

University students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a profession: a phenomenological study

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Abstrak

Rendahnya minat mahasiswa terhadap profesi wirausaha menunjukkan perlunya pemahaman mendalam mengenai bagaimana mahasiswa memersepsikan profesi tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk (1) mengetahui pengalaman mahasiswa Prodi PAP FKIP UNS dalam menjalankan kegiatan wirausaha, (2) mendeskripsikan persepsi mahasiswa terhadap profesi wirausaha, serta (3) mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang membentuk persepsi tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif tipe fenomenologi. Informan penelitian berjumlah 10 mahasiswa PAP angkatan 2022 yang dipilih secara purposive sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) pengalaman mahasiswa Prodi PAP dalam mengikuti program wirausaha karena tuntutan akademik dan motivasi pribadi, jenis usaha yang dipilih bersifat risiko rendah dan mudah dijalankan; (2) Mahasiswa Prodi PAP memersepsikan wirausaha sebagai profesi dengan peluang menjanjikan seperti fleksibilitas, kemandirian kerja serta pendapatan yang besar dan risiko berupa kerugian dan kebangkrutan; (3) persepsi mahasiswa terhadap wirausaha dipengaruhi oleh faktor internal dan faktor eksternal. Faktor internal berupa minat, motivasi, dan kepercayaan diri, sedangkan faktor eksternal berupa lingkungan keluarga, lingkungan sosial, dan pembelajaran di Perguruan Tinggi. Temuan ini berkontribusi dalam penguatan strategi pendidikan kewirausahaan untuk membentuk orientasi karier mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: efikasi diri; lingkungan sosial; niat berwirausaha; orientasi karier

Abstract

The low interest of university students in entrepreneurship as a career profession underscores the need to understand how students perceive this domain. This study aims to: (1) examine the entrepreneurial experiences of Office Administration Education (PAP) students at Sebelas Maret University (UNS); (2) describe students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a profession; and (3) identify the factors shaping those perceptions. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Ten students from the 2022 cohort were selected via purposive sampling, and data were

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gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Findings indicate that: (1) students engaged in entrepreneurial programs primarily due to academic requirements and personal motivations, gravitating toward low-risk ventures in the food and beverage sector; (2) students perceived entrepreneurship as offering promising opportunities flexibility, work autonomy, and high income while acknowledging risks such as financial loss and business failure; and (3) perceptions were shaped by internal factors (interest, motivation, and self-confidence) and external factors (family environment, social environment, and university entrepreneurship education). These findings contribute to the design of more effective entrepreneurship education strategies that foster students' entrepreneurial career orientation.

Keyword: career orientation; entrepreneurial intention; self-efficacy; social environment

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in national economies. Entrepreneurship not only generates income but also creates employment opportunities, increases productivity, and drives innovation. GEM (2025) defines entrepreneurship as the act of initiating and operating a new business. Jenanu et al. (2024) state that entrepreneurship contributes significantly to the national economy. The Indonesian government has long provided various entrepreneurship programs for university students, among them the Student Entrepreneur Development Program (P2MW), the Merdeka Entrepreneurship Program (Wirausaha Merdeka/WMK), and the Student Entrepreneurship Program (PMW). P2MW aims to develop students who already have a business idea or are running a venture. WMK provides benefits such as business networking, training, mentoring, and seed capital. PMW, meanwhile, is a program designed to develop students' entrepreneurial interest and talent.

The Office Administration Education (PAP) Study Program is one of the programs under the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University (FKIP UNS). One of the graduate profiles of this program is entrepreneur. In efforts to realize this profile, the PAP Study Program equips students with the courses Entrepreneurship and Creative Office Products, and provides opportunities for students to participate in various entrepreneurship programs offered by the university and by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikisaintek RI). Since 2020, the PAP Study Program has implemented the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum, one activity of which is conducting entrepreneurship activities for one semester outside the classroom. This program gives students the opportunity to develop themselves as entrepreneurs, whether by starting a new business or developing an existing one. However, based on data from databoks in August 2024, the number of university graduate entrepreneurs is the lowest across educational levels diploma (D1/D2/D3) graduates account for only 1.3%, or approximately 462,551 self-employed individuals and 195,367 assisted by informal labor, while bachelor's and postgraduate graduates (D4/S1/S2/S3) reach only 3.7%, comprising 1.37 million self-employed and 553,733 assisted by informal labor. These figures are considered low compared to other educational levels. Field evidence shows that efforts to increase PAP program graduates entering entrepreneurship have not yet been successful. Based on preliminary studies conducted through interviews, it was found that the entrepreneurial interest of PAP Study Program students remains relatively low.

