

**AFFILIATION:**

¹Universitas 17 Agustus 1945
Banyuwangi

^{2,3} Politeknik Negeri Malang

***CORRESPONDENCE:**

iqbalachmad@untag-banyuwangi.ac.id

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Motivations, Reflections, and Contexts: Understanding Gen Z Entrepreneurial Awareness in Higher Education

Achmad Iqbal^{1*}, Farida², Alawia³

Abstract

Main Purpose - This study aims to explore how Generation Z students in Indonesia construct entrepreneurial awareness through lived experiences, motivations, and social contexts.

Method - A qualitative research design with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with three university students interested in entrepreneurship.

Main Findings - The findings revealed three major themes: internal motivation, reflective experience, and contextual factors. Participants were intrinsically driven by autonomy, personal growth, and social values, while reflective experiences shaped their entrepreneurial self-awareness. Support from family, peers, and institutions acted as critical enablers in their entrepreneurial journey.

Theory and Practical Implications - The study suggests that entrepreneurship education should incorporate reflective and experiential learning to align with Gen Z's identity and motivation. Institutions should also provide tailored support systems to nurture value-driven young entrepreneurs.

Novelty - This study offers a multidimensional perspective on entrepreneurial awareness formation among Generation Z by integrating personal meaning-making and sociocultural influences.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Awareness, Generation Z, Phenomenological Study, Reflective Learning, Youth Entrepreneurship

Abstrak

Tujuan Utama - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana mahasiswa Generasi Z di Indonesia membentuk kesadaran kewirausahaan melalui pengalaman hidup, motivasi, dan konteks sosial.

Metode - Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis fenomenologis interpretatif (IPA). Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur terhadap tiga mahasiswa yang memiliki minat dalam kewirausahaan..

Temuan Utama - Temuan menunjukkan tiga tema utama: motivasi internal, pengalaman reflektif, dan faktor kontekstual. Partisipan terdorong secara intrinsik oleh nilai otonomi, pertumbuhan pribadi, dan kontribusi sosial, sementara pengalaman reflektif membentuk kesadaran diri kewirausahaan mereka. Dukungan dari keluarga, teman sebaya, dan institusi menjadi faktor penting yang memperkuat perjalanan kewirausahaan mereka.

Implikasi Teori dan Kebijakan - Studi ini merekomendasikan agar pendidikan kewirausahaan mengintegrasikan pembelajaran reflektif dan pengalaman untuk sejalan dengan identitas dan motivasi Gen Z. Institusi juga perlu menyediakan sistem dukungan yang terarah guna menumbuhkan wirausaha muda yang berorientasi pada nilai.

Kebaruan Penelitian - Penelitian ini menawarkan perspektif multidimensional terhadap pembentukan kesadaran kewirausahaan pada Generasi Z dengan menggabungkan makna personal dan pengaruh sosial budaya.

Kata Kunci: kesadaran kewirausahaan, Generasi Z, studi fenomenologis, pembelajaran reflektif, kewirausahaan muda

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship among Generation Z has gained significant traction globally and nationally, emerging as a pivotal theme within the academic and practical domains of business and education. As digital natives, Generation Z individuals are uniquely positioned to capitalize on technological advances, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and evolving societal norms that favor innovation and agility in the workplace. Over the past decade, entrepreneurship has undergone a paradigm shift, facilitated by unprecedented access to digital platforms and an increasing number of youth-oriented start-up programs (Dreyer and Stojanová 2022; Saeedikiya et al. 2023). These shifts have reshaped the conceptualization and practice of entrepreneurship, with Generation Z leading a movement characterized by creativity, adaptability, and purpose-driven ventures. In particular, in the post-pandemic era, countries such as Indonesia and Germany have seen a surge in entrepreneurial initiatives led by this generation, as young individuals seek alternatives to traditional employment and embrace self-employment as a means of social impact and personal fulfillment (Dreyer & Stojanová, 2022; Alamanda et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, this enthusiasm is echoed by national survey data, which reveals that 73% of Generation Z respondents express a desire to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Despite this high level of interest, entrepreneurial participation remains modest, with only 19.48% of young individuals actively involved in business ventures as of 2022 (Suryaborneo.com, 2020). This disparity underscores the well-documented gap between entrepreneurial intentions and actions. Scholars suggest that this gap can be attributed to several key challenges, including limited access to capital, insufficient experiential learning, and the absence of institutional support structures tailored to Gen Z's unique needs and aspirations (Yi, 2017; Nayak et al., 2024). Furthermore, traditional academic curricula often emphasize theoretical constructs at the expense of practical exposure, thereby inhibiting the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy required for venture creation and sustainability (Li, Kang, and Feng 2024; Maritz, Nguyen, and Ivanov 2022).

