The Entrepreneurial Intention of Tertiary Accounting Students

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The unemployment rate remained very low, at 27.7\% (Stats SA, 2017). The Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) students follow a structured academic program of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). The researcher used the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) to determine if Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) students are capable and ready to become entrepreneurs. The results of 170 Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) final-year students showed that students are willing to start their businesses and become entrepreneurs, but they lack entrepreneurship education to equip them with the necessary skills to start their businesses. The results also revealed that students have positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship, mainly when they are supported by family, friends, classmates and society. Even with these positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship, the Perceived Behavioural Control showed that students are not likely to start businesses because they lack entrepreneurial skills and have limited knowledge and understanding about managing a business.

**Key words:** Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting), Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Entrepreneurial Intention, University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new and different to create wealth for yourself while adding value to society (Dees, 2017). This article presents the importance of entrepreneurship in the South African economy. Entrepreneurship is viewed as the backbone of an economy as it provides economic growth, helps individuals in communities to be financially independent, creates employment opportunities and reduces poverty (StatsSA,
2017). During 2015, the unemployment rate was 25%, and it increased to 27.7% in 2017 despite work-seekers having invested more time, money and energy looking for jobs (StatsSA, 2017). The Youth unemployment rate in South Africa increased to 52.4% in the first quarter of 2018 from 51.1% in the fourth quarter of 2017, with an average of 51.9% from 2013 until 2018 (StatsSA, 2017).

These statistics indicate that the youth are facing difficulties to acquire jobs and they often lack the required skills, which implies that a substantial scope on entrepreneurial activity has become fundamental to employment creation (Henderson & Robertson, 1999). The findings by Henderson and Robertson (1999) revealed that young people do not consider entrepreneurship as a career because of inadequate presentation of entrepreneurship as a career in institutions of higher learning and lack of encouragement from influencers such as role models and teachers, and the risk and effort involved in starting and growing a small business. Fields and Kunene (2017), however, mentioned that youth entrepreneurship had been identified as a solution to reduce the unemployment rate in South Africa. They explained that while youth entrepreneurship has been defined as a solution, it has not produced the required outcome because business ventures created by youth are still failing (Fields & Kunene, 2017).

According to the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s College of Law & Management studies handbook 2019, the structure of the Bachelor of Commerce Accounting degree (Appendix D) focuses on financial management (money management) skills from level one to level three. The students are not offered any other major subject or module that focuses on entrepreneurship education. Examples are a few modules from level three: Financial Accounting, Auditing, Managerial Accounting, Financial Management and Taxation. These modules indicate that this accounting degree is a focused program as it does not contain other alternatives unless the degree is restructured in accordance with SAICA requirements.

It seems, therefore, that B Com (Accounting) students are disadvantaged if they aim to become entrepreneurs and start businesses, due to a lack of entrepreneurial education. Certain students may fail to become Chartered Accountants and others may decide later that they want to pursue entrepreneurship as a career. Not having entrepreneurship education may disadvantage those students who wish to combine entrepreneurial and financial management skills to initiate and start a new business. The Bachelor of Commerce Accounting degree is a focused program, which does not provide students with a chance to take other modules, except the given modules in the curriculum and it does not explore other avenues such as entrepreneurship, but it provides students with money management skills that can assist an entrepreneur to manage the cash flow in the business. It then becomes a challenge when a student wants to explore other careers except working for an accounting firm.
2. Literature review

Student entrepreneurship is a phenomenon that provides an equal amount of education, skills and opportunities to students. The aim is to reduce unemployment of graduates and to promote flexible career options (Marchand et al., 2016). The main objective of student entrepreneurship is to provide students with skills and expertise to start businesses at any point during or after acquiring education. Businesses started by students after graduation show significant impact on the global economy (Marchand et al., 2016). Student entrepreneurship provides students with long-term achievement as a result of education to develop entrepreneurial ideas that would solve global challenges (Hunn, 2017).

