



Strengthening Entrepreneurial Skills and Motivation among University Students

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Abstract. Entrepreneurship is increasingly promoted as a strategic response to graduate unemployment and economic inequality, particularly in developing countries. Higher education institutions are expected to foster entrepreneurial readiness among students by shaping their perceptions, stimulating interest, and building competence. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach involving 20 purposively selected students from the Faculty of Economics and Psychology at Widya Dharma University who participated in the university's entrepreneurship development program during 2023–2024. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supported by document analysis and field observations. Triangulation was applied to validate the findings. The results show that 75% of students agreed that entrepreneurship can improve welfare, while 70% viewed it as a viable alternative to formal employment. A total of 60% expressed interest in trying entrepreneurship due to adequate knowledge, and 55% were willing to start a business with institutional support. In terms of competence, 75% enjoyed creativity and innovation, and the same percentage were ready to face the risk of failure. However, only 50% believed they had the potential to be entrepreneurs. Although 60% felt unashamed to learn from others and saw student organizational involvement as beneficial, 60% also acknowledged the need for external support to achieve entrepreneurial success. These findings indicate that students' entrepreneurial readiness is promising but still requires enhancement through practical experience and mentorship. The study proposes an integrated development model to cultivate entrepreneurial readiness by targeting three dimensions namely perception, interest, and competence.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship; Motivation; Skills; Higher Education; University Students

1. Introduction

Global attention to entrepreneurship has intensified, especially in the context of youth empowerment and economic transformation. Countries across the world are witnessing a growing urgency to address graduate unemployment by encouraging university students to become self-reliant job creators. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Rietveld & Patel, 2023; Roomi et al., 2021), youth-led

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entrepreneurial activity remains disproportionately low despite growing awareness and education efforts. In Indonesia, the issue is particularly pressing, while more than 3 million students graduate annually, a significant number face difficulties entering the formal labor market. This surplus of educated job seekers, if not addressed with alternative career pathways (Turin et al., 2021, 2023), poses a long-term risk to economic stability and productivity.

Higher education has increasingly been called upon to play a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial ecosystems. Numerous studies confirm the impact of entrepreneurship education on students' career aspirations and behavioral orientation (Lackéus, 2015; Purwana et al., 2018; Suharti & Sirine, 2011). Entrepreneurship education enhances cognitive understanding, practical skills, and emotional readiness qualities that collectively prepare students to innovate and take initiative (Hasan, 2020; Nurjamiah et al., 2020). However, the extent to which university programs can effectively translate educational inputs into entrepreneurial action remains debated. While some institutions provide business training, internships, and incubator access, others still offer entrepreneurship as a theoretical subject with minimal real-world application.

Despite these efforts, several cultural and structural barriers persist. A prevailing mindset that values civil servant positions over entrepreneurial careers continues to hinder young people from pursuing business ventures (Gubik, 2021; Kiani et al., 2020; Qiao & Huang, 2019; Salisu et al., 2019). Moreover, while many entrepreneurship programs exist, their effectiveness in fostering actual entrepreneurial competence and motivation remains underexplored. Previous research has largely focused on intention or theoretical exposure, without fully addressing how students' perceptions, interest, and competence interact and evolve through targeted interventions. This reveals a gap in the literature, a need for empirical studies that investigate comprehensive models of entrepreneurship development at the student level especially models that are grounded in lived educational experiences and institutional practice.

Addressing this gap is critical, as students represent a vital pool of future entrepreneurs. Strengthening their motivation and entrepreneurial skills is not only beneficial for their individual careers but also essential for fostering a resilient and innovative economy. Furthermore, the Indonesian government has shown strong policy support for entrepreneurship through instruments such as Presidential Instruction No. 4 of 1995 and Presidential Regulation No. 27 of 2013 on Entrepreneurial Incubators (Mahani, 2019), emphasizing the urgency of translating education into action.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a conceptual model for strengthening entrepreneurial skills and motivation among university students. The model focuses on three key dimensions namely student perception of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial interest, and entrepreneurial competence, as cultivated through institutional support in higher education. By doing so, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on student entrepreneurship development in Indonesia and similar contexts.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at exploring students' perceptions, motivations, and competencies in entrepreneurship within the context of higher education. The research was conducted at Widya Dharma University, Klaten, focusing on students from the Faculty of Economics and Psychology who had participated in the university's Entrepreneurship Development Program during the academic years



2023 and 2024. This design was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives, aligned with the contextual and interpretative nature of the inquiry.

