

# **Retrospect and Prospect of Private Higher Education Provision in Africa**

## **Proceedings of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Private Higher Education in Africa**

**Organized By:**

**Research and Knowledge Management Office,**

**St. Mary's University**

**August 23, 2014**

**United Nations Conference Centre,**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Attitudes of private higher education students towards  
entrepreneurship: A case of distance learners in Wolaita Sodo and  
Hossana Towns**

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***Abstract:***

*In the past, students of higher learning institutions in Ethiopia had guarantee of employment either in the public sector or in private firms. Currently, they are finding it difficult to secure employment in these sectors. Therefore, this study was aimed at exploring self-employment intentions of private higher education students and their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. By using convenience and snowball samplings, the primary data were gathered over a two month period, through the administration of a self-completion questionnaire delivered to 180 final year distance learning students from Business and Economics fields. The survey data were analyzed using SPSS. The good majority of the students agreed by expressing their wish to start business in an ideally considered age level of 31-40 as they would like to be their own boss. They also believed that they have business skills and knowledge, required for business ownership than students who do not want to start business. Nevertheless, the most inhibiting factors for students who did not want to start business are the shortage of initial capital and fear of taking risks. They also considered business ownership as giving them less control over their lives and, therefore, believe it would be easier to work for someone else. Interestingly, 81% of these students expressed their belief that good business support structure would encourage them to start business. Therefore, these findings have implications for academicians, educators in entrepreneurship, policy makers, enterprise support agencies and future young entrepreneurs.*

**Keywords:** Distance learners, Entrepreneurship, Private Higher Education Institutions and Entrepreneurial Attitude

## **1. Introduction**

Entrepreneurship is a worldwide phenomenon with economic growth across the globe positively impacted by the emergence of new and innovative business start-ups. These new small businesses play a significant role in job creation, influencing country leaders to recognize and support entrepreneurial start-up activity due to its positive contribution to the economy. Historically, economists have supported the view that entrepreneurship is responsible for economic expansion (Cole, 1965; Weber, 1978) due to its association with profit orientation, capital investment and the creation of new markets (Cantillon, 1755; Schumpeter, 1975).

According to Odunaike and Amoda (2013) entrepreneurship is the art of setting up and running an enterprise in a profitable and sustainable manner. The entrepreneurs are those people who are innovative; who discover opportunities for existing and new products, and who have the quest to satisfy the needs of the customers in market. To satisfy these needs, the entrepreneurs have to start up new ventures in line with the identified needs of the market (Dumbu & Chadamoyo, 2012). Overall, entrepreneurship can be regarded as the ability of the individual to mobilize scarce resources and assume risk to the exploitation of the existing business opportunities in a profitable way. The desire of entrepreneurship is to gain in the process, some revenue that are above the cost and risk associated with the entrepreneurial activity. Hence, in developing countries those problems of unemployment and poverty can be alleviated drastically.

An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related. A person having a positive attitude toward a behavior would be more likely to perform the behavior in question as would a person with a negative attitude be less likely to perform the behavior (Allport, 1954). Attention has been given lately to the role attitudes play in self-employment. There are surely more factors involved in creating the

entrepreneurial spirit than just a positive attitude. Through the theory of planned behavior, this study seeks to gain a better understanding of the attitudes students have towards self-employment as well as the factors that support or hinder the entrepreneurial spirit.

Till the end of the eighties, Ethiopian Higher Education graduates were certain of securing employment either in the civil service or in the private sector. Self-employment was therefore primarily the sanctuary of non-college graduates or school dropouts. Until very recently many institutions of higher education have also continued this tendency by setting up job placement offices without a counter effort to set up entrepreneurship support units.

However, nowadays university and college graduates of Ethiopia are realizing the difficulty of securing employment. Consequently, a lot of time is wasted as graduates search for job. One of the most effective alternatives suggested by economists is self-employment. Self-employment or entrepreneurship can contribute a great amount of output throughout the world and Ethiopia is no exception.

