

Evaluating Students Entrepreneurial Capacity of University Students in Lebanon

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Abstract

The several crises that have ravaged Lebanon in the last 3 years left us in a big need for finding solutions for unprecedented unemployment and poverty rates. Recognized as a catalyst for economic growth and job creation, entrepreneurship was a very suitable option, that's why this research aimed to evaluate the Entrepreneurial readiness of university students in Lebanon. From the behavioral perspective, this study analyzed the entrepreneurial capacity of university students in terms of psychological traits, skills and motivational factors to become entrepreneurs. We examined the possession of the students for factors that enable them to engage in entrepreneurial activities and start their own business. The study was conducted on 357 students from different universities in Lebanon. The findings showed that the majority of students had the profile of an entrepreneur and are ready to become entrepreneurs.

Key Word: *Entrepreneurship, Student entrepreneur, Entrepreneurial capacity, entrepreneurial skills, psychological traits, Lebanon.*

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I. Introduction

Developing countries, including those in the Arab world, struggle with limited fiscal capacity to create jobs and absorb new labor market entrants, the allure of including entrepreneurship in the tools of job creation has increased. Globally, entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are widely considered essential at the national level, particularly because they create a higher share of total jobs than other employers. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, SMEs represent 80-90% of all enterprises in the formal sector¹.

According to the World Bank report published in 2018, SMEs in Lebanon represent 95% of businesses and 50% of the total workforce. The Lebanese Ministry of Economy and Trade also estimates that they contribute around 40% of Lebanon's GDP².

During the last 3 years, Lebanon had faced three mega-crises at once: an economic and financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, the consequences of Beirut blast and lately the violent depreciation of the Lebanese pound against the US dollar, which plunged more than three quarters of the Lebanese under the poverty line and destroyed their purchasing power³.

The economic situation continues to get bogged down in Lebanon, where the official unemployment rate has almost tripled since 2019, according to a joint study by the UN and the Lebanese government. "The unemployment rate in Lebanon fell from 11.4% in 2019 to 29.6% in January 2022", indicated the Central Administration of Statistics in Lebanon (CAS) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) in a press release⁴.

Entrepreneurship and the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems are the engines of the economy for job creation, income generation and contribution to the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)⁵.

Until 2013, the startup concept was not very widespread in the local entrepreneurial scene. It was reinforced in 2014 when the Lebanese Central Bank issued Circular number 331, an injection of \$400 million to encourage banks to invest in startups. Despite its challenges and drawbacks, it was a golden opportunity for Lebanese talent to show off what they have always been known for – a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit and out-of-the-box thinking⁶.

In just a few years, Lebanon has seen a surge in the tech start-up scene: in 2019 alone, Lebanon was home to more than 2,000 startups operating in Lebanon and supported by accelerators, incubators, non-governmental organizations, venture capitalists and many other ecosystem players⁷.

In order to improve the country's economy and reduce the unemployment rate, we must certainly increase the number of entrepreneurs⁸. If we assume as mentioned previously that the favorable environment for entrepreneurship exists in Lebanon, the question that arises here is whether young Lebanese are ready to become

entrepreneurs. However, becoming an entrepreneur is not easy and not everyone has the unique characteristics that support their life as an entrepreneur. To succeed, the entrepreneur needs entrepreneurial skills such as self-confidence, the need for success, the propensity to take risks, the tolerance of ambiguity, the internal locus of control and innovation⁹.

To address this subject and answer the research question, a research plan was established. A questionnaire was sent to the targeted sample to collect their responses. Several readings dealing with the subject have been carried out to complement the empirical research.

This study aims to examine the entrepreneurial capacities of university students from different levels and academic specialties in different universities in Lebanon and to study their entrepreneurial potential (EP). EP is a concept used to represent the likelihood of a person eventually to become an entrepreneur or not¹⁰.

The results of this study should provide a description of the possibility for these students to become entrepreneurs in the future. The results should also contribute to the literature, prepare entrepreneurs and feedback information to various institutions to boost entrepreneurship and job creation in Lebanon.

