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DRIVERS OF CHOOSING ENTREPRENEURSHIP PATH OF FINAL YEAR STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF A UNIVERSITY IN THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA**Nteboheng Patricia Mefi¹, Samson Nambei Asoba^{2*}**^{1,2*} *Department of Administration and Information Management, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa**E-mails:*¹ nmefi@wsu.ac.za; ^{2*} sasoba@wsu.ac.za (Corresponding author)*Received 18 June 2025; accepted 15 October; published 30 December 2025*

Abstract. This study aimed to address the need to strengthen entrepreneurship by identifying the drivers of entrepreneurship as a choice of self-employment. The study was conducted among final year students at a University in the Western Cape. These students were suitable for this analysis, as they were preparing for entry into the job market upon completing their university studies, making their choice of job a worthy subject for exploration. The study employed a qualitative research design, collecting data through focus group discussions. A focus group discussion was conducted with eight final-year students of entrepreneurship at a University in the Western Cape. The data provided indicated that cognitive and environmental factors influenced their choice. The cognitive factor involved inherent drives and inborn psychological orientations to engage in entrepreneurship, while the environmental drivers related to the nature of the environment, where factors such as unemployment, poverty, and social expectations drove the need to engage in entrepreneurship. The study recommends that universities strengthen their entrepreneurial role to promote entrepreneurial behaviour among students of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: entrepreneurship; employment; students; self-employment; higher education

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1. Introduction

The worldwide acceptance that entrepreneurship is essential for economic growth and societal development creates a need for inquiry into the enablers and drivers of positive entrepreneurial behaviour (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2024; Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025). Entrepreneurship research as a separate field gained strength from the early 1990s and has continued to rise in importance due to the need to support entrepreneurial policies and cultivate entrepreneurial behaviour (Kaki et al., 2023; Jia et al., 2023; Mirvis, 2024; Xiong & Sun, 2025; Nguyen & Uong, 2025).

Entrepreneurship research is expected to grow in countries such as South Africa and many other developing nations due to the various socio-economic challenges that they face and the need to accelerate economic development (Anal & Singh, 2023; Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025). In their efforts to promote entrepreneurial behaviour, countries will require specific information on dimensions of entrepreneurship research, such as the drivers of entrepreneurship. This is exacerbated by the ever-changing macro and micro environment (Liguori et al., 2024; Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025). The results of earlier studies may become less relevant due to environmental turbulence. In view of this situation, the purpose of this study was to explore the drivers of entrepreneurship behaviour in the present socio-economic environment in South Africa. This is vital to support policymakers, the

government, the education sector, as well as society in their various attempts to increase the rate of entrepreneurship in South Africa (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021; Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025).

Additionally, post-apartheid South Africa continues facing the enduring challenge of addressing poverty, inequalities and unemployment (Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025). These challenges make it difficult for successful entrepreneurship activities, necessitating the development of entrepreneurship ecosystems that support one another for successful entrepreneurship behaviour (Zin & Ibrahim, 2020; ILO, 2024). The ILO (2024) notes that such entrepreneurship would involve human capital initiatives that include entrepreneurial education, appropriate policies, suitable finance, a supportive culture, and access to markets. These arguments are also made in Zin and Ibrahim (2020), who argue that there is a need for supportive measures to ensure successful entrepreneurship. This study focuses on education as a key component of this ecosystem. Research results from other scientists indicate that entrepreneurial education is crucial for enhancing entrepreneurial intention, as well as increasing creativity and self-efficacy or confidence in entrepreneurship (Ebewo & Rugimbana, 2017; Rakib et al., 2020). Despite observations that some progress has been made in addressing these challenges, more needs to be done (Bezerra et al., 2023). The ever-dynamic environment has complicated necessary interventions, as what has worked over the past years may suddenly become irrelevant. This situation calls for continuous studies of the environment in the search for possible solutions.

2. Literature review

Studies of entrepreneurship have been a focus within entrepreneurship theory; however, more research remains necessary due to the turbulence within the business environment (Ahmad et al., 2024). Scientists have found such drivers as personality (achievement motivation, risk propensity, innovativeness, stress tolerance, autonomy, consciousness and openness to experience), human and social capital, strategy (strategic planning abilities, business planning, entrepreneurial orientation and innovation (Ndovela & Chinyamurindi, 2021).