The education system in Ethiopia is being challenged to produce job creators rather than job seekers. Current teaching promotes rote learning rather than application, problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills. Rubanju (2008) notes that in the traditional lecture hall or classroom, theory and applications are not linked. Studying via distance learning will allow students to apply theories to their own settings and to observe the effect on their environment. Nevertheless, the majority of Ethiopian distance learners enroll in distance education in order to obtain a qualification and/or a promotion with the view that distance education is easy; however, distance learning requires self-discipline and self-management. Thus, the general objective of this study was to explore self-employment attitudes distance learners of private higher education students towards entrepreneurship at Wolaita Sodo and Hossana towns.

The research was limited to distance students of three private higher education institutions in Woalaita Sodo and Hossana towns who were Bachelor Degree students in Business and Economics fields.

## 2. Related Literature Review

It is important that entrepreneurship continues to grow and prosper positively affecting the economic growth of nations through job creation and economic development. Entrepreneurship studies have been influenced by the economics, psychology, sociology and strategic management literatures providing established theoretical frameworks and methodological tools (Gustafsson, 2004).

One leading management specialist, Drucker (1985), has extended the notion of entrepreneurship by emphasizing opportunity and took this idea further, describing the entrepreneur as someone who actually searches for change, responds to it, and exploits change as an opportunity. Chandler and Lyon (2001) see the multi-disciplinary approach to entrepreneurship in a positive light suggesting that this is one of the strengths of the field of entrepreneurship as it considers and borrows frameworks and methodologies from other legitimate social sciences.

The increased interest in entrepreneurship and in the number of institutions offering entrepreneurship education can be attributed to the acknowledgment by external stakeholders of the importance of the creation of new businesses and innovation for wealth creation and economic growth globally (Minniti *et al.*, 2006). Studies about entrepreneurship education focus on enterprise education and consider course content, pedagogy, entrepreneurial learning, and assessment (Greene & Rice, 2007). The need to evaluate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs has been made evident by several researchers (Block & Strumpf, 1992; Porter & McKibben, 1988).

According to Bechard and Toulouse (1998), the goal of entrepreneurship education training programs should be specific to the target clientele and in turn evaluation should be adjusted accordingly. Students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship can be changed over time (Hatten & Ruhland, 1995), and a useful approach to the measurement of entrepreneurship programs is to evaluate participants' changes in attitudes and perceptions of entrepreneurship and the impact of these on their entrepreneurial intentions.

Matthews *et al* (1995) acknowledged the significance of education and the part it plays in entrepreneurial activity, stating that it is critical to attract the young and educated to entrepreneurship, especially as current industrial trends are towards a knowledge-based environment (Henderson and Robertson 2000; Postigo *et al.*, 2006). Thus, higher education provides the skills required for the formation of firms within these knowledge-based industries. Furthermore, Scott *et al* (1988) observed that undergraduate students, with the assistance of an entrepreneurial education strategy could be helped to consider entrepreneurship as a career.

More recent research would appear with findings to prepare students for self-employment (Klapper, 2004), as University Career Centers tend to provide information about large organizations, therefore, promoting a large firm culture (Henderson & Robertson, 1999; Oakey *et al.*, 2002). Large firm culture, according to Vickery *et al* (1990) and Henderson & Robertson (1999), demoralizes and actually inhibits the entrepreneurial spirit and encourages the majority of students to plan to work for someone else. However, Vickery *et al* (1990) countered these arguments by quoting the six fold increase in annual new business registrations in the USA in one generation, stating this would seem to correlate better with the boom in secondary and higher education than with a major personality change.

In general, entrepreneurship education is an important component of business school education (Peterman & Kennedy, 2003; Zhao *et al.*, 2006) providing a stimulus for individuals and making career choices to consider self-employment thereby increasing new venture creation and economic growth. The main objective was an examination of the influence of entrepreneurship education on student's attitudes towards entrepreneurship and their self-employment intentions. Therefore, the current study sought to examine the role of the private distance education institutions in promoting entrepreneurship among their undergraduates.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The study applied *cross - sectional* survey design for the quantitative study and was used to gather the relevant data with regard to undergraduate students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. By using convenience and snowball samplings, the primary data were gathered over a two month period, through the administration of a self-completion questionnaire delivered to 180 final year distance learning students from fields of Business and Economics. The survey data were analyzed using the SPSS (version 20). Frequency tables were used to summarize the respondents profile and other data of the study, whereas the descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviations were calculated in order to determine respondents' entrepreneurial attitudes.

