

Entrepreneurship or Employment? The Factors Influencing Ivorian University Student's Career Choice

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Abstract

This Article examines the various factors that come into play, when it comes to Ivorian university students choosing the right career path. By analyzing empirical data and scholarly studies, this research aims to highlight the factors that influence career aspirations among university students in Ivory Coast. Ivory Coast, a country in west Africa has faced remarkable changes in entrepreneurial behavior, primarily among university students that consider entrepreneurial activities as an alternative to counter the unemployment issues. By focusing on the Ivorian demographic, this research enlightens the key and determinant factors such as family, educational and cultural background. The purpose of this article is to identify the factors influencing these student preferences towards organization employment or entrepreneurial activities.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship, Employment, University Students, Career, Ivorian

1. Introduction

The world of employment has faced tremendous difficulties since 2020, due to the covid-19 pandemic. This situation has forced organizations and companies to reduce their employees, causing a collapse in the world economy. Beyond the economic damage, COVID-19 has caused a shrink in the way society and more specifically university students perceive employment. In the case of Ivorian university students, choosing between entrepreneurship and employment entails several complex considerations, given the unique socioeconomic landscape of Ivory Coast (Mokibelo & Seru, 2020). More post-graduated students are pushing their intention toward a more promising activity which is entrepreneurship.

Many Studies and researchers emphasize the fact introducing entrepreneurial practice into our educational system may promote creativity and generate more jobs. According to the report of the United Nation (Brundtland, 1985), entrepreneurial behavior is one of the best way for achieving continuous and sustainable development (Peterman & Kennedy, 2003). In fact, there is proof that support that entrepreneurship strongly contributes to the economic growth of a nation (Van Praag & Versloot, 2007). Students give priority to job security and steady income, mostly leaning towards employment.

To analyze the intention of university students either to embrace employment of entrepreneurship, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen & Fishbein (1977) in his study Attitude-behavior relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research which suggests that behavior is determined by intentions, attitudes and subjective norms have been applied as theoretical basis. The purpose of this research is to answer the following questions: what factors influence Ivorian university students' career choice when it comes to entrepreneurship or employment? What is the best alternative between employment and entrepreneurship for Ivorian university students? How can the Ivorian education system promote university students' entrepreneurial intention? This paper is structured as follows: the literature review and the conceptual model will be conducted in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will emphasize the methodology and data collection. The findings of the study will presented in Chapter 4. A discussion will be made in chapter 5, followed by a conclusion that will be elaborated in the last chapter.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1. The Correlation between Entrepreneurship and Employment

The connection between organizational employment and entrepreneurship has raised interest among researchers and within the economic field. In the Ivorian context, it is important to comprehend this relationship as the country is working towards strengthening its economy. This literature review explores existing research that analyze the relationship between the two variables. Nkouma (2020) argues that entrepreneurial practices and employment are connected. He says that entrepreneurial practices represent potential solution to the high unemployment rate in Ivory Coast. Pursuing entrepreneurship could generate more opportunities and create a job. Nkouma (2020) also states that the entrepreneurship field in Ivory Coast faces tremendous difficulties. Among those we can count limited access to fund, scarcity of Infrastructure and policies. An empirical evidence is proposed by Decker, Haltiwanger, Jarmin, & Miranda (2014), in which they provide proofs of correlation between entrepreneurship and employment. According to the authors, there is positive correlation between the two variables in different sectors such as the informal economy. They argue that, to generate sufficient jobs, policies have to be favor of entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, we have Contrarily, Kalu (2015) in his study Entrepreneurship Qualification and Development in Cote d'Ivoire in the New Millen-

nium. Review of Public Administration and Management, according to the author, individuals the struggle fitting in to employment world have entrepreneurship as second alternative, which can lead to the creation PME (Petite et Moyennes Entreprises) know as small scale-business in ivory coast. A Study by Liñán & Rodríguez (2004) entrepreneurial attitudes of Andalusian university student, examines the relationship between employment and entrepreneurship, but in the context of women empowerment in ivory coast. she enlightens on how the inequalities of gender is overcome by women entrepreneurial tendencies. Ndoye (2020) also highlights the necessity of strong and adequate policies that support women entrepreneurs in their challenges. There is no doubt that entrepreneurship is a job generator, but also on the other hand organizational employment can be key factor to entrepreneurship (Autio, Keeley, Klofsten, & Rossi-Lamastra, 2001). However, to completely solve the issue of employment in Ivory Coast, changes such as more access to finances new and supportive policies need to be made.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives

2.2.1. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1985), provide an explicit framework that describes how people's behavior is influenced by psychological constructs. These can be named as follows. Subjective norm, attitudes and perceived behavioral. This theory aligns with the theory of reasoned action which is mostly used in studies has also been utilized this topic. The theory of reasoned action (TRA), emphasizes the outcomes of social environment on occupational intention. Organizational employment refers the personal decision of and individual to be employed by an organization, company or governmental institution. A person's career intention can be relatively predicted by their occupational intentions.

