

# Gender Differences in Entrepreneurial Attitude & Intentions among university Students

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## ABSTRACT

This empirical study aims at assessing the attitudes, perception and intention of university students towards entrepreneurship and new venture creation with a focus on gender differences in entrepreneurial perceptions and intentions to start new business in the future. Data were collected using a questionnaire-based survey of 350 students at the University of Khartoum in Sudan. The target population was the students in the final year in the University of Khartoum. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the sample size because the population consisted of a number of subgroups that differed in their characteristics. The results showed significant differences between genders in entrepreneurial intentions and its antecedents. Thus, it is important that customized approaches based on gender are needed for developing entrepreneurial intentions among college students.

**Keywords:** Gender; entrepreneurship; attitude; intention; students; Sudan

**JEL code:**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship, venture creation or, more generally, the willingness to create and develop new businesses, has always recognized as one of the most important drivers of economic growth and societal welfare. Entrepreneurship is generally considered to be of great importance for economic development (Baumol, 1993), as it could change the economic scene of a country, bring development and help to overcome a number of arising economic problems in the country such as poverty and unemployment. In today's world, entrepreneurship is seen as the vital source for economic growth through job creation, wealth creation, and providing societal interests (European Commission, 2003). Entrepreneurship is considered as having the ability to allow the advanced economies to grow and generate new jobs (Shapero, 1975) and reduce unemployment (Santarelli et al. 2009).

Following the proliferation of higher education institutions in the early 1990s onwards Unemployment among universities Graduates in Sudan has reached a disastrous level with unemployment rate averaged 15.83 percent from 1993 until 2014, reaching an all-time high of 19.50 percent in 2014 and a record low of 11.10 percent in 1993 (Sudan Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The number of graduates with university degrees from Sudanese public and private higher educational institutions that join the labor market increases each year. This makes the focus on entrepreneurship an inevitable strategy to address the resultant social problem of high unemployment. Understanding what factors influence and shape students' intention towards starting a business is a vital for developing the programs and policies to promote entrepreneurial behavior (Barkovic and Kruzic, 2010). Both academia and practitioners have increased their efforts in promoting entrepreneurial mindset within the society. However, only a few studies have investigated entrepreneurial attitudes amongst students; even fewer have considered entrepreneurial intentions and no studies have been conducted in the Sudan. This paper tries to fill this gap. Specifically, this study aims at seeking to understand whether entrepreneurial inclinations exist among students to explore Sudanese students' attitude and intentions to become future entrepreneurs with a focus on gender differences in entrepreneurial attitude and intentions towards starting new business in the future.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. Entrepreneurship intention:

Entrepreneurship can be defined as a process of getting new ideas and innovatively converting them into products or services with value (Johnson, 2001) by which individuals, either on their own or inside organizations, pursue opportunities

without regard to the resources they currently control (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990). Bygrave and Hoper (1991) define entrepreneurship as the function, activities and actions associated with the perception of opportunities and creation of organizations. Similarly, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) define entrepreneurship as an opportunity driven process, whereas, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project defines Entrepreneurship as any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business.” (Reynolds et al., 2005).