Distance learning students of the aforementioned private higher education institutions filled out the questionnaire. The contents of the questionnaire were designed to make respondents express their attitudes towards self-employment. Convenience and snowball samplings were used to collect data from the participants. The convenience survey, in which students filled out the questionnaire during a tutorial period, gave 104 valid responses while the snowball sampling was used to collect the remaining amount of the total sample size used for the current study.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

##### **4.1. Characteristics of the Participants**

The total sample of this study was 180 final year undergraduate distance learners, taken from three Private Higher Institutions of Wolaita Sodo and Hossana towns, SNNPR. It is of interest to this current research to note the representation of distance learning students in the field of Business and Economics regardless of other fields. The total number of final year students undertaking degree courses used for current research questionnaires from St. Mary's University, Unity University, and Alpha University College were 80 (44.4%), 40 (22.2%), and 60 (33.3%) respectively.

*Table 1: Number of distance learning students surveyed in each of the institutions and centers*

Institutions	Actual responses of students in both centers for each institution		Total
	Wolaita Sodo	Hossana	
St. Mary's University	50	30	80 (44.4%)
Unity University	25	15	40 (22.2%)
Alpha University College	30	30	60 (33.3%)
Total	105	75	180

The majority of respondents were from Wolaita Sodo center (58.3%), but the remaining from the Hossana center. Therefore, the attitudes of the student sample in this study were mainly based on respondents from the two distance learning centers found in Southern Region.

*Table 2: Demographic data of distance learners at private higher education institutions*

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Female	61	33.9
	Male	119	66.1
Age	Under 20 years old	5	2.8
	20-25 years old	9	5
	26-30 years old	159	88.3
	31-40 years old	7	3.9
Entrepreneurship course taken	Yes	116	64.4
	No	64	35.6
Occupation	Government official	10	5.6
	Full time employee	90	50
	Part time employee	60	33.3
	Owner / Private business	12	6.7
	Others	8	4.4

The table above presented the summary of the demographic data. Sixty six percent of the students were male. The majority of the students were between 26-30 years of age (88.3%). However, the range of participants less than or greater than to that of the above mentioned range of age were not more than 5%. Among the participants, higher proportion of students



(64.4%) took some form of entrepreneurship course, whereas the remaining did not.

#### 4.2. Students who want to start their own business

Out of the total usable responses considered for this study, 141 (78.4%) participants agreed that they are interested in starting their own business. As we can see in Table 3, more than half of these students (54.6%) expressed their wish to start business in an ideally considered age level of 31-40 years, followed by 26-30 years as the ideal age to start business.

*Table 3: Preferred ideal age to start business*

<b>Ideal age to start business</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>20-25</b>	19	13.5
<b>26-30</b>	41	29.1
<b>31-40</b>	77	54.6
<b>41-50</b>	4	2.8

*Note: N= 141*

The most repeated reasons for preferring this age range by most of the distance learners were due to their belief that it is the most productive period, and they need time to gain more experience before starting business.

*Table 4: Type of business students would like to start*

<b>Type of business</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Wood and metal works</b>	17	18.5
<b>Retail</b>	18	19.6
<b>Agriculture/Animal Breeding</b>	7	7.6
<b>Health &amp; Beauty</b>	8	8.7
<b>Education</b>	6	6.5
<b>Entertainment</b>	8	8.7
<b>Food processing</b>	14	15.2
<b>ICT</b>	10	10.9
<b>Unsure</b>	4	4.3

*Note: N=92*

As it can be seen in Table 4, most of the students would like retail, wood & metal work, and food processing type of businesses; on the other hand, each of the remaining types were also considered by a few ones to be started within the expected period of age.