2.2.2. The Theory of Reasoned Actions

The theory of reasoned actions involves distinctive factors such as occupational attitude and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1985). Choosing the suitable career is often an important choice in every person's life. Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) in their book Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior delve deeper into the conceptual framework of the TRA, where a negative correlation may be implied indirectly. According to Rae & Carswell (2000), there is a correlation of positivity and negativity in this particular case. If someone significant other people deem the positive behavior, they literally have a greater mean and motivation to go after the career. While on the other, a negative attitude toward a certain career by an individual may lead a renouncement. **Figure 1** below shows the four components that describe an individual's behavior, attitude or intention to perform a behavior, according to Ajzen & Fishbein (1980) theory of reasoned action.

These variables affect consequently occupational behavior via behavioral intention, subsequently characterized by individual's attitude and perceived subjective norms about employment rather than directly affecting occupational behavior. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall (Vincent et al., 1998). There is a

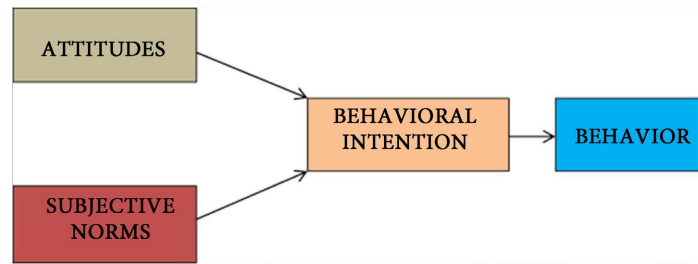


Figure 1. A conceptual model of Theory of Reasoned Action, adapted from Ajzen & Fishbein (1980).

correlation of positivity and negativity in this particular case. According to Ajzen & Fishbein (1980), a negative attitude towards a behavior, could weaken the intention to engage in that behavior. If someone significant other people deem the positive behavior, they literally have a greater mean and motivation to go after the career. While on the other, a negative attitude toward a certain career by an individual may lead a renouncement. Zhao, Seibert, & Hills (2005), Markman, Balkin, & Baron (2002) sheds light on how positive or negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship from significant others can influence an individual's motivation to pursue an entrepreneurial career.

2.3. Social and Demographic Factors

Factors Specific to the Ivorian Students Context

Family plays a tremendous role in the occupation choice an individual. In many African countries, particularly in Ivory Coast, familial expectations are high. The choice of certain professions by university students' is often influenced by their families' preferences and perceptions of industries or professions (Gilbert, 2018). An individual's social environment can also significantly influence his or her career choice (Segal, Borgia, & Schoenfeld, 2005). In the context of university student in Ivory Coast, beyond being influence by the family background, their decision may also be impacted their own peers career decision. This may lean their intention towards entrepreneurial practice (Ndoye, 2020). The level of education as well as the family background influence an individual's career choice, in fact, previous studies such as (Watanabe et al., 2019).

Another factors is necessary to be mentioned in this study is the economic circumstance of the country. In fact, the scarcity of job and opportunities strongly impact people's career choice (Kalu, 2015). With the same perspective, (AfDB, 2019) argue that the deterioration of Ivory Coast's economic situation and high youth unemployment is contributing to more entrepreneurial behavior (Liñán & Rodríguez, 2004). According to (Watanabe et al., 2019) and Baluku, Bogere, & Mistulo (2019), training centers in Ivory Coast must include entrepreneurial practices in the education system.

Individual's personal traits represent an important factor in choosing a career path. Among those traits we can mention risk taking propensity, innovativeness and self efficacy (Bhatiasevi & Zhu, 2020). These factors are often required for entrepreneurial practices.

Student's passion and personal interest strongly influence their career choice, whether in the favor of employment or entrepreneurship (Krueger, Michael, & Carsrud, 2000). According to (Campbell, 2016), people who have strong will for the field are more likely succeed (Souitaris, Zerbinati, & Al-Laham, 2007).

