

PERCEIVED PERSONAL PROBLEMS AND UNSUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT PREDICTING ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER INSTITUTION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The need to produce more university graduates that are self-reliant, business oriented, and driven by a high sense of responsibility to society and the nation at large, creates the necessity to incorporate entrepreneurship studies into the tertiary education curriculum. Several scholarly efforts have previously investigated and contributed to student entrepreneurial intention in developed countries, yet little has been achieved in South Africa. The present study examined the role of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment in entrepreneurial intention with a sample of 366 (205 (56%) male and 161 (46%) female university students in South Africa, using the ex-post facto research design, and a structured validated questionnaire.

Five hypotheses were stated and tested using Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The results confirmed the hypothesised significant relationships between perceived personal problems, unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention. The results further revealed that there is a significant joint impact of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention, $F(2,363)=17.655$; $R^2=0.084$; $p<0.01$; there is a significant independent influence of perceived personal problems on entrepreneurial intention, ($\beta=0.289$; $t=5.091$; $p<0.01$); but no significant influence of unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention.

The study concludes that perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment are significant joint predictors of entrepreneurial intention as there are significant relationships among the three variables. The findings are valuable to the policy makers and professionals in promoting the spirit of entrepreneurship among the youth.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Interest, Internal Economic Locus of Control, Resilience, South Africa, University Students.

INTRODUCTION

The need to produce more university graduates that are self-reliant, business oriented, and driven by a high sense of responsibility to society and the nation at large, creates the necessity to incorporate entrepreneurship studies into the tertiary education curriculum (Zhang et al., 2014). The present study defines entrepreneurial intention as a psychological concept that refers to the personal plans or interest of individuals to engage in profitable and legalised business activities

in the future. It is motive-based, because intention is intrinsic. There is however scientific evidence which has demonstrated that the identified individuals' intentions, at the fundamental stage, could be nurtured by environmental factors to grow into reality (Marire et al., 2017). Hence, the present study sought to examine the role of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment in entrepreneurial intention among some university students in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

Perceived personal problems are described in the study as identified peculiar issues to the individual university students, which have the tendencies to discourage individuals' will or limit their interest in venturing into business activities after graduation. Examples of such personal problems are negative attitude, irrational fear of failure and lack of self-efficacy. Unsupportive environment, on the other hand, implies the absence of encouraging socio-cultural, political and economic factors that are beyond the control of a person.

Despite the proliferation of entrepreneurship literature, research on the phenomenon remains inconclusive. Many previously conducted studies in the area of student entrepreneurship intention had focused on the developed countries such as the United States of America (Krueger et al., 2000); Spain (Guerrero et al., 2008); Singapore (Wang & Wong, 2004); Canada (Audet, 2002); New Zealand (Gnoth, 2006); United Kingdom (Robertson, 2001) and Puerto Rico and Catalonia (Sandhu et al., 2011; Şen et al., 2018). Only a few entrepreneurship investigations were recently conducted in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Ngorora & Mago, 2018; Kanonuhwa & Chimucheka, 2016; Aramide et al., 2018; Koh, 1995). The few existing related studies conducted within the province in the area of entrepreneurship did not focus on the role of personal problems and unsupportive environment.

Furthermore, factors affecting entrepreneurial intention differ across different potential entrepreneurs in the developing countries. Their perceptions may also be different from those in the developed countries, perhaps because the developed countries have more institutional support, and advanced education systems, thus reducing possible barriers (Sandhu et al., 2011). Besides, a review of literature of student entrepreneurial intention reveals that previously, scholarly attentions were mainly concentrated on investigating either undergraduate (Sakede et al., 2017; Looi & Khoo-Lattimore, 2015; Alsaaty et al., 2014; Aderibigbe & Babalola, 2015; Aderibigbe & Oluwafemi, (2015) or postgraduate students (Hayter et al., 2017; Mubarka et al., 2012; Ali et al., 2010; Aderibigbe et al., 2014; Ganati et al., 2019). However, the present study focused on bridging the identified gaps in the literature, by examining the role of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment in entrepreneurial intention among the final year undergraduates and postgraduate honours students of a university that is situated in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. In view of the above, the present study sought to achieve the objectives stated next.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to empirically investigate perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment as predictors of entrepreneurial intention among some final year undergraduate and postgraduate honours students of a university in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. In addition, the following were the study's specific objectives:

1. *To examine the relationship between perceived personal problems and entrepreneurial intention;*
2. *To investigate the relationship between unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention;*

3. *To explore the influence of perceived personal problems on entrepreneurial intention;*
4. *To examine the influence of unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention; and*
5. *To investigate the joint influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a scientific investigation of entrepreneurship intention of students in four faculties within a university in South Africa, Oni & Mavuyangwa (2019) found statistically significant differences in the levels of entrepreneurial intention among students in four faculties, and reported that students in the Faculty of Management and Commerce and in the Faculty of Law have high levels of entrepreneurial intentions. Likewise, Ndofirepi (2020) examined the mediating role of psychological traits in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial goal intentions among a sample of 308 vocational education students in Zimbabwe-a neighbouring Southern Africa country. The study found that need for achievement, risk-taking propensity and internal locus of control accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in entrepreneurial intentions.

