



Demographic Antecedents of Entrepreneurial Intentions Among South African University Students

Wimbayi Chasaya¹ , Ayansola Olatunji Ayandibu²

¹ Postdoctoral research fellow, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law, University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, 3886, South Africa. Email: wchasaya@gmail.com

² Senior Lecturer, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law, University Of Zululand. KwaDlangezwa Campus, 3886, South Africa. Email: ayansolaayandibu@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship literature has identified several factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions, including psychological, social, environmental and demographic. Considering the importance of youth entrepreneurship, examining how these factors affect students' entrepreneurial inclinations is essential. Thus, the purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of age and race on the entrepreneurial inclinations of South African university students. Researchers collected data from 197 undergraduate entrepreneurship students at two public universities in Durban. Quantitative data was gathered using a self-administered structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS. The research found that students' entrepreneurial intentions are not significantly influenced by age and race. This indicates that students' aspirations to initiate and manage business enterprises are unaffected by age or race. The study recommends that students should be exposed to equal entrepreneurship opportunities including education and training, support, funding and mentorship regardless of their age and race. Thus, students should be introduced to an entrepreneurial environment and ecosystem from primary school to instill in them an entrepreneurial mindset. Furthermore, entrepreneurship policies and regulatory frameworks should be developed and implemented regardless of age and race. Future research should consider the intersection between demographic factors and their influence on entrepreneurial intentions. Also, future studies can look at how demographic characteristics affect various entrepreneurship traits besides intention.



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Corresponding Author's Email: wchasaya@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is considered a crucial economic development strategy for promoting economic growth and competitiveness amidst globalization (Binti Shamsudin et al., 2017). Hence, several Western countries prioritize entrepreneurship, and it has since gained momentum in developing countries (Maheshwari et al., 2023). On the other hand, emerging countries such as India struggle with unemployment as graduate output often exceed available opportunities (Dubey & Sahu, 2022). The same applies to South Africa which in the second quarter of 2025 has an unemployment rate of 33.2%, increasing from 32.9% in the first quarter (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Thus, entrepreneurship can create employment opportunities especially among the youth population. This is supported by Nguyen et al. (2019) who argue that youth entrepreneurship is a crucial strategy for enhancing graduate

employment in various countries. Additionally, Msosa (2023) mentions that high school and college graduates should consider becoming business owners to help eradicate unemployment and poverty. Because of this, entrepreneurship has become an important subject of study. But one important question is if young people or recent graduates want to start their own businesses.

Collier and Chinta (2025) assert that entrepreneurs' mindsets significantly shape the direction of new business ventures from inception. It can therefore be argued that developing a positive entrepreneurial mindset in students can significantly enhance their entrepreneurial intentions. According to Nguyen et al. (2019), channeling the intentions of young people towards entrepreneurship is crucial to encourage them to become entrepreneurs. Hence, different strategies including entrepreneurship education and training, business mentorship and coaching and government funding and support are implemented to facilitate students' entrepreneurial intentions. A lot of research has been done to find out what makes people want to start their own businesses. This is consistent with Maheshwari et al. (2023) who acknowledges that significant research has been conducted to examine the determinants of higher education students' entrepreneurial intentions. Entrepreneurship models delineate various aspects, including educational, contextual, environmental, psychological, and personality traits, that affect the entrepreneurial intentions of university students (Maheshwari et al., 2023). However, Dubey and Sahu (2022) emphasize the importance of demographic, social, and environmental factors in shaping the entrepreneurial behavior of emerging entrepreneurs.

Numerous research investigated the significance of demographic factors in shaping entrepreneurial inclinations (Collier & Chinta, 2025; Farrington et al., 2012; Garcia & Baack, 2021; Jovicic-Vukovic et al., 2020; Msosa, 2023; Rehan et al., 2019). For instance, Collier and Chinta (2025) argue that the racial structures of an entrepreneurial ecosystem affect the confidence and drive of aspiring entrepreneurs from different backgrounds. On the other hand, Msosa (2023) argues that business aspirations vary according to gender. As such, it is critical to examine the interaction of socio-cultural variables and entrepreneurial intention (Msosa, 2023). Nguyen et al. (2019) stressed how important it is to understand the country-specific elements that affect entrepreneurial goals. In a similar manner, the researchers assert that further examination is necessary to understand the impact of demographic variables on the entrepreneurial inclinations of South African university students. It is crucial to examine the demographic aspects influencing university students' entrepreneurial aspirations, given South Africa's extensive history of injustice and inequality. Furthermore, research has mostly focused on the determinants of entrepreneurial inclinations within the South African community, mainly overlooking demographic factors and the university student demographic. This study aims to rectify this gap by examining the interaction among age, race, and South African university students. To develop more inclusive and effective entrepreneurship education and support systems that accurately represent the realities of aspiring student entrepreneurs, it is essential to comprehend these demographic aspects. So, it is important to understand the demographic factors that determine the entrepreneurial goals of South African college students. This study looked at how age and race affect the entrepreneurial tendencies of South African college students. The objective of the study is therefore as follows:

1.1. Study Objectives

1. To investigate how age affects the intention of South African university students to start their own businesses.
2. To examine how race influences the entrepreneurial intentions of South African university students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Entrepreneurship Intention and Age

Research conducted by Chipeta et al. (2016) found significant differences between students' social entrepreneurship intentions and age in selected universities in Gauteng. On the contrary, Iwu et al. (2016) study established that no significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions of a South African university of technology students exist based on age. While both studies adopted quantitative research methodologies, one was conducted in

one university and the other in more than one university. Thus, Iwu et al. (2016) findings could be attributed to the limited sample diversity, with students from one institution reflecting similar entrepreneurial characteristics. On the other hand, Chipeta et al. (2016) findings could be attributed to sample diversity and variations in institutional factors including the entrepreneurial ecosystem exposed to students in the different universities. Chipeta et al. (2016) findings corroborate with Sahinidis et al. (2021) findings which established that age affects the entrepreneurial intentions of students from a Business School in Greece. Chipeta et al. (2016) and Sahinidis et al. (2021) did their studies in quite different settings. Nevertheless, it may be asserted that age is a significant determinant of students' entrepreneurial aspirations, irrespective of social, cultural, or environmental influences.

Similar results were found by Aydin et al. (2024), their study established that age significantly influences Bosnia and Herzegovina's working-age population's entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial intentions. The study's results showed that younger people were more likely to want to start their own businesses or work for someone else (Aydin et al., 2024). Considering the varied samples utilized in Chipeta et al. (2016); Sahinidis et al. (2021), and Aydin et al. (2024), age may serve as a significant predictor of students' entrepreneurial inclinations.

2.2. Entrepreneurship intention and race

Research conducted by Farrington et al. (2012) established higher mean scores on the perceptions of an entrepreneurial career for black small business owners and student respondents compared to their white counterparts. Thus, the study concluded that black participants had more positive perceptions of the entrepreneurial career than whites, however, white South Africans had better intentions to engage in entrepreneurial ventures than black South Africans (Farrington et al., 2012). Interestingly, Farrington et al. (2012) distinguished between perceptions of an entrepreneurial career and entrepreneurial intentions, with black participants scoring higher than whites in the former and lower than whites in the later. Overall, the study underscores the significance of race in predicting entrepreneurship behaviour. Contrary to Farrington et al. (2012); Msosa (2023) research established that race did not impact significantly on the entrepreneurial intentions of South African higher education students. While Msosa (2023) study investigated students' entrepreneurial intentions, Farrington et al. (2012) research investigated both students and business owners. Thus, Farrington et al. (2012) research could be influenced by the perceptions of participants who were already entrepreneurially active.

Research conducted by Collier and Chinta (2025) found significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions of selected USA participants based on race. However, unlike several studies, Collier and Chinta (2025) research underscored the significant role of education in influencing the findings. Thus, considering Collier and Chinta (2025) findings, there is a need for research to take new direction and consider the role of mediating and moderating variables when investigating the influence of socio-demographic variables such as race and age on entrepreneurial intentions.

3. Research Methods

A quantitative cross-sectional research method was used to investigate how race and age affect students' plans to start their own businesses. According to Aliaga and Gunderson (2002), quantitative research involves gathering and analyzing numerical data using statistical methods to solve research problems. The quantitative research method aligned with the positivism philosophy adopted by the researcher. The positivist research philosophy entails understanding the social world from an objective perspective with the researcher separating themselves from their personal values (Žukauskas et al., 2018). As such, the researcher objectively collected, analysed and interpreted the research findings for this study. Given the substantial population of university students in South Africa, the focus was restricted to institutions in the KwaZulu-Natal area and Durban. The research focused exclusively on undergraduate students enrolled in two public universities in Durban that provided entrepreneurship courses. The overall student population was 1,000. Morgan (1970) recommend a sample size of 278 for a population of 1000. A simple random sampling method was employed to choose a sample of 278 undergraduate entrepreneurship students from two

universities. Simple random sampling employs the notion of randomization to select units from a specified sampling frame (Taherdoost, 2016). 197 responses were successfully obtained.

