kenya. Stage 2 was stratified sampling based on faculties/schools. Stage 3 was simple random sampling of students within each stratum. A sample size of 1% targeting approximately 400 respondents was used to ensure generalizability and statistical power.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Content validity was ensured through expert review by entrepreneurship scholars. Pilot testing was conducted with 30 students from a non-sampled university. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, with all constructs achieving $\alpha \geq 0.70$.

Data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, and frequencies. Inferential statistics included simple linear regression analysis to test the influence of the independent variable (self-efficacy) on entrepreneurial intention.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the target population, of which 336 were fully completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 84 percent. This high response rate indicates that the findings are based on a representative sample of the study population and can provide reliable insights into the drivers of entrepreneurial intentions among undergraduate students in Kenya.

Descriptives on Self-Efficacy

The respondents’ level of agreement on various statements related to self-efficacy are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptives on Self-Efficacy

	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std. Deviation
I believe I can successfully start my own business	1.5	0	5.4	39.6	53.6	4.44	.73

I can develop a business plan on my own.	2.4	0.6	8.3	47.9	40.8	4.24	.820
I feel confident solving unexpected problems in a business.	1.8	0.9	11.3	50.9	35.1	4.17	.797
I can identify and seize entrepreneurial opportunities.	1.8	0	9.2	53.9	35.1	4.21	.751
Aggregate score						4.27	.774

The descriptive results indicate that students generally reported high levels of self-efficacy, as reflected in the aggregate mean of 4.27 (SD = 0.774). This suggests that most respondents were confident in their ability to start a business, design business plans, solve problems, and identify opportunities. The highest-rated item was “I believe I can successfully start my own business” (M = 4.44, SD = 0.730), showing that a majority of students trust in their entrepreneurial potential. Relatively lower but still strong mean scores were noted in the areas of problem-solving (M = 4.17) and opportunity recognition (M = 4.21), indicating that while confidence is generally high, some students may still perceive challenges in translating knowledge into action. The relatively small standard deviations across all items reflect consistent agreement among students, further reinforcing the importance of self-belief in shaping entrepreneurial behavior.

These findings align with the theoretical and empirical literature on the role of self-efficacy in entrepreneurial intentions. Bandura’s theory underscores that individuals with high self-efficacy are more resilient and proactive in navigating uncertain situations, qualities that are essential in entrepreneurship. Empirical evidence across contexts supports this view. For instance, Wang and Mwiya (2020) found that all dimensions of self-efficacy significantly predict entrepreneurial intention in Zambia, while Oyugi (2014) highlighted its role in fostering entrepreneurial mindsets in Uganda. Similarly, Maina (2010) noted that self-efficacy mediates between college experiences and entrepreneurial intention, with students exposed to family businesses developing higher confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities. Kimathi et al. (2020) further demonstrated that quality training and mentorship enhance students’ entrepreneurial readiness by boosting their self-belief. Taken together, these findings suggest that self-efficacy is not just an internal trait but a malleable belief shaped by learning, mentorship, and prior experiences, making it a cornerstone for nurturing entrepreneurial intentions among students.

Descriptives on Entrepreneurial Intention

The respondents’ level of agreement on various statements related to entrepreneurial intention are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptives on Entrepreneurial Intention

	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std. Deviation
I intend to start my own business after graduation.	1.8	0.9	8	46.1	43.2	4.28	.795
I am seriously considering entrepreneurship as a career option.	2.4	1.5	19.9	41.1	35.1	4.05	.908
I frequently think about business ideas.	2.1	0.9	8.9	47.9	40.2	4.23	.814
I am determined to create a business in the near future	1.8	0	7.1	45.5	45.5	4.33	.762
Aggregate score						4.22	.820

The results show that most students demonstrated strong intentions to engage in entrepreneurship as a career pathway. The highest level of agreement was recorded on the statement that respondents are determined to create a business in the near future with a mean of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 0.762, indicating strong resolve and focus on entrepreneurial pursuits. Closely following was the intention to start a business after graduation with a mean of 4.28 and standard deviation of 0.795, which reflects readiness to transition directly from academic training into entrepreneurial activity. The frequent generation of business ideas also scored highly with a mean of 4.23 and standard deviation of 0.814, pointing to an active entrepreneurial mindset and innovative orientation among students. The lowest rated but still positively skewed response related to seriously considering entrepreneurship as a career option, which had a mean of 4.05 and standard deviation of 0.908. This finding suggests that while many students strongly embrace entrepreneurship, a section of them may still weigh their options due to factors such as limited resources, risk perceptions, or external labor market opportunities.