Botha & Bignotti (2016) studied the possibility of internships enhancing entrepreneurial intent and self-efficacy among some tertiary institution students in South Africa. The study found a statistically positive influence of internships on both entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Besides, Kalitanyi & Bbenkele's (2019) study measured university students' perceptions about the role of self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intentions in Cape Town, South Africa and reported a statistically significant positive relationship between entrepreneurship self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intentions.

In another related study conducted in South Africa, Botha & Taljaard (2019) investigated whether entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial competencies influence each other. The findings of the study provided evidence of statistically bidirectional relationship between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial competencies - self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, conveying a compelling vision, value creation through innovation and perseverance. Also, Maziriri & Maramura's (2019) study of entrepreneurial intention among generation Y students in Johannesburg, South Africa revealed that opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial role models and entrepreneurial passion have statistical significant positive influence on entrepreneurial intentions.

Amanamah et al., (2018) quantitative investigation into barriers to entrepreneurial intention with a sample of 731 male and female students from a public university in Ghana revealed that personal factor, among others, is a barrier to entrepreneurial intention, as expressed by the research participants. Malebana (2015) examined perceived barriers influencing the formation of entrepreneurial intention with a sample of 329 male and female final year commerce students at the University of Limpopo, using a questionnaire to collect data from the participants and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse the data collected. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between attitudes toward becoming an entrepreneur and perceived behavioural control.

Similarly, Fatoki (2010) explored the motivations and obstacles of graduate entrepreneurial intention with a sample of 701 final year students of a university in South Africa, using a self-administered questionnaire, principal component analysis, t-test and descriptive

statistics to analyse the data collected. The results of the study identified skills and risk factors as barriers to entrepreneurial intention.

In their comparison of perceived barriers to entrepreneurship in Eastern and Western European countries, Iakovleva, Kolvereid, Gorgievski & Sørhaug (2018) conducted a qualitative study with a sample of 591 business students from four European countries. The cross-country differences in the kind of barriers people perceive to business start-up were investigated in the study, using the quantitative approach to data collection. The study's findings indicated that the most important perceived barrier in all countries relates to regulative structures.

On the other hand, Panda's (2018) study examined the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in developing countries, with the aim to identify, rank and differentiate between the constraints faced by male and female entrepreneurs, using the qualitative methodology to categorise and rank entrepreneurial constraints. The study's findings revealed that the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in developing countries arise from gender discrimination, difficulty in raising capital, lack of infrastructure, and unstable business, economic and political (BEP) environments. The study suggests that unstable BEP environments need to be addressed as top priorities.

Bustamante & Izquierdo (2018) examined the entrepreneurial intention - propensity relationship by using a sample of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data of four countries (amounting 13935 respondents), and running a MIMIC model, contextual and personal factors - multiple causes model. The results of the study indicated that such factors are all significant for explaining entrepreneurial intention. This gives evidence that people are more determined to take entrepreneurial actions. However, they usually express much lower intentions to new venture creation when faced with certain personal and situational barriers (Bustamante & Izquierdo, 2018).

Moreover, Raeesi et al., (2013) investigated the interactions with 11 barrier factors to entrepreneurship, using Interpretive Structural Modelling. The study divided the 11 identified barriers to entrepreneurship into inside barriers and outside barriers. The ISM-based model indicates that inside barriers are dependent on outside barriers. The study's findings further revealed that the corrupt and unsupportive business environment proved to be the major barrier to entrepreneurship.

Agbenyagah's (2018) study determined the risk and effect of selected social capital elements and risk factors on rural entrepreneurship, using a quantitative approach of data collection through a self-administered questionnaire, the snowball and convenience sampling techniques to sample a population of 282 respondents. The descriptive statistics, t-test and Pearson correlation analysis were performed to test the hypotheses. The research findings revealed that some social capital elements including risk factors, lack of skills, funding and lack of collateral are significantly interrelated, and have a significant impact on entrepreneurship. In addition, Peng et al., (2012) conducted a study on entrepreneurial intention and its influencing factors with 2,010 senior university students in China, using a survey instrument to elicit research information from the participants. The results of the study revealed that attitude, self-efficacy, family background factors and social environment factors influenced entrepreneurial intention.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were stated and tested:

H1: There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and perceived personal problems.

