

Which types of experience matter? The role of prior start-up experiences and work experience in fostering youth entrepreneurial intentions

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Abstract

Purpose – In spite of research on entrepreneurial intentions being a mature field of enquiry, little is known about the influence of experience on entrepreneurial intentions, especially among the youth and in developing contexts. This paper investigates the impact of different types of experience—entrepreneurial early childhood experiences, prior start-up experiences, work experience, education and peer influence—on the entrepreneurial intentions of South African youth.

Design/methodology/approach – First, a quantitative survey of 827 secondary students was administered, and results were analysed by means of hierarchical logistic regression. Second, two focus groups were conducted with secondary students representing two distinct segments of South African society to shed light on some of the unique survey findings.

Findings – Results revealed that the experiences of having attempted to start a business and having previously worked in a business, as well as entrepreneurship education, have a positive influence on youth entrepreneurial intentions, while peers' entrepreneurial intentions exert a negative influence. Peer influence and contextual factors such as family and community support, which are catalytic in other parts of the world, appear to dampen youth entrepreneurial intentions because of fear of failure and fear of competition.

Originality/value – This paper examines the influence of a broader taxonomy of experience types on youth entrepreneurial intentions than found in previous studies. It highlights the unique role played by specific types of experience and points to the need to include extra-curricular entrepreneurial experiences in interventions aimed at fostering youth entrepreneurial intentions in developing nations.

Keywords – Entrepreneurial intentions; experience; youth; developing countries; sub-Saharan Africa

Article classification – Research paper

Introduction

In recent times we have witnessed the proliferation of initiatives and efforts to promote youth entrepreneurship (Schøtt et al., 2015), especially in reaction to persistently high youth unemployment rates globally. It is a widespread belief that entrepreneurship can curb the negative effects of unemployment by creating employment for young entrepreneurs and the people they employ (Kassean et al., 2015; Pandit et al., 2018). Hence there has been a focus in research and practice on stimulating entrepreneurial intentions (EI) for youth, firstly because of the claim that EI translate into future entrepreneurial behaviour (Kautonen et al., 2015; Kolvereid and Isaksen, 2006; Rauch and Hulsink, 2015) and, secondly, because young people still have to overcome some barriers to their successful business start-up at this stage of their life compared to older individuals (Schøtt et al., 2015). EI represent an important behavioural step in the business start-up process (Hsu et al., 2019) and deserve more attention in the developing world, where their underlying mechanisms have been under-researched (Iakovleva et al., 2011; Nabi and Liñán, 2011). For instance, it appears that a larger portion of EI in the developing world are born out of necessity (Margolis, 2014), but the relationship between socio-economic variables such as income levels and the type of entrepreneurial intention is not always intuitive (Rosa et al., 2008), also considering that diametrically opposed intentions are not necessarily the result of contrasting goals (Richetin et al., 2011).

As Liñán and Fayolle (2015) point out in their systematic review of the EI literature, there have been multiple approaches to the investigation of how EI may be fostered. These range from studies on entrepreneurial personality traits (Brandstätter, 2011; Rauch and Frese, 2007; Zhao et al., 2010) to behavioural studies based primarily on Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour. What has emerged over time (e.g., Fayolle and Gailly, 2015; Kassean et al., 2015), however, is the importance of experience in driving future EI and behaviour, with some studies (e.g., Gird and Bagraim, 2008; Politis, 2008; Zhang et al., 2014) investigating the impact of experience on entrepreneurial behavioural outcomes such as EI. In the case of prior exposure to entrepreneurship, whether direct or vicarious, there is evidence that this type of experience has both a catalytic effect—e.g., among university students in South Africa (Gird and Bagraim, 2008)—and a dampening effect on youth EI—e.g., among university students in China (Zhang et al., 2014). Hence, there is a need to accumulate more empirical evidence on the relationship between different types of experience and EI.

The promotion of youth EI is especially relevant in developing countries where, besides the challenge faced by early-career youth in finding employment also encountered in other parts of the world, the quality of employment is often substandard (International Labour Organization,

2015). In these regions of the world, not only is it crucial that young people start businesses, but also that these youth enterprises be of the kind that are able to survive, grow and employ more people (Kew, 2015).

With this perspective in mind, the investigation of the factors motivating young people to start businesses is highly relevant in a developing-country context. Decades of research have established several personal and contextual factors influencing the emergence of EI (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015), but studies have mostly been conducted in advanced economies and among adults. Recent work in South Africa (Bignotti and Le Roux, 2016), however, has shown that personality traits such as need for achievement and contextual factors such as family support may, contrary to literature-based expectations, even have a dampening effect on EI, and only a positive effect when situated in the context of entrepreneurship-education interventions. To our knowledge, only Gird and Bagraim (2008) have studied the effect of experience on EI in a sub-Saharan African youth context. The importance of experiential factors in fostering youth EI in developing nations such as those in sub-Saharan Africa has been demonstrated by evidence that entrepreneurship education programmes based on experiential learning have a much higher impact than theoretically based programmes (Nabi et al., 2017).