This study argues that within a turbulent environment, nothing is permanent, and further research is necessary on previously identified phenomena, such as the drivers of entrepreneurship. While entrepreneurship is based on personal and cognitive drivers, community and societal, as well as family, drivers have also been evident (Molina, 2020). In many communities, it has been observed that there are families known to have a history of grooming entrepreneurship, which is not reliant on education, and arguments have been raised that it is a hereditary trait (Molina, 2020; Adeel, Daniel, & Batelho, 2023). This may be indicative of genetics. Several cases also exist where a person became an entrepreneur after acquiring higher education, while observations have also been made that some individuals left education to initiate entrepreneurship ventures (Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025). This leaves the question: What is the nature of entrepreneurship? In this controversy, it is clear that genetics is rooted in family lines. At the same time, nurture refers to the environment in which people and institutions, such as those in higher education, develop, cultivate, and groom students. The final remark on the role of higher educational institutions in this controversy is the nurturing of students.

In the study by Jardim and Sousa (2023), it was found that drivers of entrepreneurship emanate from both the cognitive characteristics of individuals and the nurturing environment. Entrepreneurship nurturing is the act of creating an environment that stimulate entrepreneurship through relevant cognitive, emotional, physical and psychosocial strategies that inspire and ignite the entrepreneurial potential of individuals (Ojogbo, Idemobi & Ngige, 2016; Farrukh et al., 2018) Whereas entrepreneurially oriented genetics can be part of an individual, unlocking it to actual activity may be a function of the university (Adeel, Daniel & Batelho, 2023). While many institutions of higher education could have established a Department of Entrepreneurship and created entrepreneurship modules, this is not enough to enhance the complex compositions required for real entrepreneurial activity (Jardim & Sousa, 2023). Enriching learners with entrepreneurial education without the emotional drive, physical strength, desire, and belief in entrepreneurship will yield minor achievement (Ncube &

Lekhanya, 2025). The nurturing environment of the university requires a holistic composition and complex network of actions that is truly inspiring to engage in real entrepreneurship activity (Lans et al., 2013). This is the missing link; while attempts have been made to promote entrepreneurship, the need remains for more targeted actions that truly unleash an individual's entrepreneurial potential. The inability to unleash entrepreneurial motives remains a weakness in institutions of higher education. Another level remains to be reached, where real and successful entrepreneurship is realised (Ojogbo, 2016; Phiri & Chasaya, 2023; Qwabe, Ngibe, & Bingwa, 2025). The current situation in universities has done quite well in fostering an entrepreneurial appreciation and sensitivity to the need for entrepreneurship. Facilitating real actions that are sustained and that translate to thriving entities remains an unlocked potential. This requires new approaches and new knowledge positions for educators and their universities. While entrepreneurship education is a driver of entrepreneurial intention, more still needs to be done to improve entrepreneurial activities in South Africa (Jardim & Sousa, 2023; Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025; Mothibi, Malebana, & Rankhumise, 2025).

The present inadequacies in higher education for entrepreneurship, as demonstrated by continued high youth unemployment and small business failure, underscore the need to elevate entrepreneurial education to a new level (Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025; Qwabe et al., 2025). This enriched level of higher entrepreneurship education has been conceived within the concept of entrepreneurial education in recent years. The entrepreneurial level emanates from the university's realisation within an ecosystem comprising industry, the community, the government, and the student community (Feder & Nițu-Antonie, 2017; ILO, 2024). Such an ecosystem creates a network of relationships that fosters the creation and sharing of critical ideas and intelligence for promoting entrepreneurship (Najera-Sanchez, Perez-Perez, & Gonzalez-Torres, 2023; Ncube & Lekhanya, 2025). The creation of interaction platforms, as well as the inclusion of small business incubators and engagement with related government institutions, have been key strategies for taking entrepreneurship to the next level. While this is critical, it can be argued that, to some extent, the emotional component of such systems remains underdeveloped. The emotional component is that sense of attachment and earnest desire that can drive a person to action. There may be a need to ensure that universities incorporate an emotional component that encourages and accelerates entrepreneurial behaviour among learners (Ncanywa & Dyantyi, 2022; Nițu-Antonie, Feder, & Stamenovic, 2022). In this view, some universities, such as Nelson Mandela, have established key institutions, including the Centre for Rapid Entrepreneurship Incubation, as well as entrepreneurship hubs designed to inspire potential entrepreneurs. These are necessary actions, but it is clear that more creativity and innovativeness are still essential to strengthen entrepreneurship. There is also more to be done.