The findings indicate that respondents generally exhibit strong entrepreneurial intentions, as reflected by the high aggregate mean score of 4.22. A large proportion of students intend to start businesses after graduation, frequently think about business ideas, and show determination to create ventures in the near future. This suggests that entrepreneurial intention is already well-established among the respondents and can be seen as a predictor of actual entrepreneurial behavior. These results align with the argument by Wu and Wu (2008) that entrepreneurial intention is the main driving force behind the creation of new ventures. Similarly, Douglas and Fitzsimmon (2008) emphasized that entrepreneurial intention is shaped by self-efficacy and personal attitudes, both of which were reflected in the high levels of self-belief and confidence observed among students in this study. The positive results also resonate with Peterman and Kennedy (2003), who noted that entrepreneurial intentions are strongly linked to the ability to recognize and exploit opportunities. The fact that many respondents frequently think about business ideas and see themselves starting businesses demonstrates opportunity-seeking behavior, which is a critical entrepreneurial trait.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

The results of the simple linear regression analysis on the influence of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intention among undergraduate students in Kenya are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.703 ^a	.494	.492	.50170
a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Efficacy				

The regression results demonstrate that self-efficacy is a strong and statistically significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention among students. The model explains 49.4% of the variance in entrepreneurial intention ($R^2 = 0.494$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.492$), which indicates that nearly half of the changes in students' entrepreneurial intentions can be attributed to differences in their levels of self-efficacy.

Table 4: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	81.939	1	81.939	325.538	.000 ^b
	Residual	84.069	334	.252		
	Total	166.009	335			
a. Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial Intention						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Efficacy						

The ANOVA results ($F = 325.538, p < 0.001$) indicate that the regression model is statistically significant. This means that Self-Efficacy, as a predictor, reliably explains variation in students’ entrepreneurial intention.

Table 5: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.031	.179		5.761	.000
	Self-Efficacy	.749	.042	.703	18.043	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial Intention						

The predictor variable Self-Efficacy ($B = 0.749, \text{Beta} = 0.703, t = 18.043, p < 0.001$) demonstrates a very strong positive and statistically significant effect on entrepreneurial intention. This means that for every one-unit increase in self-efficacy, entrepreneurial intention rises by 0.749 units.

These findings align with Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more proactive, persistent, and resilient when pursuing challenging goals. Empirical evidence also supports this relationship: Wang & Mwiya (2020) found that all dimensions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy were positively associated with entrepreneurial intention, while Oyugi (2014) emphasized that fostering self-efficacy is critical for shaping entrepreneurial mindsets.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concludes that self-efficacy significantly influences entrepreneurial intentions among students. Students with strong belief in their ability to start and manage a business, solve problems, and seize opportunities are more likely to intend to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This highlights the importance of fostering confidence and self-belief in entrepreneurial capabilities.

Recommendations

Programs aimed at building students’ entrepreneurial self-efficacy should be prioritized. This could include mentorship initiatives, workshops on problem-solving and opportunity recognition, and exposure to successful entrepreneurs. Encouraging students to undertake small-scale business projects during their studies can also reinforce their belief in their entrepreneurial capabilities and increase their readiness to pursue entrepreneurship after graduation.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research could explore the long-term relationship between students’ entrepreneurial self-efficacy and actual entrepreneurial behavior among graduates to determine how intentions translate into business creation.

Ethical Approval

The authors confirm that ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to the commencement of this study. All participants provided informed consent and participation was voluntary. The confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents were maintained throughout the study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. The research was conducted independently and received no funding from any organization that could have influenced the results or interpretation of the findings.

Data Availability

The data used in this study was collected through primary research involving human subjects. In accordance with ethical guidelines and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents, the data is not publicly available. However, the data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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