H2: There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and unsupportive environment.

H3: There is a significant joint and independent influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design, Sample and Procedure

The study adopted ex-post facto research design to examine the role of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment in entrepreneurial intention. The ex-post facto research design was considered relevant for the study because the study was purely a survey in nature, and did not involve any active manipulations of variables under investigation (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The variables had already occurred before the study, and the research participants were conscious of the existence of the variables. Thus, the researchers only sought the opinions of the respondents using a structured validated questionnaire. Hence, the study's methodology was built on the principle of the positivist approach, by means of quantitative data generation, and hypotheses testing (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The dependent variable of the study, therefore, was entrepreneurial intention, while perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment comprised the study's independent variables.

Moreover, the Raosoft software was used in calculating the sample size. The Raosoft software was considered appropriate in the study because it is a survey software that is mostly applicable in determining how many people to engage in a survey research in order to get results that reflect the target population as precisely as needed. Further, the Raosoft software was chosen for the study because it also makes provision for confidence interval (margin of error) and confidence level of the calculated and recommended sample size, based on the available population size. The available population of the study was approximately 4000. In view of this, Raosoft calculated and recommended 351 (confidence interval=5%, confidence level=95%) as the appropriate sample size of the study. Hence, the researchers were 95% confident of the population sampled being a true representation of the study's targeted population. Eventually, a total of 366 male and female final year undergraduate and honours level postgraduate university students constituted the sample size of the study.

Furthermore, the study adopted the purposive and convenience types of non-probability sampling method to select participants for the study. At the first stage of the selection process, the convenience sampling method was used in selecting the University of Fort Hare out of the three universities in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, as the site of the fieldwork. The University of Fort Hare was chosen because the institution is categorised by the Department of Higher Education as one of the historically disadvantaged institutions in the nation. Although the University of Fort Hare's student population comprises international and national students, the institution is regarded as the less economically privileged institution. Hence, it was presumed

that the institutional curricula would have been negatively affected by related situational factors, which could predispose students to barriers to entrepreneurial intention.

Another reason for applying the convenience sampling technique is because it made the process easier for the researchers to reach the research participants at the University of Fort Hare than engaging those in the other universities in the country. This is also because the researchers are more familiar with the University of Fort Hare's campuses. The fieldwork was scheduled for the end of the academic year, and at that time it was difficult to obtain the ethical approval of management of other universities during the said busy schedule. Besides, the fieldwork became easier when the convenience sampling technique was applied as a strategy to meet the research participants in the lecture-rooms, student centre, campus student residences and other relaxation places like the sport pavilion, and under the shields around the campus premises.

Furthermore, since the study was designed only for the final year undergraduate and postgraduate honours students, the purposive sampling technique was also introduced and applied to ensure that participants in the study were in the aforementioned academic/study level during the period of the fieldwork, and that they were registered students of the University of Fort Hare. The sample comprised 205 (56%) male and 161 (46%) female university students. Ninety-nine (27%) were final year undergraduate and 267 (73%) were postgraduate honours students. The research participants' ages ranged from 18 years old - minimum (0.8%) to 55 years old - maximum (0.3%), mean (27.01) and standard deviation (5.73). The majority of the participants were 22 years old (18.8%). Data were collected by means of paper-pencil inventories (structured validated questionnaires), which were distributed to research participants in the lecture-rooms during the week and in the halls of residence, student centre and sport pavilion during the weekend, within the Alice Campus of the University of Fort Hare.

Ethical Consideration

The participants' voluntary participation was sought through the informed consent, which was signed by each of the participants. The participants were informed about the importance of the study as the findings from the study may positively influence the government policy by helping in reviewing the South African higher education curriculum to cater for innovative and practical entrepreneurship education in the universities. Moreover, the participants were assured of confidentiality of all information supplied.

Furthermore, the participants were instructed not to indicate any means of identification such as name and student identity number. With the utmost sense of sincerity, information concerning the study and its outcomes were accurately submitted to the appropriate institutions. Thus, it was ensured that no instance of misleading actions was demonstrated in the course of the study. The researchers also ensured that the study was conducted in a conducive environment that would not expose the participants to any physical or psychological hazard. The Research Ethics Committee of the University granted approval of ethical clearance of the study (Certificate reference number: MC-2018-0224).

Measuring Instrument

Three validated scales of measurement were used to assess entrepreneurial intention, perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment.