Empirical studies investigating the contribution of experience to the development of EI (e.g., Kautonen et al., 2010; Miralles et al., 2016) are not lacking but are still scarce relative to the body of research on EI (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015), especially in youth and developing-country contexts. Moreover, studies on the role of experience in the emergence of EI in individuals differ widely depending on the type of experience examined, such as prior entrepreneurial experience (Miralles et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014), entrepreneurial knowledge as a result of prior experience and education (Miralles et al., 2016) and work experience in a small business, in the public sector or blue-collar careers (Kautonen et al., 2010). There also appears to be some variability of results across different age groups, with entrepreneurial experience influencing EI positively in young individuals but not in older individuals (Miralles et al., 2017).

In the sub-Saharan African context, and leading up to the present study, Bignotti and Le Roux (2016) focused on the influence of personality traits and contextual factors on youth EI in South Africa, and found that entrepreneurship education moderates the effect of need for achievement and family support on EI in a positive direction. A second paper (Bignotti and Le Roux, 2018) analysed the unique composition of personality traits and contextual factors associated with youth EI in South Africa, with significant differences found based on gender, cultural background and entrepreneurship education. So, taken together, these studies have demonstrated that the personality-trait and contextual antecedents of youth EI are rather peculiar

to the sub-Saharan African context. Our study takes a next step to investigate the influence of different types of experience on EI in a sub-Saharan African youth context, using secondary students as respondents. We frame this research under the theoretical lens of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and focus specifically on performance-accomplishment types of experience. Borrowing experiential constructs from the extant literature on the relationship between experience and entrepreneurial behavioural outcomes, we follow a mixed methods approach. First, we used hierarchical logistic regression to test a model including the experience variables as predictors (Study 1)—over and above the influence of a number of control variables and the personality and contextual variables identified as predictors of EI in previous research. In a second stage (Study 2), we conducted two focus groups—representing two segments of South African society (privileged and underprivileged)—to gain insights into some of Study 1's heterodox, surprising findings.

This paper aims to make several contributions. First, we contribute to the literature by considering a wider set of types of experience conjointly when investigating the influence of experience, compared to previous studies on the antecedents of EI. Second, our context is a novel contribution in that we situate our study where youth unemployment rates are high, the quality of work is dismal and youth EI are low (Kew, 2015). This paper offers empirical evidence on which types of experience have a catalytic impact on youth EI, particularly in a developing nation. The third contribution is our empirical finding that certain types of experience may hinder the previously established important association between personality traits, such as need for achievement, and EI (Walter and Heinrichs, 2015). In so doing we offer hope that individuals without certain given entrepreneurial personality traits or situated in certain contexts may still exhibit entrepreneurial behaviour based on types of experiences they accrue. Lastly, our use of two distinct focus groups offers two unique demographic perspectives on the nature of some of the findings.

Literature review

The role of experience in fostering entrepreneurial intentions

In a recent review of the EI literature, Liñán and Fayolle (2015) identified studies on the influence of personal-level factors on EI as the largest research category. Within this research are studies on the role of experience in the development of EI. For instance, Gird and Bagraim (2008) studied the influence of final-year commerce students' exposure to entrepreneurship at a South African university. They found that only self-employment experience exerts a positive influence on EI, while having a self-employed parent or relative does not impact intentions. However, as a body of

research, these studies have been dominated by tests of the influence of personality or psychological factors, such as risk propensity and cognitive styles, on EI (Liñán and Fayolle, 2015). The study of experience as a behavioural antecedent in entrepreneurship is a more recent phenomenon than research on personal-level antecedents and is still gaining attention in the scholarly community (Walter and Heinrichs, 2015).

The need for this research goes beyond the fact that research on the impact of experience on EI has often been neglected. We also need research on experience because entrepreneurial experience is now becoming mainstream as part of entrepreneurship education. The adoption of an experiential lens in both entrepreneurship research and practice is leading more and more scholars to prescribe the inclusion of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education programmes (e.g., Bae et al., 2014; Dhliwayo, 2008; Neergaard and Christensen, 2017). Experiential learning or “learning by doing” has been argued to produce higher-impact outcomes in entrepreneurship education, as it fosters the development of problem-solving competencies (Nabi et al., 2017) and possibly reinforces a person’s beliefs in the feasibility of an entrepreneurial career. By way of example, in a study surveying undergraduate university students in the USA, Kassean et al. (2015) found that students engaging in entrepreneurial experiential learning develop higher levels of EI.

This paper adopts a specific theoretical lens under which to examine the role of experience, namely Bandura’s (1986) SCT. According to this theory, there exists a triadic reciprocal relationship between i) personal attributes (psychological and physical), ii) external environmental factors and iii) manifest behaviour, as they all mutually affect each other. In this view, behaviour is not only a consequence of the interaction between the person and the environment, but a person’s behaviour also shapes the individual and his or her expectations and goals and influences the environment and its constraints. Hence, behavioural experience can shape a person’s mind-set and future behaviour: experience, gained through the repetition of certain actions, forges one’s beliefs and conditions future behaviour. SCT is essentially a behavioural theory of how individuals learn from their environment and their own behavioural experience and, in conjunction with their personal attributes, take on future behaviour. Likewise, in the context of entrepreneurship, Dyer (1994) envisaged the development of the propensity toward an entrepreneurial career as encompassing, among others, a process of socialisation, whereby a person becomes acquainted with a career through personal experience and education. SCT is the theory that engendered the concept of self-efficacy, i.e., people’s beliefs in their capability to exercise some measure of control over their pursuits and environmental events (Bandura, 1997). “Efficacy beliefs are the

foundation of human agency” (Bandura, 2001): people will engage in activities and settings they feel confident in managing and avoid those for which they feel ill-equipped.