According to the positivist research philosophy, the researcher wanted to choose participants in a way that was fair and objective, which is in line with the idea of random sampling. Muijs (2011) says that probability sampling methods make samples that are not biased, hence simple random sampling was used. Similarly, in quantitative study, the investigator aimed to select a sample representative of the undergraduate students enrolled in entrepreneurship courses at the two public universities in Durban. Stockemer (2019) asserts that quantitative research should utilize samples that accurately represent the characteristics of the community. A structured closed-end questionnaire was employed to gather data. Part A of the questionnaire inquired about respondents' age, race, and additional demographic details. A 5-point Likert scale measuring Entrepreneurship Intention, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), was employed to assess the likelihood of students initiating their own enterprises. The scale was developed using the entrepreneurial intention scale established by Liñán and Chen (2009) and the individual entrepreneurial intent measure designed by Thompson (2009). The entrepreneurship intention scale exhibited a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.95. The research employed SPSS version 27 for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA tests were utilized to analyze the differences in students' entrepreneurial aspirations based on age and race.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Sample Characteristics

The demographic profile of the 197 polled students indicates a nearly equal distribution by gender, with 51% female and 49% male responses, facilitating significant gender-based comparisons. A significant proportion of participants (76%) were aged 16 to 25 years, suggesting that entrepreneurial ambitions are predominantly formed early in career development, whereas 22% belonged to the 26–35 age group. Regarding racial makeup, Indian students (49%) and African students (44%) represented the predominant groups, while White (4%) and Coloured (3%) pupils comprised minor fractions, illustrating South Africa's diversity. Concerning household background, 43% of students indicated that their primary caregiver was employed in the private sector, 27% were unemployed, 18% were employed in the public sector, and merely 12% were self-employed, implying a scarcity of direct entrepreneurial role models. When inquired about their motivations for selecting entrepreneurship, slightly more than half (53%) reported it as a mandatory module, while 23% articulated a sincere aspiration to establish a business. A lesser percentage of 7% regarded it as a significant opportunity or a means to enhance business acumen.

4.2. Outcomes from Descriptive Analysis

According to table 1, the sample of students was spread across three age categories, 16-25 years, 26-35 years and 36-45 years. No respondents were aged 46 years and above. This shows that the sample consisted of younger people aged between 16-45 years and excluded older people aged 46 years and above.

Table 1
Summary Statistics of Demographic Variable.

Measurement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	197	1	3	1.27	.499
Sex	197	1	2	1.49	.501
Race	197	1	4	1.67	.705
Place of study	197	1	2	1.12	.322
Level of education	197	1	3	2.74	.543
What parents do for a living	197	1	4	2.15	.957
Why I chose entrepreneurship	197	1	5	1.89	1.186

This can be considered a homogenous sample of students which is limited in variability. The standard deviation of .49 shows a low variation of students' age from the mean. Students represented all races, Indian, African, White and Coloured showing that the sample of

students was more diverse on race than age. However, like age, the standard deviation for race, .70, shows that students' scores did not vary much from the mean

4.3. Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions and Age

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to evaluate the disparities in students' entrepreneurial inclinations based on their age. The students' ages were categorized into four groups: 16 to 25 years, 26 to 35 years, 36 to 45 years, and 46 years and above. Nonetheless, none of the students in the sample were aged 46 years or older. The ANOVA test findings presented in Table 3 indicate no significant variations in students' entrepreneurship intention scores based on age, $F(2, 187) = 1.47$, $p > 0.05$.

Table 2
Age and Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between groups	804.793	2	402.396	1.472	.232
Within groups	51109.023	187	273.310		
Total	51913.816	189			

The results indicate that age did not significantly affect students' entrepreneurial intention scores. The findings suggest that factors outside age can influence students' entrepreneurial inclinations. Factors include entrepreneurial self-efficacy, attitude toward entrepreneurship, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms can more effectively impact students' entrepreneurial goals than age. This indicates that entrepreneurial support programs ought to focus on improving aspects such as students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and their attitudes towards entrepreneurship, irrespective of age.

4.4. Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions and Race

As shown in table Section 4.1, students from four different race groups participated in the study: African, Indian, White and Coloured. Based on one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests, students' entrepreneurial intention scores did not vary significantly based on race $F(3.186) = .41$, $p > 0.05$.

Table 3
Race and Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions.