The core problem lies in the prevailing methodological lens through which youth entrepreneurship is studied. Most empirical investigations prioritize quantitative frameworks that measure intention, leaving a considerable void in understanding how generational awareness experiences, constructs, and interprets entrepreneurial awareness from a subjective perspective. While intention has predictive validity in behavioral models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), it fails to capture the nuanced lived realities that shape entrepreneurial behavior among young people (Rohanaraj, 2023). Consequently, there is a pressing need for qualitative inquiries that explore the meaning-making processes underlying entrepreneurial decisions, especially among youth navigating complex socio-economic and technological landscapes.

Previous research has attempted to address these limitations by highlighting the significance of lived experience in shaping entrepreneurial awareness. For instance, Gielnik et al. (2018) and Willis et al. (2025) emphasized the transformative role of prior entrepreneurial exposure, whether through family businesses, academic incubators, or informal market participation. These experiences serve as critical incubators for developing an entrepreneurial mindset, resilience, and risk tolerance, which are essential for navigating uncertainties in business creation (Nasip et al. 2017). Moreover, qualitative methodologies, such as narrative analysis and phenomenological approaches, offer deeper insights into how youth interpret their entrepreneurial journeys, thereby enabling a more holistic understanding of the motivational and contextual dimensions involved.

As part of formal higher education, entrepreneurship education has been recognized as a key factor in promoting entrepreneurial awareness and intention. Numerous studies have asserted that curricula incorporating experiential learning, mentorship, and exposure to real-world challenges significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial competencies and confidence (Lindberg et al. 2017;

Vivekananth, Indiran, and Kohar 2023; Zhang, Huang, and Hong 2022). However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on their alignment with the psychological and sociocultural profiles of Gen Z. As this cohort values autonomy, social relevance, and innovation, educational programs must transcend traditional pedagogical models and adopt learner-centered approaches that validate personal experiences and foster entrepreneurial identity formation (Hanandeh et al. 2021; Jiatong et al. 2021).

Despite these developments, the literature reveals a persistent gap between enhanced entrepreneurial intention through education and the realization of entrepreneurial action. While academic programs may stimulate interest and skill acquisition, they often fail to translate these attributes into concrete initiatives. Rohanaraj (2023) and Nayak et al. (2024) argue that systemic barriers, such as regulatory constraints, market entry difficulties, and insufficient postgraduate support, contribute to this inertia. Furthermore, contextual inhibitors such as socioeconomic background, family expectations, and cultural perceptions of failure exert a significant influence on entrepreneurial decision-making, particularly in developing economies such as Indonesia (Yi, 2017).

Cross-national research increasingly recognizes that the path from entrepreneurial intention to action among young people is shaped by a delicate interplay between personal motivations and structural enablers. In Australia, Maritz et al. (2022) validated a multidimensional support system (digital literacy, mentoring, and community hubs) that strengthened students' behavioral follow-through. In Sri Lanka, Maritz et al. (2022) showed that personality traits interact with a supportive policy climate to boost Gen Z entrepreneurial uptake. Comparable evidence from Malaysia (Ahmed et al. 2025), China (Qi et al. 2023) and Morocco (Oulhou and Ibourk, 2023) underscores a consistent lesson: ecosystem design conditions whether entrepreneurial intentions translate into action. Indonesia, however, remains under-represented, and existing evidence is dominated by surveys, leaving unanswered how Generation Z internalizes dan menegosiasikan isyarat struktural tersebut dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.

A small but growing stream of studies employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) offers a window into such lived processes. Caglayan et al. (2023) traced how Turkish art-preneur students wove emotion regulation into entrepreneurial identity, while Gielnik et al. (2018) mapped meaning-making- trajectories within a longitudinal German cohort. More recently, Willis et al. (2025) documented how an innovative community problem-solving- challenge (implemented as an extracurricular programme) used reflective journaling to cultivate practical entrepreneurial skills, agency, and social connectedness among participating undergraduates. However, these qualitative inquiries either aggregate culturally heterogeneous cohorts or treat the context as an ancillary variable. Therefore, the subjective micro-narratives that shape entrepreneurial awareness in emerging economies remain largely unexamined.