A tenet of SCT important to this study is that self-efficacy is acquired through different sources of learning: i) performance accomplishments, ii) vicarious experience, iii) verbal persuasion and iv) emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977). In our work we consider the first two. Performance accomplishments represent the direct experience one has in performing certain actions; if this experience is positive, it will reinforce self-efficacy beliefs and future behaviour of the same kind but, if negative, it will hinder someone from engaging in the same behaviour in future. Vicarious experience is the indirect experience one has of certain behaviour through the observation of other people’s actions, and it also can be positive or negative and therefore reinforce or hinder the actor’s same behaviour through self-efficacy. The effect of vicarious experience on future behaviour through self-efficacy is, however, deemed to be weaker than that of performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977).

SCT has the potential to shed light on recent findings on the influence of experience on EI and, vice versa, such findings corroborate some of the theory’s tenets exposed above. Viewed via SCT, the findings of, for instance, Gird and Bagraim’s (2008) study could be interpreted as follows. Young people who effectively start businesses would experience performance accomplishments and thus exhibit higher levels of EI owing to their positive experience in entrepreneurial activities, which reinforces their confidence in their ability to run a business successfully. The gained self-efficacy, which is a personal attribute, transfers to similar contexts of operation (i.e., environments). However, Gird and Bagraim (2008) observed that experiencing entrepreneurship by having a self-employed parent or relative, which would be a vicarious experience, has no impact on EI. So, observing others performing entrepreneurial activities influences EI less than performing those activities in the first person. The triadic reciprocal relationship and the role of experience underpinning the SCT are evident.

Applying SCT as a theoretical lens to the extant literature on the role of experience in the development of EI, what emerges is that most studies have focused primarily on vicarious experience with a secondary focus on performance accomplishments as experience types. For instance, Carr and Sequeira (2007) empirically observed that prior family business exposure—measured as a composite index of having or having had a self-employed parent, a self-employed relative and having worked in a family member’s business—positively influences EI among USA adults. In contrast, Gird and Bagraim (2008) found that having a self-employed parent or close relative (vicarious experience) does not influence the EI of young people (undergraduate university students) in South Africa. Even more in contrast to Carr and Sequeira’s (2007) findings,

Zhang et al. (2014) observed that prior entrepreneurial exposure exerts a negative influence on the EI of young people (undergraduate and postgraduate university students) in China. They also measured prior entrepreneurial exposure as an index made up of exposure to: i) parents' and relatives', ii) friends', iii) ex-employers' and iv) personal entrepreneurial activities. In Zhang et al.'s (2014) study, performance accomplishments were represented only by personal entrepreneurial activities, and it should be noted that most of the sample had no previous entrepreneurial experience.

However, as we have seen, performance accomplishments represent a more powerful form of experience in stimulating future behaviour; in other words, performing entrepreneurial activities in the first person has more impact on one's EI than observing other people perform entrepreneurial activities. Only a few studies have focused primarily on this type of entrepreneurial experience. For instance, Politis (2008) examined the influence of entrepreneurs' prior start-up experience on their entrepreneurial learning. Surveying Swedish entrepreneurs, he found that prior start-up experience enhances entrepreneurs' skills for coping with liabilities of newness, effectual reasoning and attitudes towards failure, with some differences between nascent and established entrepreneurs (Politis, 2008). More recently, Miralles et al. (2017) studied the influence of people's entrepreneurial behaviour on their EI using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. They found that being personally engaged in entrepreneurial activities positively affects the antecedents of EI (personal attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control) for young (age 35 or younger) individuals (Miralles et al., 2017).

What emerges from the literature on the role of experience in the development of EI is that performance accomplishments as a type of entrepreneurial experience have been downplayed with a greater focus on vicarious experience and, what is more, the studies focusing on performance accomplishments offer mixed evidence for their impact on EI. As mentioned, based on SCT, we expect performance accomplishments to have a stronger impact on future behaviour than does vicarious experience. Hence, this study will focus primarily on performance accomplishments, with a secondary focus on vicarious experience. In the next section, we review the literature with a focus on operationalising this study's experience constructs and developing its hypotheses.

Towards an operational definition of experience

As can be seen from the previous section, studies on entrepreneurial experience have followed different approaches, and a comprehensive theoretical framework of entrepreneurial experience is lacking. To arrive at an operational definition of experience, this paper borrows from Dyer's (1994) Entrepreneurial Careers Framework. More specifically, under the heading of career

socialisation, Dyer (1994) envisages certain socialisation experiences that would predispose someone to pursue an entrepreneurial career, namely: i) early childhood experiences, ii) prior start-up experiences, iii) work experience, and iv) education. Based on what has been said above about the performance accomplishments type of experience being underexplored at present, Dyer's (1994) framework is appropriate with its broad taxonomy of personal, direct experiences. We review each construct in turn from the perspective of performance accomplishments. The hypotheses may not be novel in themselves (other studies have tested them in isolation), but this study's overall contribution lies in its comprehensive approach in testing the influence of a broader set of experience types and in the context of African youths.