Research conducted by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor showed that the level and quality of education and training is of concern in South Africa (Matchaba et al., 2015). South Africa should focus on education and training while encouraging youth entrepreneurship as a career option (Fatoki & Chindoga, 2011). Higher education institutions in South Africa have to find innovative ways to ensure research, teaching and learning styles that adapt to the needs of society and the economy to suppress the increasing economic pressure in South Africa and also internationally (UKZN InQubate, 2017). The University of KwaZulu-Natal InQubate created a student entrepreneurship policy with the objective to promote job creation and economic prosperity in South Africa by developing skills, promoting social enterprises and commercial start-ups at the university (UKZN InQubate, 2017). The aim of the Department of Higher Education and Training is to make students aware that they could also consider entrepreneurship as a career option. The aforementioned plan is executed during Entrepreneurship Week at all the universities in South Africa.

Mason and Brown (2014) observed that more countries tend to invest in the youth for future benefits. Student entrepreneurship is therefore essential. More students need to be attracted and exposed to entrepreneurship education with a well-designed entrepreneurial curriculum, practical application and well-trained entrepreneurship educators (Nieuwenhuizen et al., 2019). The curriculum should be designed in such a way that it addresses the current void in the market for the development of innovative businesses and entrepreneurship as a career (Iqbal et al., 2012).

Introducing entrepreneurship through education and training enables the youth (student entrepreneurs) to be innovative, utilise the latest technologies and open ventures in high-tech industries compared to non-academic entrepreneurs (Iqbal et al., 2012). They further explained that education should bring positive change to students’ behaviour in terms of intention and their willingness to create new ventures. Youth entrepreneurship is still in its infancy in South Africa and this is caused by a lack of skills, support and capital (Fatoki & Chindoga, 2011). Student entrepreneurship is essential because it may suppress challenges faced by non-academic entrepreneurs since students can apply skills such as digital marketing and IT skills.
they acquired through entrepreneurship education for managing and promoting their businesses (Fatoki & Chindoga, 2011).

The University of KwaZulu-Natal, Discipline of Accounting website 2019 mentions that Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) students follow a structured academic program accredited by a professional body of the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). The University of KwaZulu-Natal is one of the public universities accredited by a professional body (SAICA, 2014). The aim of accreditation is to ensure that higher education institutions provide an acceptable quality of education (Happe, 2015). The University of KwaZulu-Natal use procedures that are in accordance with SAICA policies. The Accounting degree is categorised as an academic degree, but the focus is to prepare students to work for accounting firms and in the financial sector. This causes a barrier for students if they decide to pursue entrepreneurship. The University of KwaZulu-Natal does not offer a full-time or part-time entrepreneurship degree, and extended learning does not provide entrepreneurship short courses.

The significant role of entrepreneurship is its contribution to income, innovation, research and development; it creates jobs and generates economic benefits for entrepreneurs and employees (Van der Sluis et al., 2008). Different kinds of contributions are made by entrepreneurs and education provides a higher calibre of entrepreneurial performance and to invest in entrepreneurial education is mandatory. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor stated in 2007 that school grades (marks) and the level of education were seen as essential factors in securing employment in South Africa. As a result, promoting the idea of starting new enterprises by young adults needs to be focused on and included in syllabi are key factors of successful entrepreneurs (Steenekamp et al., 2011).

The promoting of good grades is an essential factor, because a school-leaving certificate does not guarantee employment after school, but it opens doors to tertiary education because basic education does not necessarily develop an entrepreneurial spirit among learners at the basic education stage (Steenekamp et al., 2011). Scholars with good grades may get a chance to study an entrepreneurship programme and develop entrepreneurial skills relevant to start-up ventures. Entrepreneurship education involves generating business ideas and generating opportunities that add value to the community (Gibb et al., 2012).