Responding to these blind spots, the present study asks: How do Indonesian Generation Z university students construct, interpret, and act on entrepreneurial awareness? We explore three intertwined facets: 1) the dynamic interplay between internal drives and external enablers, 2) the critical life episodes that cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, and 3) the subjective meanings that Gen Z attach to entrepreneurship as a life project and career path. By adopting an IPA approach, we move beyond the dominant survey logic and center on the reflective voices of young Indonesians.

This emic perspective fills two inter-locking gaps: it injects experiential depth into literature that has thus far privileged large-sample- modelling and explains how structural resources acquire the personal significance that propels intention into action. In doing so, this study not only widens the methodological repertoire of youth entrepreneurship- research but also yields practical insights for educators, policy-makers, and ecosystem builders aiming to design programs that resonate with the values, motivations, and constraints of Indonesian Gen Z.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial awareness among university students, particularly Generation Z, has become an increasingly focal point in contemporary entrepreneurship research. Generation Z, characterized by digital nativity, independence, and social consciousness, demonstrates unique patterns in forming entrepreneurial identities. Several studies affirm that internal motivations, such as autonomy, personal achievement, and the desire to contribute socially, are central to entrepreneurial intention (Nasip et al. 2017; Sefiani and Davies 2025). These intrinsic drivers reflect a shift from purely profit-driven goals to value-driven entrepreneurship, especially in post-pandemic and digitally accelerated contexts (Dreyer and Stojanová, 2022).

Empirical evidence supports the notion that entrepreneurial intention is not solely determined by cognitive predictors. Mujtaba et al. (2025), for instance, found that entrepreneurial awareness, inspiration, and skills significantly influence entrepreneurial intention, with entrepreneurship education playing a mediating role. Similarly, Cao et al. (2022) and Khalil et al. (2024) emphasized the influence of personality traits such as risk-taking, internal locus of control, and resilience on the intention formation of young entrepreneurs. Cognitive styles and entrepreneurial thinking patterns also vary based on individual differences, indicating that both intuitive and analytical pathways can lead to entrepreneurial commitment (Krueger, Mestwerdt, and Kickul 2024).

In addition to personal traits and motivation, reflective experiences have emerged as critical mechanisms for shaping entrepreneurial identity. Early exposure to entrepreneurial activities, such as student markets and small-scale digital ventures, can serve as formative experiences. Caglayan et al. (2023) and Zanabazar et al. (2025) demonstrated that these turning points, when followed by structured reflection, enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy and contribute to adaptive learning. Hägg and Kurczewska (2020) argue that entrepreneurship education must go beyond skill acquisition to foster reflective cycles of experience, learning, and identity negotiation.

Contextual factors also play an essential role in fostering or hindering entrepreneurial awareness. Family support, peer influence, and entrepreneurial ecosystems in universities are crucial enablers. Maritz et al. (2022) highlighted how student entrepreneurship ecosystems (SEEs) in Australian universities integrate familial, institutional, and community support to sustain entrepreneurial development. In the Indonesian context, Kamdi et al. (2024) found that an entrepreneurial mindset and digital literacy mediate the effect of education on entrepreneurial intention, reinforcing the importance of context-specific educational intervention. Chahal et al. (2024) and Vivekananth et al. (2023) further emphasize that curriculum design, lecturer competency, and institutional infrastructure are strongly associated with students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intentions.

However, structural and perceptual barriers often limit the translation of intention into action. Ahmed et al. (2025) found that despite high levels of perceived behavioral control, students' negative perceptions of external environments significantly dampen entrepreneurial intention. This confirms the findings of Rohanaraj (2023), who identified the persistence of an intention–action gap driven by systemic limitations, such as a lack of capital access and policy support. These challenges are particularly pronounced in developing economies, where institutional support structures are often underdeveloped or misaligned with the entrepreneurial needs of the youth.