Early childhood experiences may foster the pursuit of an entrepreneurial career later in life. Dyer and Handler (1994) posited that involvement in the family business at a young age, as well as a challenging childhood and conducive child-rearing, may play a crucial role in the later choice of an entrepreneurial career. Similarly, the finding of Cox and Jennings's (1995) empirical study revealed that challenging situations found in one's childhood—such as parental separation, parental bankruptcy and feelings of detachment and loneliness—may be responsible for the development of successful entrepreneurs. Drennan et al. (2005) also observed that early childhood experiences, such as a difficult childhood and frequent relocation, contribute specifically to the development of EI. Hence, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H1: Young people with entrepreneurial early childhood experiences exhibit higher levels of EI than those without this type of experience.

As for prior start-up experiences, there is a large consensus that they influence future entrepreneurial behaviour positively. Previous entrepreneurial experience has been found to foster future nascent entrepreneurial activity (Farmer et al., 2011; Mueller, 2006). Likewise, other authors have observed the positive effect of prior start-up experiences on future entrepreneurial status (Davidsson and Honig, 2003), on venture emergence mediated by opportunity confidence (Dimov, 2010), as well as on all the stages of the business start-up process, namely aspiring-entrepreneurial, nascent-entrepreneurial and business-founder activity (Rotefoss and Kolvereid, 2005). From the narrower perspective of EI, as mentioned previously, it appears that prior start-up experience affects also this outcome variable positively (Gird and Bagraim, 2008). Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: Young people with prior start-up experiences exhibit higher levels of EI than those without this type of experience.

Work experience may also have a catalytic influence on EI. For instance, Mueller (2006) observed that work experience and managerial experience in a small business increase the

likelihood of individuals becoming nascent entrepreneurs. Kemelgor et al. (2011) also found that entrepreneurs with previous experience working for another organisation exhibit a higher need for independence and are more likely to become entrepreneurs owing to a greater perception of inadequate opportunities working for someone else. The type of work experience gained seems to have a bearing on intentions and future behaviour. By way of example, Nair and Pandey (2006) surveyed Indian entrepreneurs and found an association between current entrepreneurial activities and having work experience similar or related to the business currently run. Likewise, Gabrielsson and Politis (2012) observed Swedish entrepreneurs and concluded that having worked across a range of business functions leads to a higher rate of business idea generation, whereas the longer one stays in the same industry the fewer business ideas he or she will generate. However, in Dimov's (2010) study, industry experience had a positive direct effect on venture emergence, which is a more proximate construct to EI than mere business idea generation. Even though these studies on work experience vary in terms of the outcome variable used, they all investigated some aspects related to EI; hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Young people with work experience exhibit higher levels of EI than those without this type of experience.

As for education, the positive effect of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial programme outcomes, including EI, is well documented in the literature (Bae et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). However, in light of the variability of methodologies and outcome measures used in entrepreneurship education research, Nabi et al. (2017) advocate studies to specify which educational pedagogy is being investigated and, more specifically, recommend the study of experiential programmes, which typically yield higher impact. The present paper investigates an entrepreneurship education programme with a strong experiential component (described in Bignotti and Le Roux, 2016) and, based on the experiential nature of this educational programme, treats education as an experiential construct, also in line with Dyer's (1994) conceptual categorisation. There is also evidence that higher levels of general education are associated with a higher likelihood of being self-employed (Robinson and Sexton, 1994), better venture performance (Van der Sluis et al., 2008) and higher venture success, both in terms of venture funding (Dickson et al., 2008) and earnings potential (Robinson and Sexton, 1994). For the sake of coherence, we also treat general education together with entrepreneurship education as an experiential construct. Education at large can be seen as an experiential factor, as we can talk about a "learning experience" (Neergaard and Christensen, 2017) as much as we talk about "learning by experience" (Kassean et al., 2015). In this study, we consider both the level of general education attained (school grade enrolled for; e.g. Grade 11) and the academic performance (specifically, in

the Economic & Management Sciences [EMS] subject) of respondents. In light of the above discussion, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H4: Young people with higher levels of general education exhibit higher levels of EI.

H5: Young people with better performance in general education exhibit higher levels of EI.

H6: Young people with entrepreneurship education exhibit higher levels of EI than those without this type of experience.

Returning to our discussion on performance accomplishments and vicarious experience as entrepreneurial experience types, and having already stated that our paper focuses primarily on performance accomplishments, we nevertheless want to consider in isolation a specific—and, so far, overlooked—kind of vicarious experience, that is, the entrepreneurial experience provided by peers engaging in entrepreneurial activities, which we term “peer influence”. We conceptualise peers as those individuals in a person’s network who are considered as equals in terms of their age and circumstances, such as schoolmates (Falck et al., 2012) and co-workers (Nanda and Sørensen, 2010). People relate to their peers on a horizontal plane, since they see them as their equals, rather than on a vertical plane, according to which people look up to their parents and relatives as superiors. There is, therefore, a special association with peers as role models (Falck et al., 2012). Research on the association between peer influence and EI is limited. Nonetheless, some studies have produced results in support of this relationship (Bönte et al., 2009; Falck et al., 2012; Nanda and Sørensen, 2010). Given the adolescent age of our study’s population, we deem it important to investigate the role played by peers, which often influence each other’s aspirations and behaviours. Hence, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H7: Young people who experience peer influence to start a business exhibit higher levels of EI than those without such peer influence.