The state of the economy in South Africa is a cause for concern, as the youth is engaging in corruption, crime, unemployment and mismanagement due to the absence of better opportunities. To mitigate this challenge, the country needs an active intervention (Jesselyn Co & Mitchell, 2006). Young people need education and training about entrepreneurship for them to understand and be motivated to become job creators and not job seekers (Jesselyn Co & Mitchell, 2006).
South African youth entrepreneurship is inhibited by limited access to finance, high levels of bureaucracy, lack of innovation and the shortage of skills (Steenekamp et al., 2011). The study by Steenekamp et al. (2011) mentioned that there is a positive correlation between education and entrepreneurial performance and education is a convenient tool to influence entrepreneurial orientation among students.

Higher Education and Training (HET) institutions must create an entrepreneurial disposition for students by teaching them about opportunity seeking, instil an understanding of risks and rewards, skills recognition and the creation of enterprises (Jesselyn Co & Mitchell, 2006). This could be achieved if the institutions link their research findings and local development programmes. If new and/or small businesses can have a business relationship with long-existing and innovative businesses, they may get support to improve new ventures. The aim of the government for establishing the Department of Small Business Development was to provide specific support to small businesses. In the State of the Nation Address (2016/17), former President Zuma asked established and large companies to collaborate with new businesses, including establishments owned by youth and women, as part of expanding the ownership and strengthening of the economy. To teach people about entrepreneurship is a positive undertaking because new ventures could reduce the unemployment rate in South Africa, as new businesses will provide people with jobs.

The section below focuses on stimulating productive entrepreneurship to students through education.

3. The methodology and model

This study utilised the “Research Onion” developed by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 108).

The research methodology consists of five stages: (i) research philosophy, (ii) research approach, (iii) research strategy, (iv) time horizon and (v) data collection method according to Saunders (2009). For this study, the following research methodology was utilised.
Table 3.1: Research methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Applied to study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study area/location</td>
<td>UKZN, Westville campus, School of Accounting, Economics and Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study population</td>
<td>303 B Com (Accounting) final-year students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study sample and size</td>
<td>170 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion/exclusion criteria</td>
<td>Participants were selected randomly, only BCom (Accounting) third-year students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection instrument</td>
<td>Data collected using questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection (Process and study period)</td>
<td>Questionnaires were self-administered for 10 to 15 minutes before the class commenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data management</td>
<td>Information is stored for at least five years, questionnaires stored following supervisors’ instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Data analysed using SPSS version 24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study collected quantitative data using a questionnaire. The reason for choosing this research method is that it effectively enabled the researcher to have access to participants in the research problem. The questionnaires used Likert scale type. The Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. The advantages of using a questionnaire is that it ensures anonymity, is practical, it is quick and easy to collect responses, covers all aspects of a topic, is reliable and accurate but the disadvantages are that respondents might skip the questions, might be dishonest. Closed questions may limit respondents’ views and opinions (Iqbal, 2012). A total of 170 questionnaires were distributed during lecture times, and the data collected was analysed by using SPSS.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is used to explore cognitive factors that influence entrepreneurial intention. The factors are readiness, attitudes, norms, and perceived behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). TPB is a proficient framework for understanding, predicting a changing human social behaviour. These four factors analyse the behaviour of an individual, right intention, which leads to an opportunity search where entrepreneurs look for possible opportunities to explore. After the opportunity search, an entrepreneur may decide whether to start a business or not. Opportunity exploitation takes place when the entrepreneur decides to start a business, and the process of starting a business requires planning, locating resources, networking and selling (Drnovšek et al., 2010 p. 339). A stage is reached where the business starts to deliver products and services to customers as well as generating profit.

Figure 3.1 below shows the visual structure of the TPB.
The four constructs in the TPB are:

- **1st Construct: Readiness** refers to the capability and mindset of an individual to perform a task, that requires commitment, willingness and dedication (Cheon *et al*., 2012). A positive attitude, good social norm and behaviour are significant factors contributing to an individual’s readiness to perform a specific task (Iqbal *et al*., 2012).