Our research questions are:

What is the entrepreneurial capacity of the students in Lebanese universities? How prepared are students in Lebanese universities to become entrepreneurs? Are they ready to start an entrepreneurial activity?

The hypotheses to test are:

H1: Students possess the psychological traits of an entrepreneur

H2: Students have entrepreneurial skills

H3: The main motivation for students to become entrepreneurs is to earn money by creating a positive impact in the country.

II. Literature review

This research is conducted in order to measure the entrepreneurial capacity of university students in Lebanon. For this purpose, we will go through a detailed review of all key concepts and previous main studies related to this topic. According to Vivarelli, Entrepreneurship is a complex and controversial phenomenon¹¹. The various definitions of data pertaining to entrepreneurship show that the entrepreneurial world is not viewed from a single perspective. Entrepreneurship is described as a complicated, elusive and multifaceted phenomenon that draws from a number of academic fields, including management, economics, sociology, and psychology¹².

For example, the psychologist (behavioralist) sees in it: the need for success, the perceived locus of control and the propensity to take risks. The economist sees it as bringing together the factors of production (land, labor, capital and entrepreneur) and bearing the risk of buying at a certain price and selling at uncertain prices. Whereas sociologist regards it as the ability to recognize and act on market opportunities in order to provide social services. None of these approaches is solid and comprehensive, as each focus on certain aspects of entrepreneurship and leaves some untouched¹³.

Business activity, as a type of entrepreneurial behavior, involves being willing and able to make decisions, solve new problems creatively, take risks, seize opportunities and adapt flexibly to a changing environment¹⁴. These characteristics, together with the ability to plan a business and to implement the plan in practice (i.e., to control and use resources as intended), underlie the motivation for entrepreneurship¹⁵.

Gibb specified that entrepreneurial behavior is recognized when individuals demonstrate that they have certain characteristics such as initiative, a resilient influence, moderate risk-taking, flexibility, creativity, independence, a need for achievement, imagination, a high internal locus of control, leadership, and persistence¹⁶.

Now that we have a clear vision about the psychological traits of an entrepreneur, let's define a Student-Entrepreneur. Student entrepreneurship is defined as venture creation activities of people who are currently studying at a university. He/she is an individual attending award classes at university and conducting innovative and revenue generating entrepreneurial activities. This only adds to entrepreneurial profile, the fact of being a university student, which drives us to same traits¹⁷.

Several studies have been conducted in the area of student's readiness. In 2012, a research work took place in Saudi Arabia, its objective was to study the perception of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial intention of Saudi university students and to determine whether they are ready to face market challenges and take risks that are part of entrepreneurial activities. The results of the study indicate the satisfactory level of students' intentions on entrepreneurship and their willingness to put their efforts into entrepreneurial activities¹⁸.

In 2015, entrepreneurship has also become a subject of interest in Malaysia. A study was conducted and its purpose was to identify the factors that affect entrepreneurial intention in engineering technology students. The results revealed that the factors that contribute the most to entrepreneurial intention are the locus of control, followed by the need for success and subjective norms¹⁹.