The present technological revolution has created new frontiers, new business opportunities, and new ways (Liguori et al., 2024; Gazi et al., 2024). The failure to fully harness technological imperatives may be the cause of the imbalance between the desired state of entrepreneurial education and the current state of entrepreneurship in our country. The exploitation of technological developments and societal needs can be used to create new ventures, as well as assist potential entrepreneurs in realising their potential (Barba-Sánchez et al., 2023; Liguori et al., 2024). The explosion of information, new ways of processing it, and access to it are potential areas of benefit for potential and rising entrepreneurs (Gazi et al., 2024). There are unimaginable opportunities arising from the use of artificial intelligence technologies, as well as social media use, for potential entrepreneurs

3. Methodology

This study adhered to the subjective philosophy, which views reality as multidimensional and varying among individuals depending on their situations and circumstances (Pretorius, 2024). Consequently, it employed a qualitative research approach to collect in-depth information from participants and identify possible interrelationships in their perceptions. This study of drivers for entrepreneurship was conducted through focus groups with eight final-year students of entrepreneurship, who were asked to respond to possible reasons why they would choose to become entrepreneurs soon after completing their entrepreneurial courses at a selected

university. The research question for the focus group discussions was: Why would you want to be an entrepreneur as a form of employment soon after completing your studies? Participants in the focus group were final-year students of entrepreneurship at the university, selected based on their performance in the subject over the years. Top performers in the Entrepreneurship course among final-year students were identified from examination records at the university, which was chosen for its ease of accessibility and prominence as a university with a history of excellence in unlocking entrepreneurial talents among students over the past year. The Head of Department (HOD) for the entrepreneurial program at the university was approached, and the study was explained to them. The HOD showed interest in the research and provided support in the data collection process. An email was sent to all fifteen top students of entrepreneurship, and eight of them expressed interest in participating in the study.

The lecturers were also asked to help identify students who could participate in the data collection process. Ultimately, eight students participated in the data collection process. Scholars have noted that successful focus groups require a structured approach, involving a moderator or facilitator, as well as a record keeper, during the focus group discussion session. Additionally, group rules are essential in focus groups to maintain order, leading to reliable and viable data for the study. The group of respondents were then asked to have a preliminary meeting with the HOD and the researcher. They were informed of the study, and a date, time and venue for the focus group were set. The participants were informed of their rights to anonymity and the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. All participants appointed one student to moderate and lead the discussion. Group rules were established, and participants were required to adhere to them to ensure the debate's success. The biographical details of the eight participants are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic variables of respondents

	Gender	Racial group	Age range
1	Male	African	25-30
2	Female	African	25-30
3	Female	African	20-25
4	Female	Asian	30-35
5	Male	Coloured	25-30
6	Male	Coloured	25-30
7	Male	White	25-30
8	Male	African	20-25

Table 1 shows that the respondents were from all racial groups, but Africans were more represented than other groups. There were also more females than males, and the majority were within the 25-30 age group.

4. Results and discussion

The method of data analysis that was used emerged from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) on grounded theory. Following this method, data collected through written notes were first subjected to open coding, whereby important information was coded before axial coding, where codes were categorised, and then to final coding, whereby categories of themes were grouped into themes. Table 2 provides the coding process followed.

Table 2. Main responses for the focus group question: Why would you want to be an entrepreneur as a form of employment soon after completing your studies?

	Data units relevant to the study	Non-verbal cues	Open coding	Axial coding	Theme
R1	The premise for my studying entrepreneurship arises from the inspiration that I got from my own parents. My family owns multiple enterprises in the Eastern Cape, which they established and have been managing to date. These parents drive my desire to be an entrepreneur. I want to be an entrepreneur and follow in my parents' footsteps.	Head nodding and hand gestures were displayed.	Family and societal drivers	Families and society	Environmental Drivers

