

EXPLORING THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS' INTEREST IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Laila Listiana Ulya^{1*}, Pundani Eki Pratiwi², Aftina Nurul Husna³, Faiz Fatihul 'Alwan⁴,
Indah Mulia Sari⁵

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

⁵Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: lailalistianaulya@mail.unnes.ac.id

Abstract. The interest of university students in entrepreneurship has been steadily increasing; however, the underlying motives remain relatively underexplored, particularly among psychology students. This study aims to explore the factors that motivate psychology students to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected from 295 psychology students at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) through incidental sampling. Participants were asked to respond to an open-ended questionnaire consisting of a single question designed to elicit their views and personal motivations. The qualitative data were analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding based on the Grounded Theory method, followed by categorization and frequency analysis to identify the most dominant themes. The findings revealed nine main categories of motivation: (1) economic motivation and financial security, (2) social and environmental motivations, (3) personal interest and self-development, (4) learning experiences and opportunities, (5) long-term career orientation, and (6) career escape. Among these categories, economic motivation and financial security emerged as the most dominant drivers, followed by the pursuit of work flexibility and the desire to create job opportunities. These findings suggest that entrepreneurship motivation among psychology students is influenced by a combination of financial goals, personal values, aspirations for social impact, and the search for meaning in work. Understanding these motivations may serve as a foundation for developing entrepreneurship education programs tailored to the needs and characteristics of psychology students.

Keywords: entrepreneurial motivation, psychology students, qualitative research, phenomenology, Grounded Theory

INTRODUCTION

Universities worldwide increasingly view students' entrepreneurial motivation as a key factor in generating economic and social value, reducing graduate unemployment, and fostering discipline-based innovation. Entrepreneurial motivation encompasses both internal and external drivers that encourage students to initiate business ventures, including economic motives, social aspirations, and self-actualization (Stephan et al., 2013). Several factors are known to influence such motivation, ranging from internal aspects such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy, passion, and goal orientation (Newman et al., 2019), to external factors such as social support, market opportunities, and campus entrepreneurial climate. Nevertheless, most prior studies have focused on business and engineering students, while students from "helping professions" such as psychology remain underexplored, particularly in terms of how they interpret and construct the meaning of entrepreneurial motivation (Fahlia & Mulyani, 2018).

In Indonesia, empirical evidence on factors motivating students to pursue entrepreneurship has begun to emerge, including studies on university support and subjective norms during and after the pandemic. However, research in this context remains dominated by surveys grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and often involves mixed samples across diverse study programs, with very few qualitative studies allowing students to articulate directly the reasons behind their entrepreneurial interest (Amalia & von Korflesch, 2021). Psychology students present a unique profile. Their core competencies include understanding human behavior, effective interpersonal communication skills, and the ability to provide psychological interventions. Graduates often face a competitive labor market, particularly in sectors such as education, mental health, and human resources (de Dios Alija et al., 2024).

This situation prompts some students to consider entrepreneurship as an alternative career path, whether through private psychological services or through creative and social enterprises leveraging psychological expertise. However, research on entrepreneurial motivation among psychology students remains scarce, especially through qualitative approaches that capture the nuances of their personal experiences. To address this gap, the present study offers a qualitative exploration of psychology students' entrepreneurial motivation. This approach was chosen to uncover lived experiences and the processes of meaning-making that drive their motivation, including prosocial aspirations, identity alignment with entrepreneurial roles, and personal growth. The study also considers the socio-cultural context and environmental support that influence entrepreneurial decisions. By presenting rich qualitative evidence, the research aims to broaden understanding of entrepreneurial motivation within non-business disciplines.