Entrepreneurial Intention: A 6-item scale of entrepreneurial intention that was developed and validated by Liñán & Chen (2009) was applied to measure entrepreneurial intention. The construct consisted of three different kinds of intention measures - desire, self-prediction and behavioural intention, with a 5-point Likert-type of response format ranging from 1(Strongly disagree) to 5(Strongly agree). Liñán & Chen (2009) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient score of 0.94 for the scale, while the present study yielded a Cronbach alpha coefficient score of 0.95 for the scale of entrepreneurial intention.

Perceived Personal Problems: A 4-item scale of perceived personal problems that was developed and validated by Weiss (2015) was applied to measure perceived personal problems. The scale was designed with a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1(Strongly disagree) to 5(Strongly agree). Weiss (2015) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient score of 0.86 for the scale, while the present study yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient score of 0.87 for the scale of perceived personal problems.

Unsupportive Environment: A 4-item scale of unsupportive environment that was developed and validated by Weiss (2015) was applied to measure unsupportive environment. The scale was designed with a 5-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1(Strongly disagree) to 5(Strongly agree). Weiss (2015) reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient score of 0.76 for the scale, while the present study yielded a Cronbach alpha coefficient score of 0.91 for the scale of unsupportive environment.

Statistical Analysis of Data

The data generated from 366 screened questionnaires were analysed based on the hypotheses stated, using version 25 of SPSS. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using Pearson correlation analysis because both were concerned with the relationship among entrepreneurial intention, perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment. Hypothesis 3 was tested using multiple regression analysis because it examined the joint and independent influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on the entrepreneurial intention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypotheses 1 and 2, stated as follows, were analysed using the Pearson correlation analysis and the results are presented in Table 1

H1: There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and perceived personal problems.

H2: There is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and unsupportive environment.

Variable	EI	PPP	UE
Entrepreneurial intention (EI)	1	0.297**	0.154**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.003
N	366	366	366
Perceived personal problems (PPP)	0.297**	1	0.473**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
N	366	366	366
Unsupportive environment (UE)	0.154**	0.473**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003	0.000	
N	366	366	366

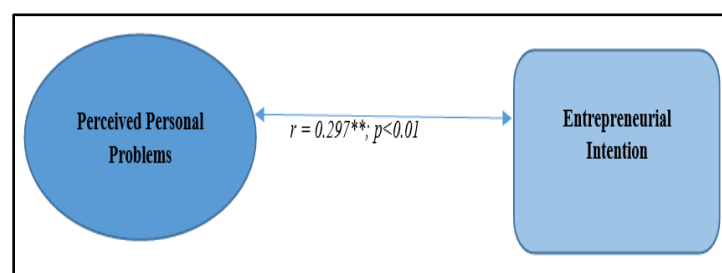
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Prepared by the authors

The results in the Table 1 above show that there is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial intention and perceived personal problems, $r=0.297$, $p<0.01$. The observed relationship between entrepreneurial intention and perceived personal problems is significantly positive and strong. Based on the above results and interpretations, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

Moreover, the results show that there is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial intention and unsupportive environment, $r=0.154$, $p<0.01$. The observed relationship between the entrepreneurial intention and unsupportive environment is significantly positive and strong. Based on the above results and interpretations, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

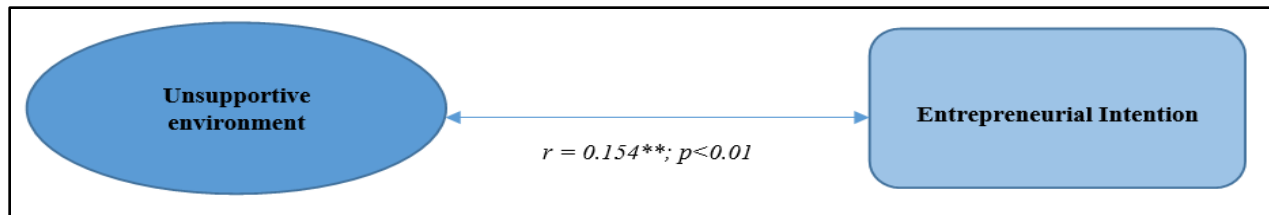
Furthermore, the results in the Table 1 show that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment, $r = 0.473$, $p<0.05$. The observed relationship between perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment is significantly positive and strong. Figure 1 below depicts the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and perceived personal problems.



Source: Prepared by the authors

FIGURE 1
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PERSONAL PROBLEMS AND
ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION

The results in Table 1 further reveal that is a significant positive relationship between unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention, $r=0.154$; $p<0.01$. This confirms that unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention are related. Figure 2 below depicts the relationship between unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention.