- **2nd Construct: Personal attitude** is the perception of a person to perform the behaviour; this explains favourable or unfavourable behaviour of a person’s interest. If the attitude is favourable towards a behaviour, then the individual intention towards a behaviour will be stronger (Ajzen, 1991).

- **3rd Construct: Social Norm** is regarded as social influence in TPB and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). It is when individual thoughts are influenced by society, culture, family, friends or the environment (Ajzen, 1991).

- **4th Construct: Perceived Behavioural Control** refers to how difficult or easy it is for an individual to perform the behaviour he/she is interested in. Perceived behaviour control differs and depends on situations and actions (Ajzen, 2011). This refers to the ease or difficulty when thinking of performing a behaviour because this determinant usually reflects past experiences, past obstacles and obstructions (Ajzen, 2011).
The abovementioned constructs are the factors that influence entrepreneurial intention, and these were used to develop the research questions and research objectives of this study.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of this study in accordance with the main research objective. The objective of this study was to identify factors influencing the entrepreneurial intention of B Com (Accounting) final-year students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, specifically on the Westville campus. The population selected for the study was university students because it is believed that education may occupy a significant role in developing goal-driven entrepreneurs. Studies focusing on entrepreneurship education at tertiary institutions are of significance (Davey et al., 2011) due to the focus being placed on universities to assist students to consider entrepreneurship as a career choice. The researcher chose the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s students because it is where the research was conducted.

4.1 Demographic description

This section presents the demographic description of the study participants and includes the gender, age and race of the participants. These three demographical variables were used to make comparisons.

4.1.1 Gender of participants

Table 4.1 shows that 39.4% of males and 60.6% of females participated in the study. More females participated than males. This outcome was expected because South Africa is a female-dominated society (StatsSA, 2017).

Table 4.1: Gender of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2 Age of participants

The age of participants was separated into four subcategories to allow making a comparison of the findings pertaining to decision making. Table 4.2 below reveals that 18.2% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 20 years, 65.9% were between the ages of 21 and 23 years, 14.1% were between the ages of 24 and 26 years and 1.8% were 27 years and older.
Most of the students were between 21 to 23 years, which usually is the norm for final-year students.

Table 4.2: Age of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 23</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 – 26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>98.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 and above</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Race of participants

The group of participants was divided into four population groups to allow the researcher to make comparisons between the findings per population group when it comes to a decision-making and social norms. Table 4.3 shows that 72.4% of the respondents were Black, 0.6% were White, 25.3% were Indian, and 1.8% were Coloured. The University of KwaZulu-Natal is dominated by black students, followed by Indians. Hence, the findings showed that the majority of participants were black.

Table 4.3: Race of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid percent</th>
<th>Cumulative percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>98.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, Figure 4.1 indicates the summary of gender, race and age as the demographical findings.
4.2 Descriptive analysis

The descriptive statistics aimed to describe characteristics that are common between the sample and its parent population (Jaggi, 2003). The descriptive analysis of the sample is providing an overview of the participant characteristics. This statistical method deals with the presentation of data and methodology of analysing data in a graphical or table format (Jaggi, 2003). The table below reveals the different means and standard deviations to achieve the five research objectives of the study.

These factors were analysed using a 5-point Likert measurement scale (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree) and this scale was tested for reliability and validity (Iqbal et al., 2012).

It can be concluded that Research Objective was achieved.
4.2.1 Research Objective: The Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) of B Com (Accounting) final-year students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Table 4.4: Entrepreneurial intention, average mean = 3.898

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am planning on starting a business.</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting a business in the future is something I have thought about.</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>0.886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am set on having my own business.</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dream is to become an entrepreneur one day.</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will put in whatever effort is needed to be an entrepreneur.</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.037</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Close to fifty-four percent (53.6%) of the participants agreed that they were planning on starting a business. The statement had a mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation of 1.132. This was a good sign showing that students were thinking about business and that shows the willingness and the intention to become entrepreneurs. An overwhelming eighty-seven percent (87.1%) of participants confirmed that starting a business in the future was something they have thought about. This was a good sign because the entrepreneurial intention of students was evident. The statement also had a mean of 4.26 and a standard deviation of 0.886.