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, in which participants were selected based on their involvement in the entrepreneurship program and their ability to provide relevant insights. A total of 20 students were identified as key informants. The number was determined based on data saturation, where responses became repetitive and no new information emerged, confirming the adequacy of the sample size (Busetto et al., 2020; Gill, 2020; Moen & Middelthun, 2015). The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a prepared questionnaire that allowed for both consistency and flexibility in probing responses.

In addition to interviews, secondary data were gathered from program documentation, previous research findings, and related literature on student entrepreneurship. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing interview results with field observations and document analysis. All field data were organized thematically according to emerging categories and were presented in a narrative format to reflect patterns, relationships, and key interpretations within the research context.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Students' Perceptions of Entrepreneurship

The findings indicate that student perceptions toward entrepreneurship are generally positive but still nuanced by various concerns. When asked about the benefits of entrepreneurship, 55% (11 out of 20) students believed in its advantages, while 45% remained uncertain. Similarly, 55% agreed that entrepreneurial values are present among students, whereas 45% disagreed. Regarding entrepreneurship as a potential solution for career competition and future prospects, the response was evenly split 50% agreed and 50% disagreed.

However, when addressing emotional barriers, 50% of the respondents admitted to experiencing fear of failure, indicating a psychological hurdle in taking entrepreneurial risks. On a more optimistic note, 75% of students agreed that entrepreneurship has the potential to enhance individual welfare. In addition, 70% viewed entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to conventional employment in the public or private sectors.

These results suggest a growing awareness of entrepreneurship as a path to economic independence and professional fulfillment. Students acknowledge the potential value of entrepreneurship in reducing educated unemployment and increasing self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, hesitation remains, especially due to perceptions of high risk, limited capital, and uncertainty about success, which hinder actual engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Table 1 Summary of Students' Perceptions of Entrepreneurship (N = 20)

No	Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree/Unsure (%)
1	Entrepreneurship provides tangible benefits	55% (11)	45% (9)
2	Entrepreneurial values exist among students	55% (11)	45% (9)
3	Entrepreneurship is a solution for job competition and future prospects	50% (10)	50% (10)
4	Students feel afraid of failure in	50% (10)	50% (10)



	entrepreneurship		
5	Entrepreneurship improves personal welfare	75% (15)	25% (5)
6	Entrepreneurship is an alternative job choice	70% (14)	30% (6)

Table 1 presents the distribution of student responses to six key perception indicators regarding entrepreneurship. The highest level of agreement (75%) was seen in the belief that entrepreneurship improves welfare, followed by the view that it serves as an alternative job option (70%). Moderate agreement levels (55%) were found for statements about the benefits of entrepreneurship and the presence of entrepreneurial values among students. However, responses were split evenly (50%) on perceptions of entrepreneurship as a viable career path and the emotional fear of failure, highlighting ambivalence in action readiness. These results reveal a dual perception, while students recognize the potential and importance of entrepreneurship, internal and external constraints continue to limit their entrepreneurial engagement.

3.2. Entrepreneurial Interest among Students

The study revealed that a majority of students expressed a genuine interest in entrepreneurship, driven primarily by exposure to entrepreneurial education and the aspiration for economic independence. Specifically, 60% (12 respondents) indicated their willingness to engage in entrepreneurship, citing sufficient knowledge and learning experiences as key motivators. Furthermore, 55% (11 respondents) stated their readiness to start a business, particularly when supported by mentors, lecturers, or institutional programs.

The desire to pursue entrepreneurship is further reinforced by the belief that it offers a viable path to independent living, with 75% (15 respondents) agreeing on this point. Additionally, 65% (13 respondents) recognized the importance of both short-term and long-term planning when launching a business. Likewise, 75% of respondents emphasized that situational analysis and preparation were crucial for entrepreneurial success.