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F.	Sig.
Between groups	337.393	3	112.464	.406	.749
Withing groups	51576.423	186	277.293		
Total	51913.816	189			

The results indicate that students' entrepreneurial ambitions are not influenced by their ethnicity; students are inclined to pursue entrepreneurial behavior irrespective of their racial background. Consequently, elements such as entrepreneurship education, availability of financial resources, prior business experience, personal fulfillment, and cultural influences can more effectively affect students' entrepreneurial ambitions than race. Consequently, entrepreneurship education initiatives and financial assistance must be tailored for students irrespective of their racial background.

5. Discussion of Findings

The study examined the interaction between age and the entrepreneurial tendencies of university students in South Africa. The findings demonstrate that there is no substantial association between age and students' entrepreneurial aspirations; students' entrepreneurial ambitions did not significantly differ with age. This suggests that the entrepreneurial aspirations of university students are not dictated or affected by their age. The data indicate that the desire to pursue entrepreneurship is not limited to a specific age group. Students may possess either high or low entrepreneurial ambitions and can exhibit the enthusiasm to initiate and manage business operations irrespective of their age. The propensity for

entrepreneurship may be more influenced by familial background, societal factors, environmental conditions, or personality characteristics than by age. Maheshwari et al. (2023) confirm this assertion, indicating that diverse theories in entrepreneurship recognize educational, contextual, environmental, psychological, and personality aspects as significant predictors of students' entrepreneurial inclinations. Moreover, the results may be ascribed to the phenomenon that university students frequently engage in analogous entrepreneurship extracurricular activities irrespective of their age. Students of all ages are frequently invited to engage in entrepreneurship programs and competitions, including innovation contests, business plan and elevator pitch competitions, entrepreneurship workshops and exhibitions, as well as intervarsity entrepreneurship competitions.

The results corroborate prior research by Iwu et al. (2016), which indicated no significant variations in the entrepreneurial intents of students at a South African university of technology, irrespective of age. Moreover, the results align with the findings of Ayalew and Zeleke (2018), which indicated that age is not a significant predictor of self-employment intention among final-year engineering students in Ethiopia. While the current study considered students registered for entrepreneurship courses only, Iwu et al. (2016) study considered those from both business and non-business courses, and Ayalew and Zeleke (2018) study considered engineering students. This emphasizes the insignificant contribution of age to students' entrepreneurial intentions regardless of whether they study entrepreneurship or not. However, the findings of this study contradict previous research conducted by Chipeta et al. (2016); Sahinidis et al. (2021) and Aydin et al. (2024). In the case of Sahinidis et al. (2021) and Aydin et al. (2024), the diverse findings could be attributed to contextual factors. While the current study was conducted in South Africa, Sahinidis et al. (2021) study was conducted in Greece, and Aydin et al. (2024) study was conducted among Bosnia and Herzegovina's working-age population where the diverse samples and environments could contribute to the conflicting findings.

Similar to age, the study revealed no significant correlation between race and students' entrepreneurial inclinations. This indicates that students' aspirations to engage in entrepreneurship and establish and manage enterprises are not affected by their age, since their entrepreneurial ambitions did not exhibit substantial variation between racial groups. The findings can be attributed to the notion that students' experiences with entrepreneurship courses and resources inside the university context surpass racial disparities. Universities often provide equal exposure to entrepreneurial education, training and resources to students regardless of their race. Furthermore, the findings confirm (Maheshwari et al., 2023) who mentions that various models in entrepreneurship have identified educational, contextual, environmental, psychological and personality factors as important determinants of students' entrepreneurial intentions.

The findings corroborate with those of Msosa (2023) who found no significant differences in the entrepreneurial intentions of South African higher education students based on race. However, the findings contrast those of Collier and Chinta (2025) who found significant differences in entrepreneurial intentions of selected USA participants based on race. Unlike Msosa (2023) and the current study, Collier and Chinta (2025) study was conducted in the USA therefore the conflicting findings can be attributed to sample, context and environmental differences. Furthermore, Collier and Chinta (2025) study underscored the significance of education in influencing the findings. These findings underline the importance of mediating and moderating variables in analyzing the association between race and entrepreneurial inclinations. The relationship between race and entrepreneurial intentions may be affected by socio-economic position, opportunities, and cultural support. Collier and Chinta (2025) study did not specify whether university or non-university students were used in the sample. In the case that a working population was used, this could influence the study findings. For instance, Farrington et al. (2012) found that white South African small business owners had higher entrepreneurial intentions than their black counterparts. The conflicting findings could be attributed to the fact that active entrepreneurs were used in the case of Farrington et al. (2012) study while university students were used in the current study. After creating and running businesses, people may find themselves in situations that might either help or hurt their desire to be an entrepreneur.