Source: Prepared by the authors

FIGURE 2
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNSUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND
ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION

Hypotheses 3 which states that there is a significant joint and independent influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention, was analysed using multiple regression analysis and the results are presented in the Table 2 below.

Variable	R	R ²	B	T	F	P
Perceived personal problems	0.298	0.084	0.289	4.715	17.655	0.000
Unsupportive environment			0.017	0.294		0.769

Source: Prepared by the authors

- Dependent Variable: Entrepreneurial intention
- Predictors: (Constant), Perceived personal problems, unsupportive environment

The results in the Table 2 indicate that there is a significant joint and independent influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention, $F(2,363)=17.655$; $R^2=0.084$; $p<0.05$. This implies that the combined influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention is significant, such that both accounted for approximately 8% ($R^2 = 0.084$) of the variation observed in entrepreneurial intention. Hence, a huge number of other influential factors, not considered in this study, are responsible for the remaining 92% variation. Moreover, the results in the Table 2 indicate that there is a significant independent influence of perceived personal problems on entrepreneurial intention ($\beta=0.289$; $t=5.091$; $p<0.01$), which means that variable, perceived personal problems, has a significant influence on entrepreneurial intention. However, the results indicate that there is no significant independent influence of unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention ($\beta=0.017$; $t=0.294$; $p>0.05$), which implies that unsupportive environment has no significant influence on entrepreneurial intention. Based on these results, hypothesis 3, which states that there is a significant joint and independent influence of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention is partially accepted. The results further explain that students' interest in venturing into business, to a large extent depends on personal factors, especially those of ability and motivation. Hence, becoming an entrepreneur is more a function of personal attributes such as desire for financial freedom and ability, especially in the face of the general unemployment situation.

The above results are supported by the study of Amanamah et al., (2018) which revealed that personal factor, among others, is a barrier to entrepreneurial intention, as expressed by the

research participants. Malebana's (2015) results also showed that there is a significant relationship between attitudes toward becoming an entrepreneur and perceived behavioural control. The findings of various related past studies conducted in the Southern Africa region, as reported by Botha & Bignotti (2016); Kalitanyi & Bbenkele (2019); Botha & Taljaard (2019); Maziriri & Maramura's (2019); Oni & Mavuyangwa (2019); and Ndofirepi (2020) provide additional supports to the evidence from the present study.

For instance, Oni & Mavuyangwa (2019) reported that students in the Faculty of Management and Commerce and in the Faculty of Law have high levels of entrepreneurial intentions. Ndofirepi (2020) also reported that need for achievement, risk-taking propensity and internal locus of control accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in entrepreneurial intentions. Botha & Bignotti (2016) found a statistically positive influence of internships on both entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Besides, Kalitanyi & Bbenkele (2019) reported a statistically significant positive relationship between entrepreneurship self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intentions. Likewise, Maziriri & Maramura (2019) confirmed that opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial role models and entrepreneurial passion have statistically significant positive influences on entrepreneurial intentions.

Similarly, Fatoki (2010) identified skills and risk factors as barriers to entrepreneurial intention. Peng et al., (2012) conducted a study on entrepreneurial intention and its influencing factors with 2,010 senior university students in China and reported that the attitude, self-efficacy, family background factors and social environment factors jointly influenced entrepreneurial intention.

CONCLUSION

The article provided a report on a scientific investigation that was conducted on perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment as barriers to entrepreneurial intention of South African higher institution students. The relationship between perceived personal problems, unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention were tested. There were statistical significant and positive relationships between perceived personal problems, unsupportive environment and entrepreneurial intention.

The joint and independent impacts of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention were also tested. There was a statistical significant joint impact of perceived personal problems and unsupportive environment on entrepreneurial intention; and there was a statistical significant independent influence of perceived personal problems on entrepreneurial intention. However, unsupportive environment did not significantly influence entrepreneurial intention.

The above findings could help potential, nascent and start-up entrepreneurs to understand that personal attributes are necessary for a successful business endeavour. The findings of the study could also provide supports to policy-makers, parents, guardians, councillors, mentors and educator that personal challenges could hinder individuals' vision of becoming a successful entrepreneur. In addition, the study's finding assist trainers, parents, and teachers on effective dealing with learners' personal problems and ensure they are well adjusted and prepared for the necessity of economically self-reliant lifestyle.

Based on the above, the researchers recommend that South African universities should expand the scope of their academic programmes to promote students' knowledge of

entrepreneurship, enhance ability to identify business opportunities, and impart essential skills and competencies to generate creative and innovative business ideas.

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