Despite this, some psychological barriers remain. Although 60% of students reported that fear of failure does not discourage them, 40% still admitted that such fears exist. Moreover, 35% of respondents felt hesitant to begin entrepreneurial endeavors without witnessing the success of others first. Interestingly, 70% (14 respondents) stated they would be more likely to pursue entrepreneurship if invited or encouraged by someone else, suggesting the influence of social support and external affirmation.

Table 2 Summary of Student Responses on Entrepreneurial Interest (N = 20)

No	Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree/Unsure (%)
1	Interested in trying entrepreneurship due to sufficient knowledge	60% (12)	40% (8)
2	Willing to start a business if supported by others	55% (11)	45% (9)
3	Sees entrepreneurship as an opportunity to live independently	75% (15)	25% (5)
4	Fear of failure prevents them from trying	40% (8)	60% (12)
5	Needs proof of others' success before deciding to try	35% (7)	65% (13)



6	Believes entrepreneurship must begin with thorough preparation	45% (9)	55% (11)
7	Believes short-term and long-term planning is necessary	65% (13)	35% (7)
8	Strong interest is enough to start a business, regardless of others' success	55% (11)	45% (9)
9	Planning must align with real-life conditions	75% (15)	25% (5)
10	Willing to start a business if invited or encouraged by someone else	70% (14)	30% (6)

Table 2 presents ten key indicators related to students' interest in entrepreneurship. The highest levels of agreement were found in statements about the desire for independence (75%), readiness for situational planning (75%), and openness to invitations or encouragement to start a business (70%). These reflect an underlying entrepreneurial potential that can be cultivated through both internal motivation and external reinforcement.

While students largely recognize the need for planning and support, a notable percentage still experience hesitation, especially due to fear of failure and dependence on visible role models. These insights highlight the importance of not only providing knowledge but also creating supportive environments that reduce fear and build confidence. Institutional initiatives that offer mentoring, peer success stories, and step-by-step business development guidance can play a crucial role in transforming interest into entrepreneurial action.

3.3. Entrepreneurial Competence among Students

The results of the study show that entrepreneurial competence among students is significantly influenced by their enjoyment of creativity and innovation. A total of 75% (15 respondents) agreed that these traits motivate them in entrepreneurial activities, while 25% disagreed. When asked whether they see themselves as having entrepreneurial potential, responses were evenly split 50% felt they had the potential, and 50% felt otherwise.

Regarding their openness to learn from others, 60% of students stated that they were not ashamed to learn from peers or mentors, while 40% still felt reluctant. In terms of risk-taking, 75% of respondents showed a willingness to accept business risks, suggesting a solid foundation in one of the core traits of entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, 65% emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive attitude toward business partners, and the same percentage also acknowledged the need for honesty in business interactions.

Participation in student organizations was also recognized as a contributing factor to entrepreneurial competence. Sixty percent of students agreed that such involvement enhanced their skills and confidence, whereas 40% felt it was not essential. Interestingly, when asked whether success in entrepreneurship could be achieved independently, only 40% believed so, while 60% acknowledged the importance of collaboration with others. Lastly, 65% agreed that maintaining trust and avoiding negative assumptions toward business partners was crucial in building an entrepreneurial spirit.

Table 3 Summary of Student Responses on Entrepreneurial Competence (N = 20)



No	Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree/Unsure (%)
1	Enjoys creativity and innovation in entrepreneurship	75% (15)	25% (5)
2	Has personal potential to be an entrepreneur	50% (10)	50% (10)
3	Not ashamed to learn from others	60% (12)	40% (8)
4	Ready to face risk of failure	75% (15)	25% (5)
5	Maintains a positive attitude toward business partners	65% (13)	35% (7)
6	Believes honesty is important in entrepreneurship	65% (13)	35% (7)
7	Activeness in student organizations enhances entrepreneurial competence	60% (12)	40% (8)
8	Success in entrepreneurship can be achieved independently	40% (8)	60% (12)
9	Building entrepreneurial spirit includes avoiding negative assumptions toward business partners	65% (13)	35% (7)

Table 3 outlines student responses regarding key dimensions of entrepreneurial competence. The strongest agreement was found in indicators related to creativity, risk-taking, and ethical behavior such as honesty and maintaining a positive attitude suggesting that students possess fundamental entrepreneurial traits. However, perceptions of self-potential were divided, indicating a need to strengthen students' self-efficacy.