To date, the influence of the above experiential constructs on EI has been studied in isolation in separate studies. The present study examines the combined effect of different types of experience on EI in the context of youth in a developing country.

Quantitative survey (Study 1)

The quantitative part of this paper investigated the effect of different types of experience on youth EI. This entailed a cross-sectional study of secondary students in South Africa using a questionnaire comprising 75 statements. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a group of 13 secondary students and finalised based on their feedback. Using hierarchical logistic regression, we followed a model-comparison approach whereby we examined the additional influence of

different types of experience over and above previously investigated personality and contextual constructs (Bignotti and Le Roux, 2016).

Sample

In line with previous studies on EI using secondary students as respondents (e.g., Dinis et al., 2013; Ferreira et al., 2012; do Paço et al., 2011; Sánchez, 2013), we considered secondary students as a sampling frame of the population of South African young people. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the choice of an entrepreneurial career may be shaped by experiences early in life (Cox and Jennings, 1995; Drennan et al., 2005; Dyer and Handler, 1994). There is also evidence that the well-researched career-choice framework of Career Anchors by Schein (1993) is relevant for secondary students (Klapwijk and Rommes, 2009).

The study's sample was represented by 827 learners at 18 South African secondary schools, enrolled in Grades 10, 11 and 12. The schools were located in the South African provinces of Gauteng and Limpopo, which were selected through convenience sampling. Within each school, a random sampling technique was followed to reach individual respondents, as each learner had an equal and known chance of participating in the survey.

Four-hundred-and-four learners were enrolled in a specific entrepreneurship education programme: Junior Achievement South Africa (JASA)'s Mini Enterprise Programme (see Bignotti and Le Roux, 2016, for a more detailed description of the programme). In brief, this is a twelve-week programme aiming to expose learners to the process of business start-up and management and to engage them in the practical aspects of entrepreneurship. These include coming up with a product, marketing and selling it within the community, distributing profit dividends and managing a simple bank account. Enrolment in JASA's programme was used as a proxy for entrepreneurship education.

Measures

Secondary students' EI (dependent variable) were measured by one statement ("I consider running my own business as an employment option for me after school/university") on a nominal "yes-no" scale. This statement was developed following similar approaches used by other authors (Davidsson, 1995; Krueger, 1993; Urban, 2006) to measure EI.

Three sets of independent variables were included in the investigation. For the experience variables—entrepreneurial early childhood experiences, prior start-up experiences, work experience and peer influence—ad-hoc statements were formulated, as previously validated measurement instruments were not available. Examples of these statements are: "I have worked

in my parents' business" for entrepreneurial early childhood experiences, "I have attempted to start a business" for prior start-up experiences, "I have done a holiday job" for work experience and "My friends/classmates want to start a business" for peer influence. Respondents rated these statements on a nominal "yes-no" scale. It should be mentioned here that, given the length of the questionnaire and the type of respondents, we did not ask respondents about their early childhood experiences in a broad sense (as found in some of the literature) but focused exclusively on their entrepreneurial early childhood experiences. Entrepreneurship education was measured by determining whether respondents were enrolled in JASA's Mini Enterprise Programme. General education was measured by asking respondents which school grade they were enrolled for and which subject grade they had for EMS, if they took this subject.

To build on the previous findings by Bignotti and Le Roux (2016) on the influence of personality traits and contextual factors on EI, this paper also included the responses obtained previously for the set of personality traits—need for achievement, locus of control and tolerance of ambiguity—and the set of contextual factors—role models, family support and community support. This was crucial for the hierarchical regression approach followed in this paper and for model comparison.

Lastly, the questionnaire measured respondents' gender, age and home language. These were treated as control variables, as there is evidence that EI vary according to gender (Mahadea et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2007), age (Schøtt et al., 2015) and culture (Farrington et al., 2012; Mahadea et al., 2011). Home language was used as a proxy variable for culture.

Analytic procedures

The personality-trait and contextual-factor constructs were subjected to exploratory factor analysis, and seven internally consistent constructs emerged (Bignotti and Le Roux, 2018). The constructs' descriptive statistics and correlations are also reported in the preceding two studies (Bignotti and Le Roux, 2016, 2018).

In order to test the influence of the experience, personality-trait, contextual and demographic variables on EI, a hierarchical logistic regression approach was followed. Three logistic regression models were built. The first model included the control variables—gender, age, and language—as predictors. The personality-trait and contextual variables were included in the second model as predictors, and the experience variables were further added to the third model. The experience variables were only added in the last step of the hierarchical logistic regression analysis to investigate the additional influence exerted by these variables.

Results

The results of the hierarchical logistic regression analysis are presented in Table 1. Model 1, in which the control variables—gender, age and home language—were introduced as predictors, did not have a significant fit. Moreover, none of the control variables had a significant relationship with EI.