This study is significant as it provides experiential insights into the motives of psychology students, a group characterized by social-behavioral competencies with potential contributions to value-based entrepreneurship. It also offers practical implications for designing entrepreneurship education in higher education (e.g., strengthening learning autonomy, ecosystem support, and pathways to real-world experience) and contributes to the scholarly discourse on student entrepreneurial motivation in Indonesia. The research aims to identify and explain categories of motivation that drive psychology students' interest in entrepreneurship. Its scientific and social contributions include reinforcing the evidence base for developing entrepreneurship curricula and support services that are more responsive to students' motivations, values, and needs.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore the entrepreneurial motivation of psychology students. The sample was selected using incidental sampling, involving 295 psychology students from Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire consisting of a single core question designed to freely elicit the factors that attract students to entrepreneurship. Data analysis was conducted using the Grounded Theory method, following the stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify themes, categories, and relationships among categories emerging from the raw data. After the coding process, categorization and frequency counts were performed to map the intensity of each theme. Data validity was ensured through triangulation and ongoing discussions with the researcher throughout the analytical process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Table of Main Categories and Subthemes

Main Category	Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage
1. Economic Motivation and Financial Security	Income and financial security	137	46.44%
	Sustainability and prospects	9	3.05%
	Long-term investment	4	1.36%
2. Social and Environmental Motivation	Job creation	29	9.83%
	Entrepreneurial family influence	27	9.15%
	Social impact/benefits/helping others	18	6.10%
	Social orientation	4	1.36%
	Religious motivation	2	0.68%
3. Personal Motivation & Self-Development	Personal interest and inclination	21	7.12%
	Creative work/achievement	2	0.68%
	Search for meaning	2	0.68%
4. Experience and Learning Opportunities	Direct entrepreneurial activities & experiences	27	9.15%
	Learning & personal development	20	6.78%
5. Freedom (Managerial) & Independence	Work flexibility/autonomy	40	13.56%
	Financial independence	16	5.42%
	Business ownership	10	3.39%
6. Creativity & Product Innovation	Freedom of creation/creative autonomy	22	7.46%
	Product creation	16	5.42%
	Local brand development	2	0.68%
7. Enjoyment & Positive Experiences	Enjoyment in entrepreneurship	24	8.14%
	Positive entrepreneurial experiences	9	3.05%
8. Long-Term Career Orientation	Aspiration to own a business	12	4.07%
9. Alternative Career Path	Failure in job interviews	1	0.34%

Economic Motivation and Financial Security

Entrepreneurial motivation is defined as an internal drive that encourages individuals to engage in business activities by utilizing available opportunities and leveraging their personal capabilities, with the expectation of generating income and achieving financial independence (Chong, 2022). The findings of this study reveal that the most prominent category of motivation among psychology students is economic motivation, specifically seeking financial security. Within this category, the dominant driver was income and financial security, which emerged as the primary factor encouraging students to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Students reported being motivated to pursue entrepreneurship to earn extra money, while others emphasized the importance

of saving for future needs. Furthermore, students identified opportunities that could provide promising long-term financial returns, such as the prospect of earning their own income and the potential to achieve higher earnings compared to conventional salaried jobs.

Students also expressed a strong desire to achieve financial security, independence, and freedom through entrepreneurial activities. Beyond income and financial stability, sustainability and future prospects were also cited as motivating factors. A smaller proportion of students emphasized long-term investments as a key driver of entrepreneurship, aiming to secure financial gains for the future. These findings align with Batz Lineiro et al. (2024), who emphasize that entrepreneurial activity is largely driven by two key elements: necessity and opportunity. Both aspects are interrelated in shaping entrepreneurial ventures and in the creation of wealth (Maleki et al., 2024).

Social and Environmental Motivation

In the second category, social and environmental motivations such as job creation, family influence, and social impact emerged quite significantly. These findings indicate that entrepreneurship is not solely about personal achievement but also about competencies that contribute to broader social and economic domains. The social and environmental dimensions not only experience the impact of entrepreneurship but also serve as driving forces for individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

This type of motivation reflects an external factor, showing that students possess sensitivity and concern for their surroundings. Social relations, social demands, and environmental conditions influence individuals in their decision to undertake entrepreneurship. In this context, students recognized that entrepreneurial activities can benefit their social environment in various ways, ranging from providing job opportunities to fostering sustainable community development. Some participants also reported being motivated by religious values, particularly the belief that trade and commerce, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, are honorable professions.