Social learning also plays a role, while a majority are open to learning from others, a substantial minority remain hesitant. Additionally, student organization involvement is viewed by many as an important arena for developing soft skills and confidence. Notably, most respondents recognize the importance of collaboration, with only a minority believing that success can be achieved entirely independently. This highlights the importance of nurturing not just individual competence, but also relational and collaborative capacities within entrepreneurship education.

3.4. Building Entrepreneurial Readiness through Perception, Interest, and Competence

The findings of this study underscore the importance of cultivating entrepreneurial readiness among university students by addressing three interrelated components namely perception, interest, and competence. Entrepreneurship education in higher education must not only transfer knowledge but also shape how students perceive entrepreneurship as a viable and desirable career path. As supported by Lackéus (2015), shaping perception is a foundational step in entrepreneurial learning, where emotional engagement and relevance are critical to stimulating action.

In light of the current national context, the Indonesian government has taken concrete steps to foster entrepreneurship through various regulations (Gunawan et al., 2021; Junaidi et al., 2023; Sahrah et al., 2023), such as Presidential Instruction No. 4 of 1995 on the National Movement for Entrepreneurship Development, and Presidential Regulation No. 27 of 2013 concerning the Development of Entrepreneurial Incubators.



These policies are aimed at creating an enabling environment for new entrepreneurs, especially among the youth. However, as highlighted by this study, institutional translation of these policies into university-level programs still varies in quality and effectiveness. The integration of entrepreneurship education into higher education curricula must therefore be more than symbolic; it must be operationalized through cross-sectoral collaboration, infrastructure investment, and pedagogical reform.

One effective approach to bridging theory and practice is experiential learning. Susanti (2014) emphasizes that entrepreneurship learning must combine cognitive instruction with concrete, action-based experiences. In this study, students who had been exposed to entrepreneurship training, workshops, and student-led initiatives demonstrated higher readiness to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Learning methods such as problem-based learning (PBL) (Bayley et al., 2021; Hermann et al., 2021), design thinking, business simulation, and direct involvement in startups or student enterprises should be promoted within entrepreneurship programs. These active learning models not only improve technical skills but also strengthen adaptability, decision-making, and resilience traits that are essential in navigating uncertainty in business.

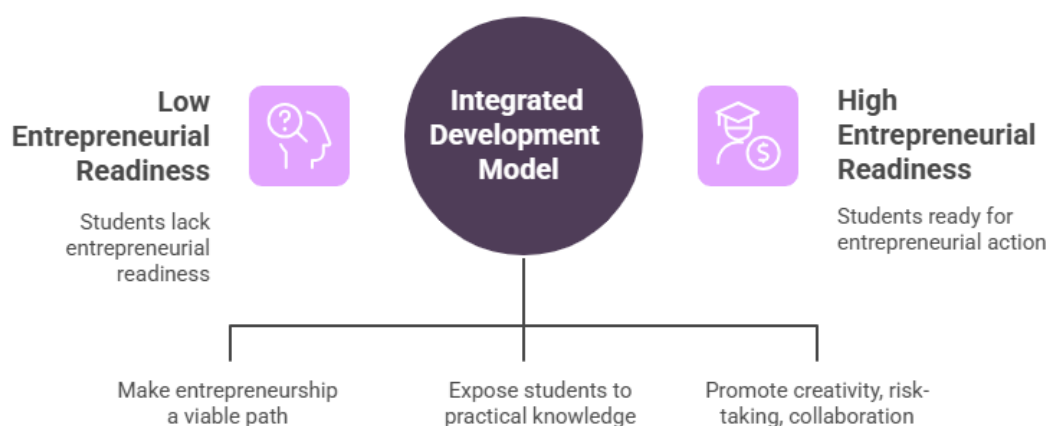


Figure 1 Cultivating Entrepreneurial Readiness

Figure 1 illustrates an integrated development model designed to guide students from low to high entrepreneurial readiness. On the left, students who lack entrepreneurial confidence and direction are identified as having low readiness. Through the central model, which emphasizes three strategic steps making entrepreneurship a viable career path, exposing students to practical knowledge, and promoting creativity, risk-taking, and collaboration students gradually build the mindset and skills necessary for entrepreneurial action. The right side of the diagram represents high entrepreneurial readiness, where students are equipped and motivated to engage in real-world ventures. This model highlights that entrepreneurial readiness is not innate, but a process that can be nurtured through structured education, mentorship, and experiential learning.