*Table 5: Important influencers in the encouragement of starting business*

<b>Important Influencers</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>percentage</b>
<b>Parents &amp; Family</b>	34	22.4
<b>Education System</b>	29	19.1
<b>Career Advisors</b>	8	5.3
<b>Friends</b>	51	33.6
<b>Entrepreneurs I know</b>	10	6.6
<b>Media</b>	12	7.9
<b>Other</b>	8	5.3

*Note: N=152*

As shown in Table 5, most of the undergraduate distance learners (33.6%) said that they would be/are influenced by their friends, followed by parents and family (22.4%) to start their own business. As advertisement is used to form positive attitudes towards something (Berger & Mitchell, 1989), the education system along with career advisors, entrepreneurs they know, and relevant factors influence students' opinions as well as intensify their curiosity.

### **4.3. Why students want to become self-employed?**

Distance undergraduate students who wanted to start business are in agreement with many of the traditional reasons identified *as typical entrepreneurial reasons* for business startup (as shown in Table 6) by expressing positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. Those students who wanted to start business are more likely to consider entrepreneurship as an attractive career.

*Table 6: Mean and standard deviations for the reasons of students who would like to start business*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
I want to be my own boss.	1.92	1.004
I have an assertive strong personality that is	2.14	1.005

necessary for business ownership.		
It would enable me to make best use of my personal skills and competencies.	1.96	.864
It would enable me to make a lot of money.	2.06	.923
It would enable me to do things in my way.	2.16	.895
It would enable me to have more control over my life.	2.15	1.003
It would enable me to pick my own working time.	2.21	.985
It would give me the flexibility to combine my career with my family life.	2.19	.957
It would give me better work / life balance.	2.17	1.073
It would give me a career that would challenge me.	2.52	1.102
There would be fewer boundaries to my career than if I worked for someone else.	2.72	1.247
I would be able to use my business idea(s).	2.10	.892
I would be able to use my business skills.	2.05	.939
I would be able to use my education to the best advantage.	2.04	1.102
It would give me self fulfillment to own and run my business.	2.13	.995
It would enable me to give something back to society.	2.35	1.125
It would gain me respect from others.	2.32	.939
It would enable me to work in the area of my choice.	2.23	1.095

Note:  $N=140$

*The reasons want to start a business are rated using a 6-point Likert scale labeled as 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = Don't Know.*

The main reasons for those who strongly agreed (MS= 1-2) are that it enable them to be their own boss and make best use of their personal skills and competencies. The measured responses were consistent with the findings of Brindley and Richie (2000) who recognized being their own boss was a key positive feature for the undergraduates to consider starting their business. Similarly, the main reasons for those agreed (MS= 2-3) ones on starting their own business are that it would enable them to use their education to the best advantage, self-fulfillment and a career that would challenge them, allow them to work in the area of their own choice, and use their business ideas. These results are in line with Oakey

*et al.*, (2002) who distinguished ‘flexibility of choice in the work environment’ as an important feature for those who want to start their own business.

Almost half of the participants’ perceived taking entrepreneurship course as an advantage to self-employment and compared to relevant statistics, it shows a very encouraging degree of self-employment in Ethiopia (CSA, 2001) and self-employment may be a relevant expression of taking entrepreneurship course for both of them. Therefore, entrepreneurship course is probably a decisive factor to becoming self-employed. In line with the finding of Davidson and Henerkson (2002), it is too bad that the public sector is the dominant employer in Ethiopia in these areas where undergraduates have the highest employment rates which hinders these individuals’ opportunities to start businesses in their fields of expertise.

The present research noted that the majority of undergraduate students who wanted to start business (53%) believe that they require more work experience before actually entering entrepreneurship. This is in line with the findings of Carter and Collinson (1999) who also found that entry into entrepreneurship was delayed because of the belief that respondents require more work experience. This requirement of more work experience is of particular interest to the present research because work experience is often acknowledged as an important factor in the development of a business idea (Madsen *et al.*, 2003). However, in the current study lack of work experience did not appear to interrupt on these undergraduates’ perception of their ability to develop a business idea, as the majority of them agreed that they are being able to use their business ideas as important reasons to start their own business.

#### **4.4. Students that Expressed They Do Not Want to Start Their Own Business**

The findings related to distance learning students who lacked interest to start their own business are presented in Table 7. From the sample of 180 appropriate responses, some of the students 39 (21.6%) said that they do not want to start their own business.