Model 2, in which the personality-trait and contextual variables were introduced, displayed a good fit. In this model, need for achievement was a significant positive predictor of EI, while family support and community support were significant negative predictors. More specifically, secondary students exhibiting need for achievement were roughly twice as likely to have EI, while secondary students with family support and community support were, respectively, roughly twice ($1/\text{Exp}[\beta]=1/0.520$) and three times ($1/0.334$) less likely to have EI.

Model 3, in which the experience variables were factored in, also had a good fit. Moreover, a log-likelihood-ratio test indicated that Model 3 predicted EI more accurately than Model 2 ($D = 23.938$; $df = 12$; $p = 0.021$). In this model, prior start-up experiences (“I have attempted to start a business”) and work experience (“I have worked in a business”) were significant predictors of EI. Secondary students having attempted to start a business and those having worked in a business were roughly 2.7 times ($\text{Exp}[\beta]$ value) more likely to have EI. Hence, H2 and H3 were accepted pertaining specifically to these two specific kinds of prior start-up experience and work experience. H1 could not be supported, as there was no statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurial early childhood experiences and EI.

Entrepreneurship education was also a positive predictor of EI at the 10 per cent significance level (see Table 1, Model 3): secondary students enrolled in JASA’s Mini Enterprise Programme were almost three times more likely to exhibit EI. H6 could thus be accepted with caution. The level of general education—whether learners were enrolled in Grade 10, 11 or 12—had no significant influence on EI, nor did their taking EMS as a subject in school, leading to the rejection of H4 and H5, respectively.

Family support, community support and peer influence (the latter in terms of “My friends/classmates want to start a business”) were significant negative predictors. In particular, family support made it almost twice ($1/0.556$) less likely, community support roughly three times ($1/0.309$) less likely, and having friends or classmates wanting to start a business 1.5 times ($1/0.685$) less likely to display EI. H7, which hypothesised a positive relationship between peer influence to start a business and EI, was rejected accordingly.

Table 1: Hierarchical logistic regression analysis for entrepreneurial intentions

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	β	S.E.	Exp(β)	β	S.E.	Exp(β)	β	S.E.	Exp(β)
Constant	-1.895***	0.575	0.150	2.484	2.077	11.988	-1.800	3.088	0.165
Gender: male	-0.078	0.360	0.925	-0.059	0.386	0.943	0.221	0.428	1.248
Age	0.131	0.316	1.140	0.075	0.333	1.078	0.010	0.373	1.010
Language: other ^a									
Language: Afrikaans	-0.064	0.669	0.938	-0.640	0.741	0.527	-0.350	0.881	0.705
Language: English	-0.166	0.574	0.847	-0.334	0.636	0.716	-0.084	0.722	0.920
Language: African	-0.078	0.402	0.925	0.058	0.420	1.060	-0.039	0.457	0.962
Need for achievement				0.675**	0.345	1.964	0.588	0.381	1.800
Locus of control				-0.174	0.235	0.841	-0.080	0.255	0.923
Guidance role models				0.285	0.255	1.330	0.219	0.278	1.245
Inspirational role models				-0.128	0.195	0.880	-0.024	0.210	0.977
Family support				-0.655**	0.268	0.520	-0.588**	0.301	0.556
Support from close others				-0.132	0.295	0.876	-0.126	0.314	0.882
Community support				-1.098***	0.370	0.334	-1.175***	0.412	0.309
Early childhood experiences: "I have worked in my parents' business."							-0.121	0.257	0.886
Early childhood experiences: "I have sold goods and services."							0.338	0.366	1.402
Prior start-up experiences: "I have attempted to start a business."							0.988**	0.406	2.686
Prior start-up experiences: "I have helped someone to start a business."							-0.001	0.401	0.999
Work experience: "I have worked in a business."							0.990***	0.392	2.691
Work experience: "I have done a holiday job."							-0.191	0.366	0.826
Work experience: "I have worked in a part-time job such as waitering."							0.531	0.473	1.700
Peer influence: "My friends/classmates want to start a business."							-0.379**	0.193	0.685
Peer influence: "My friends/classmates have parents and/or relatives that run their own business."							-0.222	0.214	0.801
General education: school grade enrolled for (Grade 10, 11 or 12)							0.081	0.400	1.085
General education: mark obtained for EMS (% mark)							-0.006	0.014	0.994
Entrepreneurship education							1.062*	0.622	2.892

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
n	827		827		827	
-2 log likelihood	308.406		284.831		260.893	
Model chi-square	0.427		24.002**		47.940***	
Hosmer and Lemeshow test	$\chi^2(5) = 3.159$	p = 0.676	$\chi^2(8) = 5.999$	p = 0.647	$\chi^2(8) = 4.093$	p = 0.849
Nagelkerke R ²	0.002		0.109		0.212	
Percentage predicted correctly	86.3		87.0		87.8	

*Significant at 10 per cent

**Significant at 5 per cent

***Significant at 1 per cent

^aThe hierarchical logistic regression analysis looked at significance in relation to a base category (Language: other)

Focus group (Study 2)

To shed light on some of the unexpected findings emerging from the quantitative survey of secondary students, we further conducted focus group interviews. In particular, we were interested in gaining insights from secondary students to enable us to interpret the negative effect of family support, community support and peer influence on youth EI found in Study 1.