Perception is a way of viewing something or expressing the understanding resulting from one's thinking (Nisa et al., 2023). Perception is a process of translating stimuli received through the

senses in order to interpret information after observing the environment, giving rise to a meaningful visual representation (Candra & Amrizal, 2022). Perception helps individuals explain their views and thoughts about the surrounding environment. According to Juneli et al. (2022), perception is a process of recognizing, organizing, and analyzing information that then provides meaningful understanding of that information.

A profession is work produced through a process of training in a specific area of expertise. That expertise is then used to accomplish work tasks (Rahmanita et al., 2020). A profession can be understood as a type of work that demands expertise, skill, commitment, and responsibility in completing its tasks. Prasmewari et al. (2023) argue, "A profession refers to a job or position that demands expertise, responsibility, and dedication. In theory, a profession cannot be practiced by just anyone without training and preparation." Entrepreneurship is regarded as a profession; within entrepreneurship, a range of competencies, knowledge, and skills must be learned and developed, just as in other professions (Burton et al., 2016). Entrepreneurship as a profession demands that individuals possess expertise, creativity, responsibility, strong business ethics, and perseverance.

Various studies have examined the relationship between perception and entrepreneurial intention, with the majority using quantitative approaches focused on measuring inter-variable relationships. Research that deeply explores students' lived experiences in making sense of the entrepreneurial profession based on direct participation in university entrepreneurship programs remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study presents a novel contribution by employing a phenomenological approach to explore students' experiences and meanings regarding entrepreneurship as a profession. This approach enables the researcher to understand more deeply how entrepreneurial experience, internal psychological factors, and the social and educational environment shape students' perceptions of entrepreneurship. Studies by Purwadi et al. (2023) show that student perceptions influence entrepreneurial intention. Similar findings are reported by Mulyadi et al. (2016), who explain that students' entrepreneurial interest is produced by individual perceptions of the entrepreneurial profession. Based on the problems identified in the PAP Study Program as described above, this study aims to: (1) examine the entrepreneurial experiences of PAP Study Program students; (2) describe the perceptions of PAP Study Program students regarding entrepreneurship as a profession; and (3) identify the factors that influence PAP Study Program students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a profession.

Research methods

This study was conducted at the Office Administration Education Study Program, Sebelas Maret University, located at Jl. Ir. Sutami No. 36A, Jebres, Surakarta, Central Java, 57126.

The research method used in this study is qualitative of the phenomenological type, aimed at understanding the meanings, views, in-depth understanding, and perceptions of PAP FKIP UNS students regarding entrepreneurship as a profession. Aflah et al. (2025) argue, "Phenomenological methodology prioritizes data collection through in-depth interviews with participants who have direct lived experience with the phenomenon being studied."

The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique for selecting samples from a population according to the researcher's criteria (Asrulla et al., 2023). Purposive sampling enables the researcher to deeply explore the perceptions of PAP FKIP UNS students regarding entrepreneurship as a profession based on their experiences and academic context. The criteria for informants in this study were: active students of the Office Administration Education (PAP) Study Program, FKIP, Sebelas Maret University (UNS) from the 2022 cohort; willing to serve as informants and able to articulate their experiences and views on entrepreneurship; and having participated in a Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program in the field of entrepreneurship.

The data collection technique used in this study is in-depth interviewing. Hossain et al. (2024) argue that in-depth interviewing is the primary and most important data collection technique for gathering information from informants, and is also well-suited to qualitative phenomenological methodology. Aflah et al. (2025) state that, "Phenomenological methodology prioritizes data collection through in-depth interviews with participants who have direct lived experience with the

phenomenon being studied." Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions. The interview guide was designed to direct discussion while still allowing informants the freedom to express their views, experiences, and perceptions. In general, the interview guide in this study covered several main themes: (1) students' experiences in participating in or carrying out entrepreneurial activities; (2) students' perceptions of entrepreneurship; and (3) the factors influencing students' perceptions of entrepreneurship as a profession. The duration of each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. All interview sessions were recorded with the informants' consent and subsequently transcribed for data analysis purposes. Data collection was conducted from October to December 2024.