Table 7: Mean and standard deviations of students' reasons who do not want to start their own business

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
I would find the responsibility of running a business too difficult.	2.17	.857
I would find the pressure too stressful.	2.61	1.145
I do not have the personal skills and competencies necessary.	3.11	1.132
There is too much red tape e.g. legal and employment regulations required when running a business.	3.00	1.495
The Ethiopian market is too small and does not have enough potential.	2.72	.826
It would take up too much of my time.	2.83	1.465
It would be easier to work for someone else.	2.44	.984
I don't have a good business idea.	2.22	1.114
I do not have the relevant experience needed to run a business.	2.56	1.247
I don't have the business skills required to run a business.	3.17	1.425
I would be afraid of the lack of a secure income.	3.17	1.200
I would have to work too hard.	2.83	1.505
It could take over my life.	2.39	1.145
It would be too difficult to run a business if I had family commitments.	2.22	.878
Entrepreneurship does not have the same status or respect as other careers.	2.22	.808
I would be afraid that my business would fail.	2.56	1.464
It would be too difficult to obtain the finance necessary.	2.22	1.003
The educational area that I studied is not suitable to start a business in.	2.33	.907
I do not have the contact or networks necessary to start a business.	2.67	.970
I do not know how to access business information or support structures.	2.61	1.335
The educational system does not encourage starting your own business.	2.33	.767

Note:  $N=39$

The reasons why respondents do **not** want to start business are rated using a 6-point Likert scale labeled as 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = Don't Know.

The majority of the undergraduate distance students who did not want to start their own business in the current study put forward fear of failure and ending in debt as causes for not starting their own business. They also agreed with the concept that ‘the responsibility of running business is too difficult’. In other words, they are afraid of taking risks (with  $MS=2.17$  and  $SD=.857$ ) which is a reason for not starting their own business. This finding corroborates with Wang and Wong (2004) who also noted risk as a serious inhibitor to business startup.

It would also be observed that there is a distinct lack of confidence in distance undergraduate students concerning their ability to start business. Many believed that they do not have good business idea ( $MS=2.22$ ) to enter entrepreneurship. This is in line with the findings cited in many literatures about lack of good business idea as a reason for not starting a business (Carter & Collinson, 1999; Klapper, 2004). Having family commitment is also found to be a problem for those who lacked interest to start business, with many distance undergraduate students believing entrepreneurship does not have the same status or respect like other careers. A variable aggregate of distance students also agreed that they do not know how to access business information or support structures.

Generally, it was found that most distance students in the current study did not want to start business since they do not know how to access good business information or support structure which would have encouraged them to start business and consider entering entrepreneurship.

#### **4.5. General attitudes of the combined group of students towards entrepreneurship**

The general view of the combined group of 180 distance students towards entrepreneurship in general is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: General attitudes towards entrepreneurship

Characteristics	Str. Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Str. Disagree	DK
You require special characteristics or traits to start your own business.	36%	42%	14%	5%	3%	0%
Undergraduates do not like taking risks.	22%	54%	13%	7%	1%	3%
Undergraduate business owners are taken less seriously than non-graduate business owners.	19%	32%	28%	14%	2%	5%
You need to work extra hard when you have your own business.	40%	52%	3%	4%	0%	0%
You need to be very determined to run a successful business.	42%	34%	8%	6%	4%	6%
To own a successful business you need to be selfish.	3%	6%	10%	44%	32%	5%
To own a successful business you need to be ruthless (cruel).	2%	8%	19%	36%	25%	10%
Support from family and friends is important when starting a business.	34%	55%	5%	3%	0%	3%
There is a lack of undergraduate role models, who own their own business.	30%	38%	16%	10%	6%	0%
Society in general encourages undergraduates to start their own business.	3%	11%	18%	37%	29%	2%
The media encourage undergraduates to start their own business.	6%	12%	31%	26%	21%	4%

*Note: N=172, 180, 180, 163, 170, 173, 180, 178, 180, 176, and 174 respectively.*

As the result indicates in the Table, the majority of participant students in this study (78%) perceived that the required special characteristics or traits is important if one wants to start one's own business, which is in agreement with Postigo *et al* (2006). They found out that entrepreneurs are seen as people with specific attributes. The need to work extra hard

(92%) was also seen as a basic requirement when entering entrepreneurship. There was also significant agreement (76%) on the need to be very determined to run a successful business which is consistent with Gasse (1990) who found determination as an important trait for entrepreneurship. The majority of the participants (89%) also underscored the importance of support from family and friends while starting business.