Entrepreneurship scholars generally argue that entrepreneurial behavior is intentional and so best predicted by the measure of intentions of an individual (Bird, 1988). Intentions have been proved to be the best predictors of individual behaviors particularly when the behavior is rare, hard to observe or involves unpredictable time lags (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994). According to (Ajzen, 1991) an individual’s entrepreneurial intention claims to be a moderate predictor of future entrepreneurial behavior. He defines intentions as “indications of how hard individuals are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, to perform the behavior. Entrepreneurship intention is usually considered to be formed by a person’s attitude toward entrepreneurship and the predominant social norms attached to entrepreneurship in the future (Delmar & Davidsson, 2000). Research on entrepreneurial intentions suggests that having the intentions to engage in entrepreneurial behavior is a strong predictor of actually engaging in entrepreneurial behavior (Kautonen et al., 2015). Entrepreneurial intentions have gained significant attention as a core construct in entrepreneurship and are influenced by a variety of factors both internal and external to the entrepreneur. For example, Kolvereid et al. (2005) state that three important elements must be present before any substantial entrepreneurial activity can be expected at the national level: individuals who recognize business opportunities; individuals who have entrepreneurial capacity; and individuals with sufficient motivation to actually pursue an entrepreneurial career option. Franke and Luthje (2004) revealed that students’ intention to entrepreneurship is also directly influenced by perception towards entrepreneurship enablers and obstacles. Specifically, the more positive students’ perceive the support for entrepreneurship, and then his/her intention would be higher. Research has also argued that entrepreneurial intentions are influenced by entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Zhao et al., 2005), need for achievement, self-confidence and risk taking propensity (Dinis et al., 2013). Ekore (2012) examined the role of psychological factors, especially fear of failure as an entrepreneur, among university graduates, in this case in Nigeria. Findings confirmed core self-evaluation as influencing fear of entrepreneurship. Also, pre-entrepreneurial intention, attitude, and capacity significantly predicted fear of entrepreneurship. The fact that these psychological variables affect the intention to become an entrepreneur, suggests that they need to be considered in the selection, placement, and training of university graduates for entrepreneurship, it is also because these variables play an important role in innovation, creativity, and adjustment to changes which are as inevitable in management as they are in entrepreneurship. Zain Z. et al (2010) stated that intentions to become entrepreneurs and their decisions are attributed by the influence from their family members, academics and attending courses on entrepreneurship. Their results also show that out of the two factors: personality traits and environmental, personality traits play an important role in influencing the students’ decision to become entrepreneurs. In addition to personality traits, several additional individual difference variables have been found to predict entrepreneurship. Demographic factors such as age, sex, education, work experience and role models have also been found to predict entrepreneurial behaviors.

## 1.2. Entrepreneurship & Gender

In the last few years, entrepreneurship and gender has grown to become an important research area, especially issues associated with women entrepreneurship has been of interest in many entrepreneurial studies. In a global context, results of Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study, GEM (2010), of a large 17-nation study showed that subjective perceptual variables have a crucial influence on the entrepreneurial propensity of women and account for much of the gender difference in entrepreneurship in the terms that women tend to perceive themselves and the entrepreneurial environment less favorably than men, regardless of their motivation. GEM 2012 results showed that Compared to men, women have lower opportunity perceptions in all regions, with the greatest difference visible in the MENA/Mid-Asia region self-assessment about capabilities and fear of failure. It is notable that in every single economy in the sample, women have lower capabilities perceptions than men Fear of failure is assessed in those seeing opportunities for entrepreneurship. In every region, women have, on average, a greater level of fear of failure than men. In nearly every economy, men have higher rates of entrepreneurial intentions than women. In no economy were women more likely than men to know entrepreneurs. The results across the regions reveal a generally strong link between women’s perceptions about entrepreneurship and their rates of entering this activity yet given that both attitudes and entrepreneurship rates differed for women and men in many regions; it is obvious that environmental conditions or constraints weigh differently on the sexes.

Differences between female and male entrepreneurs are widely recognized and researched; several studies from the west supported the argument that males had significantly higher entrepreneurial intention than females (e.g., Mazzarol et al., 1999; Crant (1996; Zhao et al., 2005; Dabic et al (2012); Javier et al (2017)). For instance, Opoku-Antwi et al (2012) concluded that males students are more predispose to entrepreneurship compared to the feminine counterparts, and will be willing to venture into new business compared to their female folks. This is consistent with a study by Amofah (2006) that students who reported higher entrepreneurial intentions tended to be males rather than females. Males were more likely than females to be potential entrepreneurs as well as risk takers. Sánchez-Escobedo et al (2011) analyzes the existence of gender differences in the perceptions and attitudes of university students towards entrepreneurship, measured perceptions of the public image of the entrepreneur, along with the desirability, viability and intentionality of students towards creating their own business. Results indicate that gender plays a significant role in how the figure of the entrepreneur is perceived and on the intention to generate new business. Gatewood, Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud (1995), examine cognitive factors which may influence new venture creation, suggest that external perceptions are stronger for men (perception of a market opportunity) than for women, whereas women are more likely to cite internal explanations (such as the desire to be one's own boss).