To test credibility, the researcher employed source triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing interview results across informants with different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of entrepreneurial involvement. Through this comparison, the researcher could ensure that the data obtained were not singularly subjective but rather reflected a variety of mutually reinforcing perspectives. The transferability test is an external validity test, also referred to as generalization in qualitative research. The transferability test was conducted with the aim of demonstrating the extent to which research findings can be applied or made applicable in other contexts (Oktaviani et al., 2023). The dependability test was carried out by auditing the entire research process. The audit was conducted by the research supervisor. Dependability auditing in this study was performed by the thesis supervisor to ensure that the research process had been implemented systematically and could be accounted for. The confirmability test can be understood as testing the research findings in connection with the processes that have been carried out. The confirmability test aims to ensure that the research findings originate from the data and not from the researcher's interpretation.

The data analysis technique in this study employed the Thematic Analysis model to analyze the research data. Thematic analysis is one way of analyzing data with the aim of identifying patterns and discovering themes through the data collected by the researcher (Heriyanto, 2018). In general, thematic analysis has three stages: familiarizing with the data, constructing codes, and searching for themes.

Results and Discussion

Results

The research findings obtained through interviews revealed that the background motivating PAP Study Program students to engage in entrepreneurial activities was academic requirements and internal motivations such as economic need and the desire to gain experience. Informant I explained that, "...based on the study program's policy, we were required to participate in WMK because the program is also in line with the entrepreneurship course." The forms of entrepreneurial activity carried out consisted of individual entrepreneurship and group entrepreneurship, with group-based patterns predominating in the context of campus entrepreneurship programs. The types of businesses run were dominated by the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector, as it was considered practical, has a wide market, and is easy to operate, as stated by Informant IX: "The reason for choosing F&B is because it's the safest option guaranteed to sell." In their implementation, PAP Study Program students carried out sequential and structured stages of business planning, production, and marketing. Planning was conducted through the formulation of a business concept and preliminary research; production was carried out independently or in groups with various technical challenges; while marketing generally made use of digital media and campus events. The process of implementing entrepreneurial activities was also dynamic and adaptive. Students did not only follow the predetermined program flow but also learned to make adjustments to their production and marketing strategies based on direct field experience. During entrepreneurial implementation, students also faced challenges. The challenges faced by PAP Study Program students included limited capital, difficulty managing time between academic and business demands, as well as psychological barriers, marketing difficulties, and teamwork issues. Informant IV stated that, "The challenge is mostly from the capital side, because the capital is indeed limited." However, despite

facing challenges, students had strategies such as starting their business on a small scale, managing capital gradually, adjusting their marketing strategy, and making use of social support and emotional regulation.

Students' understanding of the entrepreneurial profession was found to be multidimensional. Students did not only perceive entrepreneurship as a buying-and-selling activity to generate profit, but also as a profession demanding independence, professionalism, and consistency. Students viewed the entrepreneurial profession as one in which opportunities and risks go hand in hand. This is in accordance with the view of Informant II: "In essence, it's like, you know, the desire to figure out how we can produce something and then also gain something from it." Entrepreneurial opportunities were perceived in the form of high income potential, time flexibility, and work autonomy, consistent with the view of Informant X: "Well, if we're talking about the business world, the time is more flexible." However, on the other side, students were also aware of risks in the form of financial loss, market uncertainty, and the burden of responsibility. Research findings show that students perceived the entrepreneurial profession as a means of self-development, including the enhancement of soft skills, a shift in mindset, and the development of readiness to face the challenges of working life. Informant VI stated, "The added value here is perhaps that in terms of social intelligence, we gain more... when we do entrepreneurship there are negotiations, there are conversations between seller and buyer that sharpens our soft skills in communication." From a future perspective, entrepreneurship is viewed as a promising and relevant profession, though this has not yet been fully accompanied by readiness to take direct action. Thus, the entrepreneurial profession is perceived by students as a process of continuous learning that contributes to self-formation and future planning, not merely as an instant career goal.