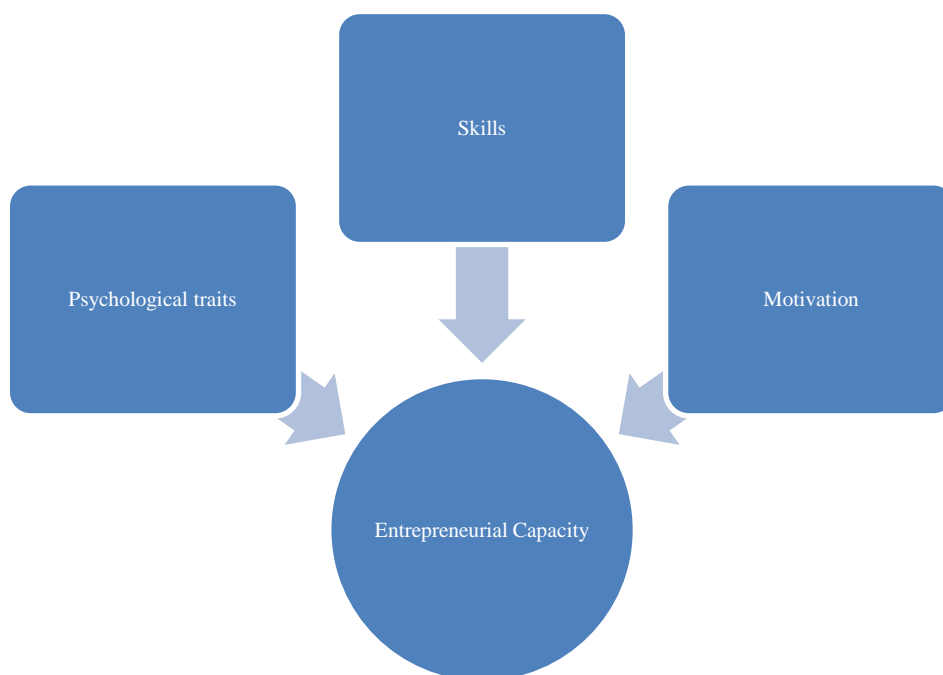
To measure entrepreneurship readiness among youth in Pakistan, researchers highlighted the result that entrepreneurial attitude, social norms and perceived behavioral control have a significant positive effect on

entrepreneurship readiness among young people. Additionally, research shows that entrepreneurial knowledge has a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial attitude, social norm, and perceived social norm²⁰.

Also, a research project in 2021, aimed to determine the effect of motivation, identification of opportunities, resources and entrepreneurial abilities on entrepreneurial preparation, the role of entrepreneurship training as a moderating variable on motivation, the identification of opportunities, resources and entrepreneurial capacities on the preparation for entrepreneurship. The results showed a positive and significant effect of motivation, identification of opportunities, resources, entrepreneurial capacity and entrepreneurial training which could moderate the impact of all these factors on entrepreneurial readiness. Based on these results, we can know that to start, entrepreneurship requires motivation to exert all efforts, identification of opportunities to find and implement potential in business, resources to increase the company's competitive advantage and the entrepreneurial ability to succeed using all of its abilities²¹.

To conduct our study and measure the entrepreneurial capacity of students, a new research model is developed. Figure no 1 suggests three main factors that compose the Entrepreneurial capacity. Psychological traits measured in this study were: taking Initiative, perseverance, hard work, patience, taking responsibility, persistence, motivation, self-drive, self-confidence and attitude towards resources. Skills were defined by 3 variables: problem solving, planification and sharing knowledge. The motivation required was earning money while creating a positive impact in the society.

Figure no1: Research model



III. Research methodology

The research methodology can be thought of as a formula. A part will be how we plan to put our research into practice and part will be why we think this is the best way to approach it. It is ultimately a methodological and systematic plan to solve our research problem²².

It simply refers to the practical “how” of a given search. Specifically, it is how a researcher systematically designs a study to ensure valid and reliable results that meet the research goals and objectives. In the methodological part, we will justify the design choices, showing that the methods and techniques chosen are best suited to the goals and objectives of our research, and that they will provide valid and reliable results²³.

In order to conduct this study, to measure the students' entrepreneurial capacity, a well-structured and oriented questionnaire that supports our research model was tailored. A questionnaire is a tool of quantitative research.

Quantitative research involves data, reasoning, and an unbiased point of view. Quantitative research focuses on precise and convergent thinking as opposed to divergent reasoning, which is the creation of multiple ideas regarding a research topic in an unplanned and unstructured way²⁴.

Here, the question that we will answer is therefore the justification for choosing the quantitative method. The quantitative research allows better testing of theories and hypotheses. When there is a well-established theoretical framework in the literature, quantitative research is appropriate.

When trying to quantify a problem, quantitative data helps to infer its extent and understand its degree of dominance by looking for results that can be projected into a larger population^{23,24}.

The study was carried out in Lebanon targeting university students from different backgrounds and specializations. To calculate the sample size, it was crucial to consider a large population.

The sample size formula:

Sample size needed = $\{(Z\text{-score})^2 * StdDev * (1-StdDev)\} / (\text{margin of error})^2$

For a confidence level of 95%, a standard deviation of 0.5 and a margin of error (confidence interval) of +/- 5.2%, 356 respondents are needed, our sample consists of 357 respondents, so it is a representative sample.