There is a common conclusion among a number of studies that females feel less confident and capable of initiating start-up activity than males for instance; Crant (1993) found that a proactive personality was positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions, and men possessed higher entrepreneurial intentions than women. A study of MBA students found no differences in the level of self-efficacy between men and women, but women still possessed lower entrepreneurial intentions than men (Zhao et al., 2005). Sánchez, (2012) showed gender differences in entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial perceptions of self-efficacy, in the sense that men felt themselves more efficient and oriented to create a new venture than women. Mazzarol et al (1999) stated that females were less likely to be founders of business than male. Men perceive themselves as more suitable for entrepreneurship than women do while more men had a firm or intended to start one than women did Malach-Pines and Schwartz (2008). It is generally believed that individuals who perceive that they have the skills and knowledge to start a business are more likely to do so (Kolvereid et al., 2005; Krueger et al., 2000). Dabic et al (2012) concluded that compared to males, female students are less willing to start their own businesses. There are significant gender differences in terms of perceived feasibility and perceived desirability such that although they feel more supported by their families, females are less self-confident, more tense, reluctant and concerned about entrepreneurship. There are fewer gender differences among students in entrepreneurial intention; however, differences relating to self-confidence and family support also exist. In line with this, Javier et al (2017) confirmed that entrepreneurial intention in the academic environment is greater in men than in women determined by the existence of implicit barriers for women that hinder their ability to be an entrepreneur. Yukongdi & Lopa (2017) found that job autonomy and job security were significant predictors for women, while for men, need for achievement and risk-taking tendency contributed to entrepreneurial intention.

On the other hand, in a study in UAE young female students showed more positive attitude and motivation towards entrepreneurship than their counterparts (Varadarajan et al., 2010). Female respondents showed higher risk-taking behavior than males, which was contradictory to past research findings that have typically found females to be more conservative in risk-taking than male (Varadarajan et al., 2012). in Sudan Musa (2012) studied women entrepreneurs and found that the vast majority is well-educated, have reasonable work/employment experience with the public/private sector before they set up their business, have similar motives for going into business like their male counterparts and have acquired personal traits/characteristics necessary for success in business.

### **3. METHODS**

#### **1.1. Sample & Procedure**

The study was carried out using data from the final year students at the University of Khartoum using stratified sampling technique across three colleges: college of engineering, college of art and the school of business administration. The students in the three colleges formed the sampling unit for this study. Students sample use as consider as the primary resource of future entrepreneurs. A descriptive, quantitative method was applied and the same questionnaire was used in all three colleges. The questionnaire was administered to the students to be completed on a voluntary basis. The target population was the students in the final year in the University of Khartoum. The questionnaires were hand - delivered which enabled the exact respondents to receive and fill them out appropriately. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the sample size because the population consisted of a number of subgroups that differed in their characteristics.

The questionnaire was composed of 11 items, adapted from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), to measure the "individual attitudes towards entrepreneurship"; "national attitudes towards entrepreneurship" and

“entrepreneurial intention”. The total population was 350 students, of which responded 300 were used with a response rate of 85.7%.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

##### 4.1. Demographic Profile

This section presents the descriptive statistics of demographic profile. Table 1 shows the breakdown and the distribution of respondents by gender, age, and college. From the total sample, 40% of the university students are male and 60 % are females. The majority of the students (89.3) belonged to the 20-24 age group. Out of the total respondents of 300 respondents, the breakdown was as follows; 50% of the students from college of engineering 28% from the school of Management studies, and 22% from the college of art.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender	119	39.7
Female	181	60.3
Total	300	100.0
Age		
Less than 20	15	5
20-24	268	89.3
25-29	17	5.7
College		
College of Engineering	150	50.0
School of Management Studies	85	28.3
College of Arts	65	21.7