Sample

To decide on the composition of focus group participants, it was necessary to first look at the quantitative survey sample composition. In the quantitative survey, the secondary students enrolled in an entrepreneurship education programme belonged mainly to the Black African¹ population group (74.8%), while the secondary students not part of an entrepreneurship education programme belonged mainly to the White population group (67.4%). To reflect the composition of the quantitative survey sample, two focus groups were set up: a focus group composed of secondary students enrolled in an entrepreneurship education programme (“EE group”) and a focus group made up of students not participating in an entrepreneurship education initiative (“non-EE group”). The EE group included twelve Black African students, of whom two were males and ten were females. The non-EE group was composed of ten students: nine White students and one Black African student, of whom six were males and four were females.

Interview schedule and data analysis technique

Since the main purpose of the focus group interviews was to gain insights into the heterodox findings of the quantitative survey, the focus group interview schedule mainly covered the variables associated with these difficult-to-interpret findings.

The focus group interviews were conducted in the following manner. The researcher first welcomed the participants, introduced the study, explained the reason for the focus group interview and went over the ethical protocol. Participants were then asked the same questions found in the questionnaire about their EI, experience, family support and community support (the latter two being the contextual factors that led, in the quantitative study, to findings incongruent with previous studies on the same relationships), and whether the different types of experience, family support and community support would make them more or less likely to start a business in the future. Finally, the researcher asked participants to interpret some of the unexpected findings of the quantitative survey. For instance, respondents were asked: “Would you say that the fact that

¹ Based on South Africa’s national census demographic classification parameters.

you have friends/classmates who want to start a business makes you more or less likely to want to run your own business after school? Why?” followed by “We did a survey with 827 high school students in Grade 10, 11 and 12 asking them the same question. It turned out that students whose friends/classmates want to start businesses were less likely to want to run their own business after school, and vice versa. How would you explain this?”

The interviews were transcribed, coded and subjected to content analysis. As Study 2 was undertaken mainly to shed light on some of Study 1’s divergent findings, we present the key findings of Study 2 as part of the discussion section, allowing us to present the findings of the two studies together and to discuss them in light of the extant literature on the subject under scrutiny.

Discussion

The main contribution of this paper is the inclusion of experience in the investigation of the factors that foster youth EI. The fact that the model including the experience variables (Model 3 in Table 1) had the best fit testifies to the fact that experience makes a significant contribution to the development of youth EI in the present context of investigation. No entrepreneurial early childhood experience was significantly related to EI: it seems that having worked in their parents’ business and having sold goods and services bear no weight on secondary students’ choice of a future entrepreneurial career. This is an important finding, as youth entrepreneurship education programmes such as JASA’s Mini Enterprise Programme include an element of marketing and sale of products and services. However, it seems from the present study that other types of experience foster young people’s EI.

The prior start-up experience significantly related to EI was represented by the experience of having attempted to start a business. This finding is in contrast with the observation by Zhang et al. (2014) that prior entrepreneurial exposure has a dampening effect on EI. The focus group interviews revealed that not only the EE group but also five out of the ten students in the non-EE group were running (informal) small businesses. It emerged that students running a business want to run businesses in the future because their prior start-up experiences have helped them to acquire valuable skills, have given them confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities to run businesses and have given them a certain degree of financial independence that they want to maintain. These insights are in line with the positive relationship between prior start-up experience and entrepreneurial outcomes observed in other parts of the world, albeit within adult populations (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Farmer et al., 2011; Mueller, 2006).

The work experience emerging as a predictor of EI was based on the experience of having worked in a business. Eight out of the twenty-two students included in the focus group interviews

had worked in a business, more specifically in businesses run by relatives (not parents). Most of them agreed that working in someone else's business has encouraged them to start their own business in the future, mainly because of the experience of seeing others make a profit and grow. This is perhaps one of the first studies examining the work experience of young individuals and its impact on their EI. However, these findings are in contrast to those of Mahadea et al. (2011), who observed no relationship between work experience in a small business and the EI of secondary students in South Africa—yet, their study only surveyed 275 secondary students in five schools in one single district.

The peer-influence experience of having friends and/or classmates who want to start a business appeared to make it 1.5 times less likely for secondary students to have EI. This finding is enlightening given the paucity of research on the influence of peers on youth EI. Pertaining to peer influence, students' responses differed across the two focus groups. The EE group agreed that the main issue would be fear of competition: if their friends ran businesses and even had more resources than they did, they would opt for something else. The non-EE group, instead, ascribed the findings of the study mainly to vicarious experience: seeing their peers working long hours and even failing at their entrepreneurial attempts would discourage them from starting their own business.

Entrepreneurship education played a catalytic role in the development of EI, but not very significantly (see Table 1). JASA's Mini Enterprise Programme seemed to play a role in fostering youth EI, even though it appears that the experiences of starting a business and working in a business were more influential. For the EE focus group, entrepreneurship education has encouraged them to start businesses because of the positive experience of running a business while being a student and because of the lessons learnt. One student who has even had a negative experience running a business as part of the entrepreneurship education programme—mainly because of running her business in partnership with other students—said that she wants to start other businesses in the future, albeit on her own.