The factors influencing the perceptions of PAP FKIP UNS students toward entrepreneurship as a profession include both internal and external factors. Internal factors encompassing interest, intrinsic motivation, and self-confidence proved to be the primary foundation in shaping entrepreneurial interest. Informant II mentioned, "Speaking for myself personally, it's more of an inner calling. Right now, at least. Because I'm genuinely attracted to it." This view was reinforced by Informant VI, who stated, "For me, it's more of an inner calling because, well, I've had an interest from the beginning I had an interest since high school." These factors serve as psychological capital in making the decision to pursue entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial interest among students generally arises from a strong personal drive that is internal in nature. As for external factors influencing students' perceptions of entrepreneurship: prior entrepreneurial experience, family and social environment, and learning at the university. As conveyed by Informant III, "Because from previous experiences I've had a lot of exposure in that direction, so I already have a picture of that world. Yes, because I've experienced it firsthand." These factors are understood as elements that consciously influence the way students make sense of and evaluate the entrepreneurial profession.

Discussion

The background motivating PAP Study Program students to engage in entrepreneurial activities was academic obligations and institutional policy, particularly through campus entrepreneurship programs. Nevertheless, there were also students driven by internal motivations, such as economic need, the desire to gain experience, and prior entrepreneurial experience. Motivation and personal factors are important determinants in students' decisions to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Research by Ustha (2023) shows that motivational factors such as the need for achievement, risk tolerance, and the freedom to work independently significantly influence students' desire to become entrepreneurs. The forms of entrepreneurial activity consisted of individual and group entrepreneurship, with group-based patterns predominating in the context of campus entrepreneurship programs. The types of businesses run were dominated by the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector, as it was considered practical, has a wide market, and is easy to operate. The simple and applicable form of student entrepreneurial activity also supports the goals of entrepreneurship education as a means of experiential learning. According to Hammuda (2023), student entrepreneurial activities whether through group or individual ventures function as practical learning media for training teamwork skills, decision-making, and basic understanding of the

business world. The process of implementing entrepreneurial activities by PAP Study Program students had a learning pattern that was gradual and contextual. Students did not run their businesses through fully mature planning from the outset, but rather through a process of learning directly in the field involving repeated adjustments to business conditions. This is consistent with research by Marsnely et al. (2025), which states that the process of implementing student entrepreneurial activities is often structured as real projects that allow students to experiment, innovate in products or services, and interact with consumers through digital or direct marketing channels. This approach helps students not only understand business management practically but also enriches their personal experience and professional competencies. In terms of challenges, PAP Study Program students faced difficulties such as capital shortages and psychological barriers. Research by Al-Fattal (2024) shows that constraints on access to capital, limited practical experience, and fear of failure are significant barriers that impede students from starting and sustaining a business. In facing these challenges, PAP Study Program students had strategies including starting on a small scale, managing capital gradually, adjusting marketing strategies, and making use of social support and emotional regulation. This finding is consistent with Zhang (2024), who emphasizes the importance of project-based and experiential learning strategies in overcoming barriers in entrepreneurship, including internal challenges such as time management and limited resources.

Students' understanding of the entrepreneurial profession was multidimensional. Students did not only perceive entrepreneurship as a buying-and-selling activity to generate profit, but also as a profession demanding independence, professionalism, and consistency. This is consistent with research by Setiawan et al. (2024), which found that students' understanding of entrepreneurship learning was not yet fully optimal, but that after exposure to entrepreneurship education students became more motivated to implement entrepreneurial concepts. PAP Study Program students viewed the entrepreneurial profession as one in which opportunities and risks go hand in hand. Entrepreneurial opportunities were perceived in the form of high income potential, time flexibility, and work autonomy. However, on the other side, students were also aware of risks in the form of financial loss, market uncertainty, and the burden of responsibility. This is consistent with research by Yin and Wu (2023), which found that entrepreneurial risk perception can be viewed both as a threat and as an opportunity that influences individuals' motivation to engage in entrepreneurship. PAP Study Program students also perceived the entrepreneurial profession as a means of self-development encompassing soft skill enhancement, a shift in mindset, and the development of readiness to face the challenges of working life. Research by Lee et al. (2025) explains that entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial experience in a university environment contribute to the development of entrepreneurial competencies including creativity, leadership, decision-making, and adaptability.