R2	I think everyone now knows that South Africa is presently troubled by high unemployment, and the prospects of being employed are now low. This is why I aspire to become an entrepreneur. There are no jobs out there. I expect entrepreneurship or self-employment to be a career of choice for me in this context.	A rise in voice and emphasis, along with hands and body gestures, was evident. Clapping of hands from other participants	Financial status Unemployment	Economic conditions	Environmental
R3	I have learnt a lot in this course of entrepreneurship, and I am eager to put these things into practice. The course has talked out the basics of enterprise formation and management. I feel that I need to try it out, and I have the self-belief that I can be a successful entrepreneur in South Africa. What is the purpose of learning if we put what we have learnt on the shelves? I am an individual who believes in oneself and trusts that I can make it.	Hand gestures from the participant.	Personal beliefs, attitude and knowledge	Psychological	Cognitive disposition
R4	Well, the present technological environment is full of opportunities for entrepreneurship and requires someone who is simply creative to engage profitably. With technology, there is a lot to do. I believe I can be a successful entrepreneur through some form of technological combinations. This environment differs from that of previous years, where large entities could profitably engage in certain activities. Now everyone can successfully exploit opportunities using technology	Body movements of agreement from all participants are shown	Technological opportunities	technology	Environment
R5	I would like to be an entrepreneur to widen my income base. I will always do something aside from formal employment so that I am adequately financed. The economic environment has become challenging, and it is essential to have diverse income streams to ensure that one meets all essential needs. This makes entrepreneurship activities important.	Participants indicated being unsettled.	Financial Economic Income	Economic	Environment
R6	I would prefer to be employed, but getting a job in South Africa or completing university can take time. Many graduates suffer soon after university and may take years to get a proper job. I would not like to do that; I expect to quickly find employment just after university, while looking for an appropriate job. When I get a job, depending on whether it is possible to continue entrepreneurial activities while in another employment, I may do both.	Applause from all participants was heard, with clapping of hands and side conversations increasing. There was evidence of high support.	Unemployment	Economic	Environment
R7	Among the many reasons that I would need to be an entrepreneur, I believe that our society now provides more status to entrepreneurs. There is social recognition and prospects for becoming a role model through entrepreneurship. I am excited by the prospects of being a role model in my society.	Applause from all participants was heard, with clapping of hands and side conversations increasing.	Social status Role model	Social recognition	Environment
R8	My own character favours entrepreneurship because I like independence and flexibility. Doing my own things. Being employed means doing what someone requires, and you must follow the directions and supervision of others. That does not suit me. I want to enjoy my own freedom and flexibility to do what I want. Entrepreneurship offers me the freedom that I need. I will employ myself and others.	Nodding of heads by participants	Personal independence Flexible Personal satisfaction	Psychological	Cognitive disposition

The results of the focus group discussions, as presented in Table 2, indicate that the drivers for entrepreneurship as a career choice among final-year students at a University in the Western Cape can be grouped primarily into two categories: cognitive orientation and the socio-economic environment in South Africa. These results seem to relate to arguments from the literature that the environmental is vital in influencing entrepreneurial behaviour (Ndofirepi, 2020; Jardim & Sousa, 2023), The socio-economic environment relates to the economic state with regards to unemployment; financial challenges related to poverty and rising cost of living which drives the final year students to opt to be become financially active and entrepreneurship seem to offer these prospects. The study also shows that the technological environment characterised by technological growth has created various opportunities for entrepreneurship. The study indicated that technology presents multiple opportunities for creativity and innovation, which can be exploited to create entrepreneurial ventures. This is also supported in Liguori et al. (2024). Results demonstrate that technological advancements can be attractive to entrepreneurs. Secondly, the focus group discussions revealed that some cognitive orientations among the participants led them to favour entrepreneurship. These include their own personal values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge, which make them confident in starting entrepreneurial activities. These results are also supported by studies such as those of

Ncanywa & Dyantyi (2022) and Mothibi et al. (2025). Some of the respondents also provided that entrepreneurship provides status, self-achievement, and allows them to realise their potential. These results are presented in Figure 1.