Family influence was also a notable environmental factor. Students who came from entrepreneurial families received encouragement and role modeling, with some being inspired by their parents' businesses and motivated to continue or expand family enterprises. Although individual factors remain central in the entrepreneurial process, business activities inevitably take place within a specific social environment. Thus, contextual factors such as social relations and environmental conditions shape individuals' beliefs and motivations to pursue entrepreneurship. As Kautonen et al. (2015) argue, cultural values that support entrepreneurship can foster a dynamic and innovative economy by encouraging individuals to pursue entrepreneurial aspirations and create new businesses and products.

Personal Motivation and Self-Development

The third category highlights personal motivation and self-development, with three subthemes identified: personal interests and inclinations, creative work, and meaningfulness. These findings align with empirical evidence suggesting that the drive for self-actualization, creativity, and personal expression often outweighs extrinsic motivations (Chitamba et al., 2025). Engagement in entrepreneurship as a pathway to life purpose and meaning reflects intrinsic motivation, demonstrating that when individuals are driven by interest or a sense of meaning, their involvement and satisfaction tend to increase.

The results of this study indicate that some students were motivated to pursue entrepreneurship based on hobbies or personal passions that they actively cultivated. Students expressed a desire to

create products that not only represent their work but also carry deeper meaning. For these individuals, entrepreneurship was not merely a means to achieve financial goals but also an avenue to produce meaningful outcomes and personal accomplishments.

This motivation to grow resonates with Verheul et al. (2012), who emphasized that one of the strongest factors influencing entrepreneurial intention is the need for achievement. Individuals with a strong desire for accomplishment are more likely to be engaged and committed to entrepreneurial behavior.

Experiences and Learning Opportunities AFT

Direct experiences play a crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial spirit. Students who engage in business activities, freelancing, or small-scale ventures from an early stage gain authentic opportunities to learn from real-life situations. These activities include using free time productively, taking risks by trying new things, and being open to challenges. Through this process, they acquire not only technical skills, such as management, marketing, financial management, and business strategy, but also non-technical abilities, including relationship building and self-confidence.

Furthermore, these experiences provide a sense of meaning, as entrepreneurship is not merely perceived as an economic activity, but also as a means to create value and lead a more fulfilling life. In this sense, entrepreneurial learning shapes a holistic understanding of how business serves as a medium for personal and professional growth.

Freedom (Managerial) & Independence AFT

Freedom and independence emerge as key attractions for students in entrepreneurship. Managerial freedom allows them to control their own schedules, choose locations, and determine the type of work without being bound by rigid working hours, as is typical in formal employment. This flexibility offers a sense of autonomy and higher control over daily activities.

In addition to work flexibility, financial independence serves as a strong motivation. Students strive to develop creative ideas, stand on their own, and seek income without depending on others. The aspiration to own a business also emerges, even if the scale remains small. The desire to be a “boss” rather than merely an “employee” reflects an aspiration for autonomy and ownership in the workplace.

Creativity & Product Innovation AFT

The realm of creativity and innovation becomes an important space for exploration in entrepreneurship. Students perceive entrepreneurship as a means to express ideas, experiment with new forms, and create products that have both financial and social value. Creativity is understood not only as the ability to make something but also as a continuous process of developing and refining ideas.

Another motivation is the desire to create handcrafted or original products that provide long-term benefits, whether in aesthetic, technological, or social aspects. Additionally, there is a strong aspiration to build and develop local brands. Students aim to create businesses that represent the identity of their own regions, so entrepreneurship is not only a means of generating profit but also a medium for fostering pride and contributing to their socio-cultural environment.

Enjoyment & Positive Experiences AFT

The aspect of enjoyment highlights that entrepreneurship is not solely viewed as a burden or obligation, but also as an activity that brings pleasure. Students report feeling satisfied when creating for themselves, seeing their products appreciated by customers, and earning income from their ventures. This enjoyment is even stronger when the business aligns with their personal interests, making work feel lighter and more meaningful.