Regarding the types of sources, primary data and secondary data were used in this study.

To collect the data necessary to conduct our study, we used the questionnaire method. A list of questions used to collect data from respondents about their attitudes, experiences, and opinions. Questionnaires can be used to collect quantitative and/or qualitative information.

A well-designed questionnaire was prepared in such a way to obtain the most complete and accurate information possible in order to meet the objectives of our research. As the designer of the questionnaire, we made sure that the people questioned understood the questions perfectly and that by using the simplest turns of question and putting them in English and translating them into Arabic, which is the mother tongue of the respondents.

In our case, the questionnaire was self-administered, all questions were standardized so that all respondents receive the same questions with identical wording.

The questionnaire was carried out on Google Forms. Google Forms is a free survey tool that's part of G Suite, Google's full office suite.

The questionnaire covered 16 multiple-choice questions, 11 are questions on the psychological traits of the students, and the other questions revolved around 2 essential dimensions: their skills and their main reason for becoming an entrepreneur.

A mass of collected data does not itself constitute research. All of this data needs to be processed. That is to say, it is necessary to carry out analytical work to isolate abstract signifying units from their context in order to compare them term by term. Then, making a synthesis. This phase includes two steps:

- 1- Data analysis and presentation
- 2- Interpretation and discussion of the data.

Quantitative data analysis involves turning raw numbers into meaningful data through the application of rational and critical thinking. Quantitative data analysis may include calculating frequencies of variables and differences between variables. A quantitative approach is usually associated with the search for evidence to support or reject the hypotheses formulated in the early stages of this research process^{23,24}.

In this research, SPSS software was used to present and analyze quantitative data. It is a suite of software that analyzes scientific data related to the social sciences. SPSS offers a fast visual modeling environment that ranges from the simplest to the most complex models.

IV. Results and discussions

Project results lead to the achievement of specific project objectives. Researchers usually hope to achieve a particular result when carrying out a project. The results of the survey were drawn from the responses to the questionnaire. The results are of little use to the reader because their value lies in their interpretation and analysis. In order to ensure that the data in this section are correctly understood, it is necessary to provide an interpretation of the results, and discuss whether the hypotheses are validated or rejected.

Figure no 1 shows that 88.85% of students are perseverant, 80.84% do things themselves, 79.44% have a sense of responsibility, 75.96% are persistent, 72.82% are motivated and autonomous, 71.08% know how to use limited resources, 70.73% take initiatives, 55.40% have self-confidence, 50.87% do not waste resources, 48.43% are patient and 31.71% work hard.