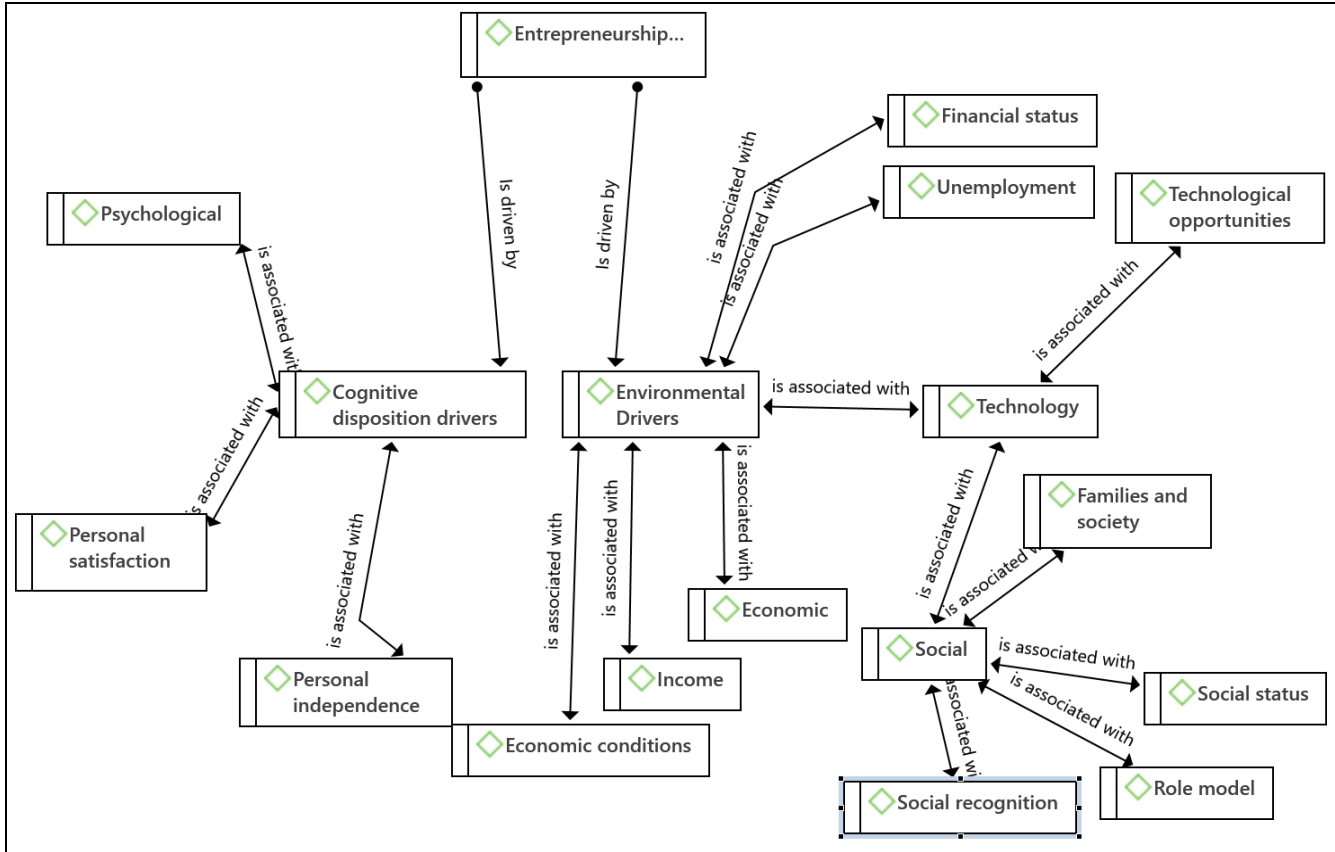


Figure 1. Summary of drivers towards entrepreneurship

Source: the authors

Figure 1 summarises the drivers in terms of environmental and cognitive drivers as found in this study. The cognitive drivers may be inborn attributes that are the skills needed for entrepreneurship. In contrast, the environmental skills relate to the nurturing role of various components in driving entrepreneurial intention and behaviour.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the factors that influence entrepreneurship as a career choice among final-year students at a University in the Western Cape. This study found that environmental and cognitive factors influenced the drivers of the urge to become an entrepreneur. This supports previous studies on entrepreneurial intention and activities. Institutions of higher education should strengthen their nurturing role by inspiring the development of entrepreneurship to another level. In particular, the emotional component to encourage entrepreneurship is worth exploring. Technological tools and systems remain essential for opening new frontiers to advance entrepreneurship education. Students who tend to have cognitive abilities should be identified and nurtured to ensure a supportive environment for the realisation of real entrepreneurship activity.

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