On the other hand, the majority of distance learning students did not agree to the claim that it is necessary to be selfish (76%) or ruthless (61%) to own successful business. This is related to the view expressed by Kalafatelis and McMillen (2004). They found out that more than half of the undergraduate respondents surveyed disagreed that business owners only cared about the success of their business and did not care about any negative impact they may have on society or the environment.

The immediate intentions of the participants after the completion of their degree course were summarized in Table 9. It was found that over half of these students (54%) want to work in a company in order to obtain professional experience immediately after the completion of their undergraduate study, whereas nearly half of the total participants (47%) said that they want to continue their education further. As Fletcher (1999) suggested the more educated a person is; the more likely he/she is to start his/her own business. This could have a positive impact on future undergraduates.

*Table 9: Immediate intentions after completion of present degree course*

<b>Career intentions immediately after degree</b>	<b>frequency</b>	<b>percentage</b>
Continue further with your education?	85	47
Work with a company and obtain a professional experience?	98	54
Work for the public sector e.g. civil service?	35	19
Work with a Small or Medium Company?	22	12
Work with a large Ethiopian company?	30	16
Work with a large multi-national company?	27	15
Start your own business?	68	38
Continue with a business that you have already started?	27	15



*N=180*

*Note: The respondents could give more than one answer, and the percentage column will not total a hundred percent.*

On the other hand, a considerable number (38%) of the combined group of undergraduate distance learners expressed their wish to start their own business after the completion of their study. The current study found that specifically the students who expressed their wish to start their own business are not likely to work in a company and obtain a professional experience like those who do not want to start their own business.

## **6.6. Conclusions**

The total number of final year students undertaking degree course used for current study from St. Marry's University, Unity University, and Alpha University College were 80 (44.4%), 40 (22.2%), and 60 (33.3%) respectively. The majority of the respondents were from Wolaita Sodo center (58.3%), who are male, within the age range of 26-30 years (88.3%). Among the participants, higher proportion of students (64.4%) took directly or indirectly an entrepreneurship course.

Out of the total responses considered for this study, 141 (78.4%) participants agreed that they are interested in starting their own business. More than half of these students (54.6%) expressed their wish to start business in an ideally considered age level of 31-40 years. This age range was chosen by respondents since they believed that it is the productive period; and thus, they need time to gain more experience before starting business.

The majority of the undergraduate distance students who did not want to start their own business in the current study pointed out that they are afraid of failure and ending up in debt. Moreover, they do not know how to access good business information or support structure.

## **6.7. Recommendations**

The result indicates that there is a lack of encouragement from surrounding society to undergraduates to start their own business and this

is a barrier to entrepreneurship, and awareness creation should be carried out to the general public.

Many of the respondents who claimed that they did not want to start business believed they do not have contacts or networks necessary to enter entrepreneurship, nor do they know how to access business information or support structures. The study has also shown that the majority of participants who did not want to start business agreed to the notion that a good support system would encourage more undergraduates to enter entrepreneurship.

With these constraints in mind, policy makers, private distance education providers and enterprise support agencies could benefit from this study by implementing suitable support systems aimed specifically at young graduates and by publicizing actively their availability.

#### **6.8. Recommendations for future research:**

Since the present research used only cross-sectional survey, it would be of interest to see if there is any change in attitude and perception of undergraduates both at an individual level and general attitude level towards entrepreneurship by using longitudinal study.

Similar study could be undertaken by extending the current research to different private higher education institutions across the regions of Ethiopia. This could lead to a better understanding of the attitude of undergraduates towards entrepreneurship within the different private educational institutions.

It would also be of benefit to compare male undergraduates with female undergraduates and their attitudes towards entrepreneurship. This can enable to know if attitudes towards entrepreneurship are different between male and female students at this stage in their career development.

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