Figure no1: Frequency analysis of psychological traits

Frequency analysis of psychological traits

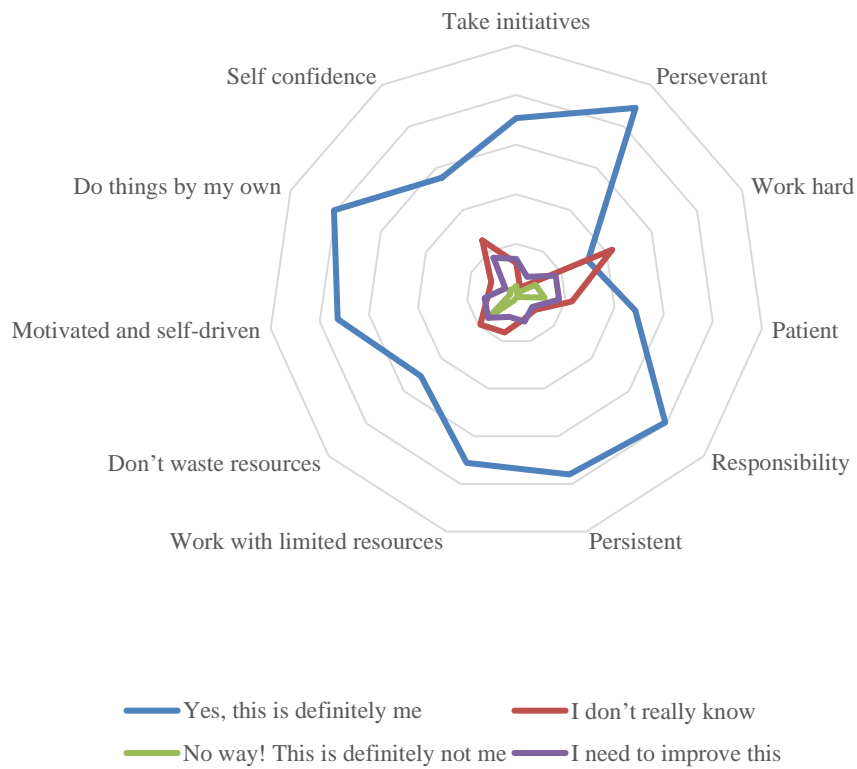


Figure no 2 shows that 76.66% of students have problem-solving skills, 76.31% do planning and 65.85% enjoy sharing their knowledge with others.

Figureno2: Frequency analysis of skills

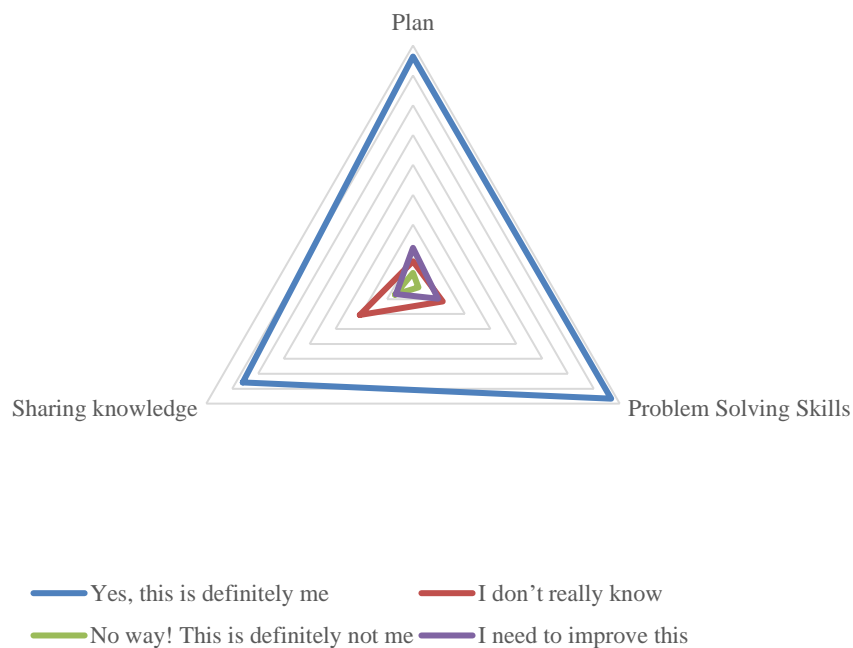


Figure no 3 shows that 39% of students consider that making money and leaving impact on others are the most important motivation to become entrepreneur, while 32.06% consider making money and solving a real problem are the most important factors, 26.83% consider making an impact and solving a real problem are their priority and 2.09% values money as the most important factor.