Recent literature suggests the need for more context-sensitive and reflective approaches to entrepreneurial education. Challenge-based learning, as described by Colombelli et al. (2022), demonstrates positive effects on entrepreneurial mindset, creativity, and planning skills, even though it does not always directly enhance intention. Moreover, the integration of digital platforms, as noted by Li, Kang, and Fen (2024), plays a transformative role in how Gen Z constructs entrepreneurial

identity and engages with markets. This is consistent with the broader shift toward viewing entrepreneurship as a socially embedded process shaped by emotional, cultural and experiential dimensions.

While much of the existing research has focused on the quantitative modeling of entrepreneurial intention using frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), there remains a paucity of qualitative investigations into how entrepreneurial awareness is formed and interpreted through lived experiences. This gap underscores the need for phenomenological inquiry that captures the nuanced interplay between internal motivation, reflective interpretation, and contextual influences in shaping entrepreneurial awareness. Accordingly, this study adopts a phenomenological approach to address this gap by offering a multidimensional understanding of how Generation Z in Indonesia constructs entrepreneurial awareness through lived experiences and meaning-making processes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a phenomenological qualitative research design to investigate the lived experiences and personal interpretations of entrepreneurial awareness among Indonesian Generation Z students. As the primary objective of this study was to explore how entrepreneurial awareness is formed and experienced from the subjective perspective of young individuals, phenomenology offers an ideal methodological orientation. This approach is grounded in the premise that human behavior is deeply embedded in personal meaning-making processes and social contexts (Hägg and Kurczewska, 2020). In entrepreneurship research, phenomenology is particularly suitable for unveiling how individuals construct understanding and agency through reflective engagement with their environment and internal motivation (Hägg and Kurczewska 2020).

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the core analytical method. IPA is specifically designed to examine how individuals make sense of their significant life experiences, enabling researchers to access both the content and context of meaning-making (Cao et al. 2022). Its double hermeneutic structure, whereby the researcher interprets the participant's interpretation of their own experiences, makes IPA particularly useful for capturing the nuances of entrepreneurial awareness, which often arises from complex interactions between internal motivations and external conditions. IPA also allows for idiographic depth, as it facilitates a detailed analysis of individual narratives while enabling the identification of cross-case thematic patterns.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with three university students aged 18–24 years who self-identified as being interested in or engaged with entrepreneurship. Participants were purposively selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) active enrollment in an Indonesian university, (2) representation of the Generation Z cohort, and (3) expressed entrepreneurial interest or activity, either through formal business ventures or informal economic participation (e.g., freelancing and online selling). The selection process was designed to maximize diversity in gender, academic discipline, socioeconomic background, and geographic origin, in line with IPA's idiographic commitment to capture a range of individual experiences (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). Consistent with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study prioritizes idiographic depth over sample breadth. IPA handbooks recommend three to six participants when the research question is tightly bound and the data are rich (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009).

Adequacy in qualitative research is judged less by numerical size than by information power and the degree to which the sample can illuminate the phenomenon (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Our study has (a) a narrowly focused aim (entrepreneurial awareness), (b) a highly specific cohort (Indonesian Gen Z students with entrepreneurial interest), (c) strong interview–participant dialogue that generated dense, reflective narratives, and (d) an analytic

strategy that examined each case in detail before a cross-case- synthesis. Under these conditions, a smaller sample provides sufficient analytical leverage while preserving the idiographic richness central to IPA. No substantively new themes emerged after the third case, indicating idiographic sufficiency and thematic completeness for our exploratory objectives (Clarke, 2010). This aligns with the IPA's emphasis on the quality of insight rather than the quantity of cases.

The interviews were conducted in a hybrid format (online and face-to-face) to accommodate the participants' availability and preferences. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and followed a semi-structured protocol that guided the participants through a series of open-ended questions. The questions focused on the participants' entrepreneurial motivations, personal and social influences, reflections on entrepreneurial experiences, and subjective interpretations of entrepreneurship as a life choice. This flexible format allowed for the emergence of rich descriptive narratives while ensuring consistency in thematic coverage across interviews (Hägg and Kurczewska 2020).

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim in the original language (Bahasa Indonesia). Transcripts were anonymized, and unique identifiers were assigned to protect the participants' identities and maintain confidentiality. To further preserve anonymity, pseudonyms were used to report the participants' narratives. To ensure rigor, this study adhered to ethical research protocols, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage.