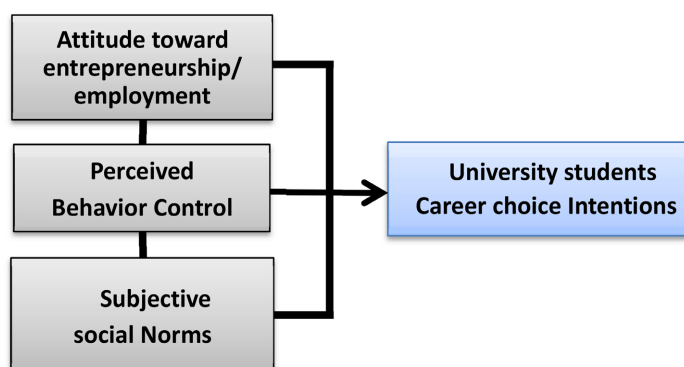
The discussion on the factors influencing Ivorian university students career choice is still uncertain given the contradictory studies and theoretical results of previous studies. However, the hypothesis is still under discussion. The contribution of this research is to lead to a clear indicator and evaluation of the factors impacting the choice of Ivorian students between entrepreneurship and employment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

Considering that the aim of this study is to collect, analyze and present data about an existing case, it can therefore be characterized as a descriptive research. The data collected for this research was made through a survey questionnaire measuring student's background information, entrepreneurial intention, attitude towards entrepreneurship and perceived behavioral control. The permission to conduct the research was given by chancellor of the university ofUCAO Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. Data were gathered by the researcher and two other assistants who were well trained to conduct qualitative research. The sample involves 319 Ivorian university students from the university ofUCAO Abidjan and university of Cocody, Ivory Coast. The questionnaire was written and answered in French, as the native language of all participants is French. The data gathering was made by measuring the students following variables: Students background, they entrepreneurial intention, perceived behavioral control, attitude toward entrepreneurship and self-efficacy. The questionnaire was sent in discussion group via the social media application, whatsapp. The data was then collected by two assistants located in Abidjan, trained known for conducting good quality research. Additional instruments were expended based on the studies of several authors such as: Green & Crick (1998), Ajzen & Fishbein (1980).

Research Framework



3.2. Instruments of Measurement

The reliability of each set of constructs has a Cronbach and the measurement of

items in the questionnaire was based on 5 point Likert scales with 1 illustrating “strongly disagree” to 5 illustrating “strongly agree”. Sullivan & Artino Jr. (2013) illustrate this in his study Analyzing and interpreting data from Likert-type scales, where he uses Cronbach’s α as a reliability measure and provides examples of how to interpret the results. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (Table 1).

Overall, for all three factors, Cronbach’s α coefficient values were over 0.8 and 0.9, and indicating good reliability and validity. Therefore, the scale is appropriate for factor analysis.

4. Findings

On Table 2 of this study, we can perceive that in general the participants have a moderate perception on the items that estimate entrepreneurial intention. For questions such as I have thought seriously to start my own business after completing my study, we found mean = 3.77, s.d = 1.01). On the other hand with the following question “I rather be an entrepreneur rather than be an employee in a company” (mean 3.82, s.d. = 1.07).

Table 2 shows that participants in general have moderate perception on their specific entrepreneurial efficacy especially.

Table 1. Mean score measurement.

Mean score	Description
<3.39	Low
3.40 - 3.79	Moderate
>3.80	High

Table 2. Ivorian students career choice: entrepreneurial and employment perception (UCAO, Abidjan).

Items	Mean	S.D
I Rather Be An Entrepreneur Than Be An Employee In A Company.	3.82	1.07
I Will Make Every Effort To Start And Run My Own Business.	3.42	1.05
I Will Choose A Career As An Entrepreneur.	3.33	1.02
I Have A Strong Intention To Start A Business Someday.	3.47	1.01
I Am Prepared To Do Anything To Be An Entrepreneur.	3,48	1.01
I Have Serious Thoughts About Starting My Own Business After Completing My Study.	3.77	1.01
I’m Determined To Create A Firm In The Future.	3.82	1.07
My Career Intention Leans More Towards Employment.	4.01	0.96
I Want To Be My Own Boss.	3.44	0.81
I Will Start My Business In The Next 5 Years	3.56	1.03

Table 3 indicates by the numbers bellow that students who have entrepreneurial aspiration significantly have higher mean score on intention as well as perceived behavior control.

Table 4 is an indicates that students with the attitude leaning towards entrepreneurship have higher mean

Table 5 shows Student's perception of and exposure to entrepreneurial tendency.