Figure no 3:Most important motivation to become entrepreneur

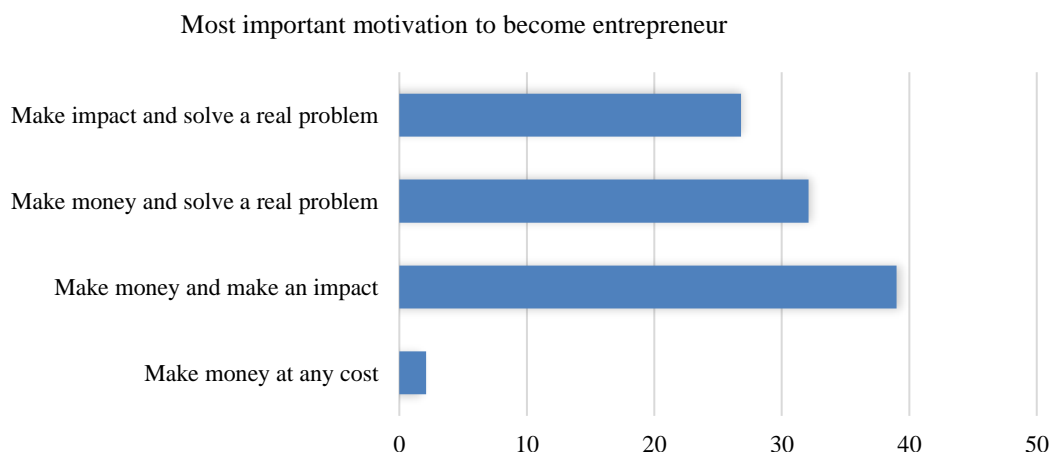
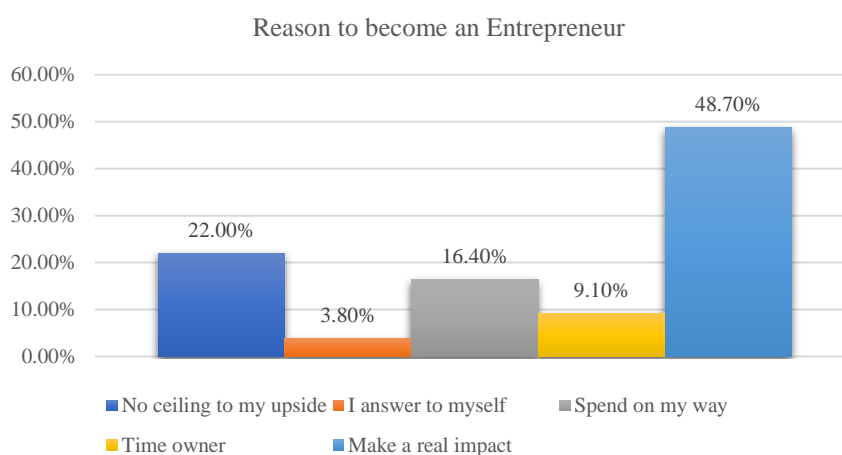


Figure no 4 shows that 48.70% of students like to become an entrepreneur because they want to make an impact and earn money at the same time, 22.00% because they can take the decision, 16.40% because they can choose how to spend their time, 9.10 because they can decide when to work and 3.80% because they can find the answers by themselves.

Figure 4: Reason to become entrepreneur



Application of the correlation test

Model testing requires checking whether there is a correlation between the essential variables of the model: psychological traits, skills and motivation.

There are 6 hypotheses:

- Ha0: there is no relationship between psychological traits and skills
- Hb0: there is no relationship between psychological traits and motivation
- Hc0: there is no relationship between skills and motivation
- Ha1: there is a relationship between psychological traits and skills
- Hb1: there is a relationship between psychological traits and motivation
- Hc1: there is a relationship between skills and motivation

Table no 1 shows an alpha (sig) = 0 < 0.05 for psychological traits and skills, which accepts Ha1 and rejects Ha0. For psychological traits and motivation, we have: alpha(sig)=0.842 > 0.05 which rejects Hb1 and accepts Hb0. For skills and motivation, we have: alpha(sig)=0.243 > 0.05 which rejects Hc1 and accepts Hc0.

Table no 1: Correlation table

		Psychological traits	Skills	Motivation
Psychological traits	Pearson Correlation	1	.435**	.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.842
	N	287	287	287
Skills	Pearson Correlation	.435**	1	-.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.243
	N	287	287	287
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.012	-.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.842	.243	
	N	287	287	287

Table no 2 shows the reliability test, used in order to measure the reliability of the questions asked in this research, it is then a question of estimating the reliability of the score to a test. Thus, the questions concerning psychological traits, skills and motivation seem reliable, since $\alpha > 0.7$.

Table no 2: Reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha)

Factor	Number of questions	Alpha de Cronbach	Validation
Psychological traits	11	0.755	Accepted
Skills	3	0.711	
Motivation	2	0.701	

V. Discussion of results

In order to know to what extent, the students are ready to create their own business and following the application of the SPSS tests which served us as an analysis tool, the results obtained will now be discussed.