Moreover, entrepreneurship is often perceived as an exciting and explorative experience. Selling, interacting with customers, and developing new ideas are seen as valuable experiences that strengthen motivation to continue their entrepreneurial journey. Thus, enjoyment and positive experiences serve as reinforcing factors that sustain students' interest in entrepreneurship.

Long-Term Career Orientation

Although enrolled in a Psychology program, the students demonstrated a strong long-term career orientation as entrepreneurs. One participant stated, "I am interested in entrepreneurship because I want to have something that I can build and develop outside of my main job. Besides being an additional source of income, I also see it as a long-term provision for financial independence and self-development." This understanding is consistent with Kakouris et al (2024), who emphasized that entrepreneurship within educational settings can serve as part of a long-term career strategy oriented toward personal and financial growth.

A career is distinct from a job, even though both involve earning an income. A career encompasses developmental stages, long-term orientation, and opportunities for self-actualization, as explained in Life-Span theory, which highlights that career development is a lifelong journey reflecting the evolution of self-concept throughout life. Pursuing entrepreneurship as a long-term career is relevant because a business rarely becomes large immediately; it requires a gradual process that enables learning, adaptation, and the maturation of strategies, which Ferdousi (2025) identifies as characteristic of a successful career journey.

This step-by-step approach offers flexibility, allowing students to start their entrepreneurial journey on a small scale, tailored to their current circumstances. This was reflected in one participant's statement: "I want to have a bakery and fashion business. Business as a side hustle and passive income alongside my main job." Fields such as bakery and fashion were chosen because they offer opportunities for creativity, emotional connection with consumers, and relatively stable growth potential, also identified in Ferdousi's (2025) study on the creative sector. These two sectors enable early experimentation with manageable risks, while simultaneously developing managerial skills and establishing beneficial networks for the future.

Previous research has shown that engagement in entrepreneurship can provide long-term psychological and economic benefits, including in later stages of life. Caines (2019) found that an open time perspective is positively associated with entrepreneurial self-efficacy and outcome expectations, while social support fosters interest in entrepreneurship. These findings underscore the importance of establishing a business at a young age for a more stable future.

Alternative Career Path

The drive to engage in entrepreneurship does not only stem from optimism but can also emerge from a lack of confidence in pursuing formal careers. This phenomenon aligns with Lent and Brown's (2013) findings that perceptions of career barriers can trigger certain coping strategies, including seeking alternative paths such as entrepreneurship to maintain professional development.

One participant stated that they wanted to become an entrepreneur because they were worried about not being accepted for work, “feeling unsure about succeeding or passing job interviews.” This condition can be explained through career coping theory, in which individuals facing pressure or external barriers manage stress by choosing career options they perceive as safer and providing greater personal control (Brown & Lent, 2013).

This study found that students lacking confidence in securing employment cope by turning to entrepreneurship. This is influenced by the perception that starting a business provides greater freedom and does not require external evaluation in order to begin, making the process more inclusive for individuals with low confidence in job selection processes. This perspective aligns with the concept of proactive coping, which emphasizes taking initiative to anticipate career challenges and utilizing them to develop alternative professional pathways (Greenglass et al., 1999).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the motivation of psychology students for entrepreneurship is the result of a combination of economic, social, personal, and creative factors. Among the nine main categories identified, economic motivation and financial security emerged as the most dominant drivers, followed by the pursuit of freedom in managing work, the desire to create employment opportunities, and the expression of creativity through the products or brands they develop. These findings indicate that students’ entrepreneurial drive is not merely pragmatic but also tied to the search for meaning, emotional fulfillment, and the aspiration to contribute social value. By understanding this diversity of motivations, educational institutions can design entrepreneurship programs that are more relevant and aligned with the interests, values, and long-term goals of psychology students. For future research, it is recommended that the dynamics of motivation over time, differences across academic programs, and external factors such as family support and access to business capital be further explored.

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