To answer the question of what perception do participants (students) have towards entrepreneurship, findings made through the survey questionnaire show that 220, 69% of the them perceive entrepreneurship the ideal activity. On the other hand 99 students, meaning 31% lean more towards employment. **Ahossou (2017)** in his study Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intentions of University Students in Côte d'Ivoire investigate the shift in perception of Ivorian and African university student in general, when it comes to entrepreneurship.

5. Discussion

The results of this research reveal that that there is different key factors impacting Ivorian university students, when it comes to choosing a career. Among

Table 3. Entrepreneurial intention of Ivorian university students based on entrepreneurial aspiration.

	Entrepreneurial Aspiration	N	Mean	S.D	T-value	Sig.
Intention	Yes	207	3.92	0.52	13.16	0.00
	No	112	3.76	0.56		
Attitude Towards Entrepreneurship	Yes	230	3.66	0.72	8.25	0.00
	No	89	3.31	0.80		
Perceived behavioral control	Yes	190	3.86	0.50	5.54	0.00
	No	129	3.60	0.59		

Table 4. Ivorian Students' perceptions of the factors associated with entrepreneurial intention.

Variables	Mean	S.D
Attitude towards entrepreneurship	3.81	0.87
Perceived behavioral control	3.45	0.95

Table 5. Participants entrepreneurial perception and exposure (319 students)

	Variables	N	Mean	s.d	t-value	sig.
Participants Entrepreneurial/ Employment Exposure	Entrepreneurship	220	3.61	0.71	2.58	0.01
	Employment	99	5.51	0.83		

those factors we count, family background that plays a tremendous role. In fact students that come from entrepreneurial families are more likely to lean toward entrepreneurial practice. Another determinant factor that was found throughout this research is the aspiration. Students aspiration represents a key factor as they (students) seeking independence and creativity. On the other we have one the most important factor, which is educational background. The understanding of entrepreneurship needs a deep and integrated research according to [Rasmussen & Sorheim \(2006\)](#). This study focuses on the factors that lead Ivorian university students towards entrepreneurship or employment. Therefore, it would be suitable to relate these two variables to students career perception. Entrepreneurship requires attributes such as skills, personal ability and attitude. The research found that Ivorian student entrepreneurial intention rate is high. These results are important for the fact that if students understand the necessity of entrepreneurship, it would alleviate the problem of employment. This study research highlights the complexity that represents the multitude of factors that directly and indirectly shape the Ivorian students career choice between entrepreneurship and employment. It is important to understand and analyze these factors to help the Ivorian government, policymakers and the educational institutions build appropriate programs to efficiently promote entrepreneurship.

5.1. Practical Implications

This study has practical implication for students, teachers and Ivorian governmental institutions. A large number of Ivorian student are paving their way to the entrepreneurial practices. Therefore, the governmental institutions must provide better and more enhanced entrepreneurial education. In this research we found that students entrepreneurial intention can be enhanced by adjusting the right variables during the implementation of entrepreneurship education universities.

5.2. Limitations

One of the major limitations in this study is the small sample size. With small and limited number participants, the results may not representative of every Ivorian university students. Therefore, this could impact the generalizability of the findings and limit the study validity. Another limitation to this study may arise from the limited scope considered in the research. This study focuses defined set of factors like family background or educational background while on the other hand minimizing other potential factors. This limitation may hinder the understanding of the influences on career choice of Ivorian students.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the correlation between entrepreneurship and employment is multi-complex. Many studies prove that entrepreneurship positively impacts a country's economy. This is accentuated by [Hessels & Stel \(2011\)](#), in their study

The Impact of Entrepreneurship Education on Entrepreneurial Activity in Europe. A Comparative Analysis. They argue that higher levels of entrepreneurship education positively influence entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurial behavior and education can contribute to economic development. When it comes to the Ivorian context, this study highlights the fact that the decision to pursue either employment or entrepreneurship is based on various factors. As developed in literature review, the theory of planned behavior used for this study provides a conceptual framework that helps understand the intention behind each decision. Variables such as perceived behavioral control subjective norms and attitude correlate with specific factors. The decision to pursue employment or entrepreneurship among Ivorian university students is influenced by various factors. The Theory of Planned Behavior provides a valuable framework for understanding the intentions and motivations that guide these decisions. Variables such as Attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control interact with specific contextual factors, like economic circumstances and entrepreneurial education, to shape students' career choices. Policymakers and educators should consider these factors to facilitate a conducive environment for both entrepreneurship and employment, aligning the aspirations of young graduates with the needs of the Ivorian labor market.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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