The findings of this study can be analyzed via the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior. Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) contend that conduct is influenced by purpose,

which is then altered by subjective standards, perceived behavioral control, and attitudes toward the behavior. Bayona-Oré (2023) and Kim-Soon et al. (2016) assert that the theory of planned behavior identifies subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and attitudes toward behavior as primary predictors of behavior. These three essential characteristics are elucidated more by individuals' personal views and perceived capabilities than by demographic aspects such as age and race. Consequently, students can cultivate entrepreneurial intent based on their perceived competencies and self-efficacy, irrespective of their age or ethnicity. Consequently, the theory of planned behavior elucidates that age and race are inadequate indicators of entrepreneurial intention.

6. Practical and Theoretical Implications

Considering that age and race are not significant predictors of students' entrepreneurial intentions, entrepreneurship education and training, support and resources, policy development and implementation should be inclusive and age and race neutral. All students, including primary and secondary students, should have equal entrepreneurial opportunities, including education and training, funding, mentorship and support. Primary and secondary schools should develop age-appropriate entrepreneurship education curricula for early exposure of entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship support programs and policies should focus more on equitable skills development, mentorship and access to resources regardless of age and race.

The results support the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which posits that intention arises from attitude, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), it may be posited that attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are significant drivers of entrepreneurial intention, in contrast to age and race. The findings confirm the view that entrepreneurial intention is a product of psychological, situational and social factors, more than it is of demographic factors. This is supported by Lingappa et al. (2020); Shi et al. (2020) and Sampene et al. (2023), who all through their research found significant correlations between attitudes towards entrepreneurship, perceived behavioural control and subjective norms and entrepreneurial intentions. Thus, the findings of this study reveal insignificant relationships between age and race and entrepreneurial intention and align with the broader entrepreneurship literature. The findings expand existing literature which highlights that demographic variables are often weaker than psychological and contextual variables in predicting entrepreneurial intentions.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Only two public universities in Durban were targeted for the study, employing a sample of undergraduate entrepreneurship students. Students at the same university enrolling in similar courses may possess comparable characteristics that could affect the study results. Future research should encompass a wider demographic, including both business and non-business students, the employed populace, active entrepreneurs, and other colleges. Iwu et al. (2016) studied both business and non-business students, Ayalew and Zeleke (2018) focused on engineering students, while Aydin et al. (2024) investigated the working-age population. Varied samples will be ascertained if analogous results are obtained.

Most research in South Africa has examined the individual effects of demographic factors, with limited studies exploring intersectionality. Garcia and Baack (2021) examined the interplay between race and gender among students at five colleges in the United States. Jaga et al. (2018) examined the interrelation of race, gender, and organizational culture in South Africa and its effect on the professional progression of Black women. Future study in South Africa should investigate the interaction of demographic drivers, as certain demographic factors are interdependent. This will help determine whether factors such as race and socio-economic background can predict an individual's inclination to initiate a business venture.

The majority of research in South Africa has investigated the impact of demographic factors on entrepreneurial inclinations. Future research should examine the impact of demographic demographics on entrepreneurial results, including business survival, growth,

and access to finance. Future study may also examine demographic characteristics and entrepreneurial behaviors, including risk-taking, innovation, creativity, and resilience, beyond entrepreneurial ambition.

The study utilized a cross-sectional approach, which constrains the monitoring of developments in students' entrepreneurial inclinations over time. This is due to the fact that a cross-sectional study gathers data at one specific moment and is unable to reflect alterations in students' entrepreneurial goals. Longitudinal research, conversely, can accommodate variations in students' entrepreneurial inclinations resulting from exposure to entrepreneurship courses or the availability of funding and mentorship programs. Consequently, subsequent study should implement a longitudinal approach to examine trends in students' entrepreneurial inclinations.

8. Conclusion

The study shows the insignificant contribution of race and age in developing university students' entrepreneurial intentions. Relevant stakeholders, including tertiary institutions, policymakers, business mentors should consider psychological, social and environmental factors in promoting students' entrepreneurial intentions. opportunities for entrepreneurship should be provided to students regardless of race and age. Future research should build on this study and consider the intersectional perspective of demographic factors and entrepreneurial outcomes.

Author Contributions

Wimbayi Chasaya: Conceptualization, design, data gathering, analysis, and writing of this study.

Ayansola Olatunji Ayandibu: Conceptualization, design, data gathering, analysis, and writing of this study.

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest w.r.t the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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