##### 4.2. Students attitudes to Entrepreneurship:

Perceptions relate to individual assessments that relate to perceptions of opportunities, self-efficacy, fear of failure and acquaintance with entrepreneurship through others in the personal network. A simple descriptive analysis of the gathered data shows higher attitudes to entrepreneurship for males than for females except for fear of failure, where females showed a high degree compared to male. Women are slightly more likely to know an entrepreneur compared to men, contact with entrepreneurs can also provide people with motivation, advice, contacts and other benefits, leading to higher interest and success in entrepreneurship. The t-test results showed that these differences are only significant for the perceived capabilities, a majority of men, with average Of 3.27, feel they have the knowledge, skills, and experience to launch a business, but the same is not true for females who are less likely to believe they have the skills needed to run a business, Perceived capabilities seem to play an important role when it comes to entrepreneurial activity.

**Table 2: attitudes to Entrepreneurship**

<i>Measures</i>	Total	Mean		(M-F) t-test
		M(181)	F (119)	
know someone personally who started a business in the past 2 years	3.50	3.59 71.8	3.44 68.8	.146
In the next six months, there be good opportunities for starting a business in the area where you live	2.72	2.77	2.69	.074
knowledge, skill and experience required to start a new business	3.03	<b>3.27</b>	<b>2.87</b>	<b>.402*</b>
Fear of failure prevent you from starting a business	2.15	2.11	2.17	-.062
<b>Overall Perceptions</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>2.93</b>	<b>2.79</b>	<b>.140</b>

### 4.3. Social attitudes towards Entrepreneurship:

Social attitudes play a crucial role in forming a country's 'entrepreneurial culture' in terms of how the general population views entrepreneurial endeavors, tolerates risk, and judges business ownership as a viable career option. This cultural environment influences individuals' opportunity recognition and willingness to take the risk to start a new venture (Female Entrepreneurship Index, 2015).

Social attitudes offer an indication about how entrepreneurship is regarded by a society or a country. A society's culture, history, policy and business environment, and many other factors, can influence its view toward entrepreneurship, which can, in turn, affect entrepreneurial ambitions and the extent to which this activity will be supported (GEM, 2015). As we can see from the data displayed in table 3, the respondents believe that the overall Sudanese have positive societal attitudes towards entrepreneurship (mean= **3.21**). Over half of the respondents believe that people in Sudan see entrepreneurship as desirable career choice (3.72) with a majority agreeing that successful entrepreneurs have a high status and respect (3.85). Overall, gender differences on these items are small and not significant, but there are notable significant gender gaps in two items which similar standard of living (60%) and media presence (43%). Female respondent are more likely to believe that most people in Sudan would prefer that everyone had a similar standard of living (2.88) than their male counterparts (2.28) but they are actually less likely to believe that in Sudan, you will often see stories in the public media about successful new businesses (2.44) than their male counterparts (2.87).

**Table 3. Social attitudes towards Entrepreneurship**

Measures	Total	Means		M-F T-test
		M(181)	F(119)	
In Sudan, most people would prefer that everyone had a similar standard of living	2.64	<b>2.28</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>-.60**</b>
In Sudan, most people consider starting a new business a desirable career choice	3.72	3.76	3.70	.06
In Sudan, those successful at starting a new business have a high level of status and respect	3.85	3.81	3.87	-.07
In Sudan, you will often see stories in the public media about successful new businesses	2.61	<b>2.87</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>.43*</b>
<b>Overall culture</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>3.19</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>-.03</b>