Using correlation, reliability and descriptive statistics tests, all the hypotheses described above are confirmed. From the descriptive statistics test, it can be seen that the majority of students possess the psychological traits necessary to become an entrepreneur except serious work, a trait that 31% of students possess. This expresses partial validation of Hypothesis 1, which asserts that students possess the entrepreneurial psychological traits studied in this research.

On the other hand, this test also revealed that the majority of students have the entrepreneurial skills studied, such as planning, problem solving and knowledge sharing. This partially confirms hypothesis 2.

And finally, hypothesis 3 is totally validated since the majority of students said that their main motive is to earn money by making a positive impact on their society.

According to the correlation test, we can determine the type of relationship between each of the dimensions studied. The analyzes show that the alpha of the psychological traits and the skills is $0 < 0.05$ which accepts H_{a1} and rejects H_{a0} , there is a positive relationship between the psychological traits and the skills.

For psychological traits and motivation, we have: $\alpha(\text{sig})=0.842 > 0.05$ which rejects H_{b1} and accepts H_{b0} . Therefore, there is no relationship between psychological traits and motivation.

For skills and motivation, we have: $\alpha(\text{sig})=0.243 > 0.05$ which rejects H_{c1} and accepts H_{c0} . Hence there is no relationship between skills and motivation.

The correlation analysis showed a relationship between psychological traits and skills, this can be explained by the fact that the set of psychological traits help them to acquire entrepreneurial skills.

Whereas when it comes to the relationship between motivation and each of the psychological skills and traits, there is no relationship between them. This can be interpreted by the fact that motivation is a personal variable and differs for each person depending on several factors and personality has no influence on it.

VI. Conclusion

Today, more than ever, we have a great need to create jobs. Therefore, the development of entrepreneurship is essential. Entrepreneurs are important to market economies because they can act as the engines of economic growth in the country. By creating new products and services, they stimulate job creation, which ultimately results in accelerated economic development²⁵.

This study aimed to assess the preparation of students to become entrepreneurs in order to know what factors we should work on to foster entrepreneurship among Lebanese students. Readiness to start a business is a critical success factor, and anyone with a dream in their heart and an idea in their mind should do an entrepreneurial readiness assessment²⁶. A thorough review of the literature on entrepreneurship reveals that there is no specific information tool to measure the readiness of individuals for entrepreneurship. But we were able to identify important variables that can be used to assess the entrepreneurial capacity of students. This assessment involves the inclusion of sets of items related to the three main pillars that make up an entrepreneurship-ready personality: psychological traits, skills, and motivation.

As part of the quantitative study, 357 responses were collected to the questionnaires that were distributed to university students belonging to almost universities in all regions in Lebanon. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS software. Quantitative analysis was used to test the validity of hypotheses.

The study examined the possession of students for the factors that enable them to engage in entrepreneurial activities and start their own business. The results showed that the majority of students had the profile of an entrepreneur and are ready to become entrepreneurs since they have the entrepreneurial psychological traits, the majority of them have the entrepreneurial skills studied and they have the right motivation which to gain money while creating a positive impact.

The objective of this study was to assess to what extent students are prepared to become entrepreneurs in order to have a broader understanding of the capabilities of young Lebanese, in case the results showed that they were ready, it means that the behavioral part is not the obstacle and that the problem that we should work on in a future study are the difficulties they face and the reasons for not taking this step in the world of entrepreneurship.

In the light of the results obtained, recommendations have been developed for NGOs, universities and the government to establish policies to encourage and guide young people to invest in their country and create an income-generating and job-creating activity. Likewise, it encourages universities to strengthen the intention of its students to undertake in their country, and to offer all kinds of support for their projects. At the level of the consequences, this subject has integrated a new concept in the entrepreneurial field, insisting on the study of the intention of the young Lebanese to undertake in his country.

This study will help future researchers to understand the entrepreneurial capacities of Lebanese students and to build on these findings for new areas of research such as exploring the barriers that students face that prevent them from starting their own business. On the other hand, also in the international context, this research will help entrepreneurship researchers around the world to understand the entrepreneurial capacity of a student and will open the door to the study of other factors that make up an entrepreneurial profile.

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