The perceptions of PAP FKIP UNS students toward the entrepreneurial profession were influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Both factors interact with each other in shaping the way students view entrepreneurship as a future career choice. Internal factors encompassing interest, intrinsic motivation, and self-confidence proved to contribute to the formation of entrepreneurial interest. Students who had an interest in business activities, a personal drive to achieve independence, and belief in their own abilities tended to view the entrepreneurial profession more positively. This is consistent with research by Ichsan et al. (2024), which found that students with high levels of motivation and self-efficacy tended to have stronger entrepreneurial interest compared to students with low levels of motivation and self-efficacy. In other words, students' perceptions of the entrepreneurial profession are not only formed by knowledge about entrepreneurship but also by the individual's psychological readiness to face challenges in running a business. External factors comprising entrepreneurial experience, social and family environment, and entrepreneurship learning at the university also played a role in shaping students' perceptions of the entrepreneurial profession. Individuals with prior entrepreneurial experience show a higher tendency toward the intention to start a business compared to individuals without similar experience. This finding is also reflected in this study, where students who had been involved in entrepreneurial activity tended to hold more realistic and positive perceptions of the entrepreneurial profession. Research by Bozward and Rogers-Draycott (2024) explains that entrepreneurial experience whether direct or indirect can strengthen individuals' intention to engage in entrepreneurship in the future.

This study found that individuals with prior entrepreneurial experience showed a higher tendency toward the intention to start a business compared to those without similar experience. Research by Arfah et al. (2023) explains that family environment has a direct influence on entrepreneurial motivation and entrepreneurial interest, indicating that family functions as an important source of encouragement for the emergence of entrepreneurial orientation or habituation. Social and family environmental factors not only encompass support from parents and family structure, but also include the influence of the broader social environment such as peers, the campus community, and the social norms around students (Asimakopoulos et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship learning at the university plays an important role in shaping students' mindsets, courage, and readiness to pursue entrepreneurship. Patricia and Silangen (2016) argue that entrepreneurship education significantly shapes students' entrepreneurial intention. This study found that entrepreneurship education was positively correlated with students' entrepreneurial interest, such that students with a strong entrepreneurship education tended to have a higher interest in entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

This study shows that PAP FKIP UNS students perceive the entrepreneurial profession not only as a career choice oriented toward economic profit, but also as a means to achieve independence, self-development, and professionalism. These perceptions were formed through the interaction between entrepreneurial experience gained during studies, the influence of the social and family environment, and internal factors such as students' interest, motivation, and self-confidence. Research findings also show that entrepreneurship learning at the university played a role in broadening students' awareness of business opportunities and providing practical experience through entrepreneurial activities generally conducted collaboratively, particularly in business sectors that are relatively easy to access such as food and beverage (F&B). Through these experiences, students began to develop a more realistic understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and risks inherent in the entrepreneurial profession. In general, this study reveals that students' perceptions of the entrepreneurial profession are dynamic and influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. These perceptions are not only shaped by knowledge about entrepreneurship but also by direct experience, environmental support, and students' psychological readiness in facing uncertainty in the business world. This study has several limitations. First, the study was conducted only among PAP FKIP UNS students, so the results cannot yet be generalized to other study programs or universities. Second, the use of a qualitative approach with a limited number of informants means that research findings place greater emphasis on depth of understanding than breadth of coverage. Third, data obtained through in-depth interviews depend on the openness and subjectivity of informants, so the possibility of perceptual bias remains. The findings of this study have practical implications for the development of entrepreneurship education in higher education. Study programs and faculties are expected to strengthen the design of entrepreneurship learning that is more applied and sustainable not only through coursework but also through business mentoring and facilitation of access to capital for students. In addition, entrepreneurship lecturers need to encourage the strengthening of students' psychological aspects, such as self-confidence, willingness to take risks, and mental resilience, so that students are better prepared to face challenges in entrepreneurship. For students, the findings of this study are expected to raise awareness that entrepreneurship is not merely an alternative career choice but also a means of competency development and professional independence. It is recommended that future researchers broaden the research subjects by involving students from other study programs or universities in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of students' perceptions of the entrepreneurial profession.

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