Sixty-four percent (64.1%) of students agreed to a statement which says, “I am set on having my own business”. Even though students lack entrepreneurial skills, they are thinking about owning businesses in future. More than sixty-nine percent (69.4%) said, “My dream is to become an entrepreneur one day”. The last statement was testing the entrepreneurial intention, personal attitude, perceived behavioural control and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. It was confirmed by more than seventy-three percent (73.5%) when the respondents agreed to the statement which says, “I will put in whatever effort is needed to be an entrepreneur”. This is a favourable attitude towards planning to pursue a business career. Over and above education, students must have ambition and be eager for a challenge. With proper entrepreneurship education, mentorship, business talks and seminars, this attitude and intention can be encouraged into the appropriate direction.

Entrepreneurial intention is a state of mind that influences action towards a specific venture creation (Drnovšek et al., 2010). If a person has a positive personal attitude and social support, the chances of creating a venture are high (Ajzen, 2011). Zain et al. (2010) considered business students in Malaysia. The findings showed that participants (students) have the intention to become entrepreneurs. The majority of participants received influence from academics, family members and friends (Zain et al., 2010). The results showed that personal attitude occupies a
significant role in influencing students’ decisions towards becoming entrepreneurs (Zain et al., 2010).

Entrepreneurial intention contains both negative and positive outcomes from the above three constructs, which lead to decision making about the behaviour. Usually, if the attitude is positive towards the behaviour and if the people around him/her positively influence a person, there is a high chance of showing interest and acting on it. If a person has a positive intention and behaviour regarding a business opportunity, s/he will start a business spontaneously. Behavioural intention is when considering motivational factors that contribute to behaviour. The stronger and positive intention to execute the behaviour, the more probable the behaviour will be performed. In most cases, when personal attitude and social norms agree, a person will perform a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The favourable mean was 4.26 and a standard deviation of 0.886. The findings corresponded with the theory used by the researcher.

Figure 4.2 provides a summary of how entrepreneurial intention control impact on B Com (Accounting) final-year students when they explore entrepreneurship.

Figure 4.2: The graph representing the entrepreneurial intention results
There was a significant agreement with all the statements corresponding to the entrepreneurial intention factor, and Research Objective was achieved.

5. Summary and conclusion

The findings showed that more females (103) participated than males (67). The majority of participants were Black (123), Indians (43), Coloured (3) and White (1). The results highlighted that the majority of participants confirmed that given the opportunity and resources, they would start businesses in future. This statement had the highest agreement percentage compared with other statements. The aim of this study was to investigate the Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) of the Bachelor of Commerce Accounting students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and to ascertain whether they are ready to start small businesses. The research questions were formulated based on the literature and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (2011). The results highlighted that students are ready to start a business.

The results revealed that students are ready to run successful businesses, and they have good entrepreneurial intentions. The findings showed that students have a positive attitude towards business start-up, but the perceived behaviour is different. The majority of students agreed that they might get support from family, friends, classmates and the community if they decide to embark on a journey of becoming an entrepreneur. To develop productive entrepreneurs, universities, and the Department of Higher Education and Training should have campaigns and projects that promote entrepreneurship, such as the Entrepreneurship week, which took place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The aim was to help students establish an entrepreneurial spirit, to develop a business mindset, to meet the incubators and hear entrepreneurs talk about their businesses. It could be true that a lack of knowledge (entrepreneurship education) is the main problem for students not seeing entrepreneurship as a career choice.


Fields, Z., & Kunene, L. (2017). *Youth Entrepreneurship Learning Challenges (Final 2)*. Durban: UKZN.