The level of general education—whether learners were enrolled in Grade 10, 11 or 12—had no significant influence on EI, nor did their taking EMS as a subject in school. These findings are in line with an earlier observation by Burger et al. (2005) that years of formal education and education in EMS do not have any significant relationship with secondary students' EI.

Family support and community support were the only two personality-contextual factors emerging as predictors of EI, but in a negative direction. However much in contrast with previous literature, there is evidence of similar findings in other studies surveying secondary students. For instance, Marques et al. (2012) found that family entrepreneurial background exerts a negative

influence on secondary students' EI and, similarly to Zhang et al. (2014), ascribe this finding to the possible negative experiences observed in the entrepreneurial lives of parents. These same observations can be applied by extension to the example represented by other individuals in one's community. The focus group interviews offered valuable insights into these unexpected findings. Pertaining to family support, some students mentioned that not having support from one's family would make them more eager to start a business because of the exciting challenge of starting a business from scratch without any help from their family. A student even mentioned that, for some young people, a negative attitude on the part of their family toward their EI would challenge them to start businesses so as to prove their family wrong. Most others, however, especially those in the EE group, mentioned that support from one's family creates too many expectations on young people so that they refrain from starting a business out of fear of disappointing their family. It was also mentioned in this group that family support may also mean family control over young people's entrepreneurial pursuits, which discourages them from starting their own business lest their family interfere. Regarding community support, the main insight came from the EE group: a community that is supportive of entrepreneurial efforts would engender a lot more entrepreneurs and, thus, lead young people to fear too much competition. Combining the insights from the two focus groups on peer influence, family support and community support, it appears that South African—especially Black African—young people in a supportive family and community environment may otherwise decide not to start businesses because of fear: fear of failure and fear of intense competition.

Finally, it is worth noting that need for achievement was a significant predictor of secondary students' EI in Model 2, but not in Model 3, where the experience variables were inputted (see Table 1). Hence, the presence of certain experiences—such as the experiences of starting a business and working in a business—appears to hinder the effect of need for achievement on EI. As need for achievement may be difficult to inculcate in young people, certain experiences may serve as alternative ways to foster EI. This finding thus points to the need to explore additional or alternative avenues to achieve the goal of developing youth EI.

Conclusion

Youth EI and their promotion have been the focus of researchers and policy-makers alike. The interest in youth EI is warranted by the recent wave of youth unemployment, coupled with the belief that entrepreneurship represents a possible way out of unemployment. However, despite a recent focus on the contribution of experience to the development of EI, to date little is known

about the influence of different types of experience on intentions at large, and especially among the youth and in a sub-Saharan African context.

This paper sheds light on which types of experience matter the most to the development of youth EI in the present context of investigation. It is a unique study in that it focused mostly on the performance-accomplishment experience type, investigated a broader taxonomy of experiences, and was conducted in an African youth context. A relevant contribution is also the finding that when young people have certain types of experience, their personality traits and context seem to cease to have an influence on their EI. Finally, this paper offers insights into some of the heterodox quantitative results that emerged, revealing the views of two distinct youth groups found in South Africa.

From a theoretical perspective, this study points to the need to focus on multiple antecedents of EI simultaneously. The fact that some of the literature-based relationships between some antecedents and EI (e.g., the positive influence of family support and need for achievement on EI) were not supported in this study may be explained by our consideration of multiple factors and our examination of their simultaneous effect on EI. Hence, we recommend a holistic approach similar to the one adopted in this study and other studies (e.g., Liguori et al., 2018) in future efforts to contribute to the body of research on the antecedents of youth EI. Additionally, we see the need to delve deeper into why some types of experience matter more than others in stimulating EI. Even though our focus-group interviews offered some insights into this question, we believe that further investigation, especially of a qualitative nature, could offer a more thorough understanding of this phenomenon. Finally, the finding that some types of experience dampen the influence of personality dimensions, such as need for achievement, among young people may suggest the need to move beyond personality considerations and further opens up avenues of behavioural research on the influence of experience on EI. We encourage future research to not only investigate the influence of other types of experience on entrepreneurial behavioural constructs such as EI but also to uncover the mechanisms by which such influence is exerted and how it counteracts some deeply rooted personality traits.

Based on the findings of this study, entrepreneurship education and training initiatives and policy efforts aiming at fostering youth EI in similar contexts should consider introducing an experiential component in their programmes and initiatives (Kassean et al., 2015; Piperopoulos and Dimov, 2014). In particular, young people should be encouraged to experience starting a business—even if as part of an entrepreneurship education and training component—and to work in an entrepreneurial venture in their adolescent years, for instance in the form of an internship (Botha and Bignotti, 2016). Furthermore, based on the results of this study, after-school

entrepreneurship education programmes with a practical component—as opposed to the theoretical entrepreneurship component included in the EMS curriculum—are also beneficial.

This study presents some limitations, acknowledged hereafter. First, the influence of the constructs included in this investigation on EI would be more validly gauged with a longitudinal research design. Secondly, the comprehensiveness of the experiential constructs may be improved by adding more items to each of these experience categories. For the sake of administering a relatively short data collection instrument to a youth sample, the variables included in the present investigation were kept to a limited number.

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