### 4.4. Entrepreneurial Intention

Results in Table 3 show that in general students have an entrepreneurial intentions (mean= 3.41). Male respondents showed overall higher mean score (mean=3.64) to express entrepreneurial intentions than females (mean= 3, 18). The results show that there is a significant differences between male and females in entrepreneurial intentions with regard to those who are currently trying to start new business Male respondents showed higher mean scores (mean=2.95) than females (mean= 2.8). The results also showed that males who expecting to start a new business or have intention to pursue a new business after graduation showed very high mean scores (mean= 3,89 and 4.09) compared to female counterpart (mean= 3.62 and 3.86), but there is no significant differences between the two groups. These findings raise questions about the type of support and encouragement female students need in order to develop entrepreneurial intentions.

**Table 4: Entrepreneurial Intention**

Measures	Total	Mean		M-F t-test
		M(181)	F(119)	
Are you, alone or with others, currently trying to start a new business, including any self-employment or selling any goods or services to others	2.43	<b>2.95</b>	<b>2.08</b>	<b>.87***</b>
Are you, alone or with others, expecting to start a new business, including any type of self-employment, within the next three years	3.73	3.89	3.62	.27
Do you have the intention to start a new business after graduation	3.95	4.09	3.86	.23
<b>Overall intention</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>3.64</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>.46**</b>

\* Sig <0,05 ; \*\* Sig <0,01. ; \*\*\*Sig <0,001.

**Table 2: attitudes to Entrepreneurship**

Measures	Middle East & North Africa	F/M	Sub-Saharan Africa	F/M	Sudan	F/M
	know someone personally who started a business in the past 2 years	40.8	0.7	50.2	0.9	<b>68.8</b>
In the next six months, there be good opportunities for starting a business in the area where you live	46.0	0.9	54.9	0.9	<b>53.8</b>	.97
knowledge, skill and experience required to start a new business	44.7	0.7	66.4	0.9	<b>57.4</b>	.87
Fear of failure prevent you from starting a business	56.5	0.9	75.5	0.9	<b>43.4</b>	.95
<b>Overall Perceptions</b>					<b>55.8</b>	

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Entrepreneurship is recognized as important driver of economic and social developments and entrepreneurial initiatives of the youth is regarded as an important factor of future growth of a nation. This study was designed to examine students' entrepreneurial perception, attitudes and intentions among university students. The present study showed that female and male students differ significantly with respect to a range of aspects of entrepreneurship. In line with the recent study of (Javier, 2017), the results of this study show that male students scored higher on the most of the factors of entrepreneurship than female students. Moreover, our results showed gender differences in entrepreneurial self-efficacy, in line with previous studies performed outside Sudan e.g. (Mazzarol et al., 1999, Zhao et al., 2005; Sánchez, 2012). This is similar to other research that has found differences between male and female entrepreneurs (Minniti et al., 2004). While gender does not seem to affect students entrepreneurial perception and attitudes, there are significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions between males and females. As expected, male showed a higher intention to start a business than female. Such differences are consistent with the results of previous studies carried out in different countries, which have suggested a greater initiative towards self-employment in men compared to women ( Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005; Sánchez , 2012). A positive attitude towards entrepreneurship is an indication that a career in entrepreneurship is desirable thus, leading to entrepreneurial intention can be associated with less fear of entrepreneurship, which can lead to actual entrepreneurial behavior When an individual perceives that he/she has the ability and capacity to succeed in entrepreneurship, then there could be less fear of entrepreneurship. In the present study, a high perception of entrepreneurial capacity was associated with less fear of entrepreneurship among the university students that participated in the study.

Intention to become an entrepreneur has been described as a major predictor of actual behavior. The study results suggest the need of promoting entrepreneurship among female students, through entrepreneurship education and training programs. These programs should combine components and activities for improving entrepreneurial characteristics such as knowledge and skills in females students, in order to fight gender stereotypes and allow them to

overcome the possible existing differences with respect to male. Thus, it is important that customized approaches based on gender and unique cultural context are needed for developing entrepreneurship orientation among college students.

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