From a broader perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on student entrepreneurship in emerging economies. While much of the existing literature has focused on entrepreneurial intentions or macro-level ecosystem design, this study offers a micro-level, student-centered lens rooted in lived experience and institutional context. The model proposed integrating perception, interest, and competence is particularly relevant for higher education institutions seeking to align their graduate outcomes with national development goals. Furthermore, the implications of

this research may extend beyond Indonesia, offering insights for countries with similar challenges in transforming educational outputs into productive economic participation.

A positive entrepreneurial perception among students, as shown in this study, reflects a growing awareness of entrepreneurship's potential to improve individual welfare and serve as an alternative to formal employment. This aligns with the argument by Purwana *et al.* (2018), who emphasize that students' belief systems particularly their perceived behavioral control and value judgment toward entrepreneurship strongly influence their entrepreneurial intentions.

Equally important is the development of entrepreneurial interest, which in this study was found to be motivated by students' exposure to practical knowledge, a desire for independence, and social encouragement. These findings resonate with Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991), where intention is formed not only by attitude but also by perceived social support and individual confidence in one's ability. However, barriers such as fear of failure and lack of confidence in preparation highlight the need for structured support systems within academic institutions, such as mentoring and incubator programs.

In terms of competence, students who enjoy creativity, are willing to take risks, and practice honesty and collaboration demonstrate the core attributes of entrepreneurial capacity. As Jones and English (2004) suggest, entrepreneurship education must go beyond classroom instruction to include real-world challenges, reflective learning, and opportunities for active experimentation. The study also shows that organizational involvement contributes positively to competence development, a finding echoed by Nurjamiah *et al.* (2020), who noted that experiential learning fosters both soft and hard skills essential to entrepreneurship.

The integration of these three elements perception, interest, and competence into a coherent development model can serve as a practical roadmap for universities aiming to produce entrepreneurial graduates. With proper institutional backing, including access to mentorship, collaborative networks, and business incubation, students can move from theoretical understanding to entrepreneurial action. The results of this study affirm that fostering an entrepreneurial mindset is not a linear process, but rather a multidimensional journey that requires emotional readiness, intellectual clarity, and strategic support.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that students generally hold a positive perception of entrepreneurship, recognizing it as a viable means to improve welfare and reduce the risk of educated unemployment. Their entrepreneurial interest is notably high, driven by adequate knowledge, institutional exposure, and a desire for independence. In terms of competence, students demonstrate a reasonable level of readiness, particularly in creativity, risk acceptance, and collaboration, although their practical experience remains limited.

The discussion further reveals that cultivating entrepreneurial readiness among students requires an integrated approach that addresses perception, interest, and competence simultaneously. The proposed development model grounded in perception shaping, practical exposure, and value-based skill-building offers a structured pathway to enhance entrepreneurial outcomes. Moreover, experiential learning and mentoring are essential elements that bridge the gap between intention and action. This study also affirms that a supportive university ecosystem, including business incubation, peer role



models, and external collaboration, plays a critical role in accelerating entrepreneurial development.

However, this study is not without limitations. The sample size was limited to 20 students from a single institution, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the data relied heavily on self-reported perceptions, which may be subject to response bias. The study also focused primarily on qualitative aspects, leaving out measurable indicators of entrepreneurial performance or outcomes. Future research should consider expanding the sample across multiple universities and disciplines to validate the model's applicability in broader contexts. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to track changes in entrepreneurial readiness over time. Furthermore, integrating quantitative measures such as entrepreneurial intention scales or post-program business outcomes could provide more robust insights into the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs.

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