Data analysis followed the six stages of IPA outlined by Smith et al. (2009). The process began with immersive reading and re-reading of each transcript to become intimately familiar with the participants' narratives. Initial exploratory notes were made to capture descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual observations. These notes served as the foundation for the development of emergent themes, which were iteratively refined through repeated engagement with the data. Patterns of meaning were then examined within and across cases to identify superordinate themes that reflected shared experiences while preserving the individuality of each participant's account (Cao et al. 2022). This iterative and inductive approach aligns with the phenomenological commitment to preserving the richness of lived experiences and the researchers' interpretative stance. Triangulation was performed at two levels. First, source triangulation compared interview narratives with artifacts and field notes to corroborate or nuance emergent interpretations. Second, investigator triangulation was achieved through peer debriefing sessions in which two qualitative researchers, who were uninvolved in data collection, independently reviewed coded excerpts and challenged thematic fits. Discrepancies were discussed until an interpretative consensus was reached.

Several interlocking validation strategies were employed to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Source triangulation compared interview narratives with supporting artifacts (e.g., screenshots of online stores, reflective journals) and detailed field notes, while investigator triangulation involved peer-debrief sessions in which two qualitative researchers uninvolved in data collection independently reviewed coded excerpts and challenged thematic coherence until a consensus was reached. Complementing these checks, member checking allowed participants to review and affirm preliminary thematic summaries, and a continuously maintained reflexive journal documented the researcher's evolving assumptions and emotional responses to the data. Together, these measures establish a transparent audit trail that bolsters the analysis's dependability and confirmability and aligns with the qualitative rigor criteria advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

While this study does not aim for statistical generalizability, its analytic generalizability lies in the depth and transferability of the insights generated in this study. The emphasis on idiographic details allows for the construction of a nuanced framework that can inform the theory, practice, and

policy of youth entrepreneurship. Through the lens of IPA, this study explores the meaning of entrepreneurial awareness for Generation Z students in Indonesia and how this awareness is situated within broader sociocultural, educational, and economic contexts. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that seeks to humanize entrepreneurship research by grounding it in lived experiences (Willis et al. 2025).

The selection of IPA over other qualitative methodologies is theoretically justified by the following reasons. Grounded theory, for instance, prioritizes theory building through conceptual saturation but often overlooks the interpretative depth of personal narratives. Narrative inquiry centers on storytelling but may lack the analytical structure needed to dissect layered meanings within participant accounts. In contrast, IPA offers a balance of methodological rigor and interpretive sensitivity, making it particularly well-suited for studies that aim to uncover the affective and cognitive dimensions of entrepreneurial behavior. Previous studies have shown that IPA has effectively illuminated psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, purpose, autonomy, and resilience within the entrepreneurial process (Cao et al. 2022; Nasip et al. 2017).

Ultimately, this methodology facilitates the emergence of new conceptual understandings grounded in the voices of Generation Z students, offering implications not only for entrepreneurship education but also for the design of policy interventions and institutional support systems. The choice of IPA reflects a broader commitment to understanding entrepreneurship as a deeply personal and socially embedded phenomenon that cannot be fully captured through metrics alone, but requires attention to the lived realities of aspiring young entrepreneurs.

RESULTS

This section presents the core findings of this study based on an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of in-depth interviews with Generation Z entrepreneurs. Three superordinate themes emerged from the analysis: internal motivation, reflective experiences and contextual factors. For confidentiality and ethical considerations, all participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. In this study, three participants—Ayla, Raka, and Tari—represented the diverse perspectives and journeys of Indonesian Generation Z student entrepreneurs.

Internal Motivation

The intrinsic motivations driving Generation Z toward entrepreneurship are multifaceted, encompassing aspirations for self-fulfillment, independence, and value-driven endeavors. Participants consistently articulated their desire for autonomy and self-expression, aligning with the literature identifying self-actualization and creativity as core motivational factors (Nasip et al. 2017; Sefiani and Davies 2025). For example, Ayla and Raka, the two participants in this study, emphasized the significance of financial independence and self-determination in their lives, as follows: Ayla stated, "Saya termotivasi untuk memulai usaha karena peluang pasar dan passion ... saya buka usaha kecil-kecilan untuk membuka jasa print atau desain," highlighting how market opportunities and personal interest drive her motivation.

Similarly, Raka described, "Saya ingin meringankan [beban] dengan mempunyai penghasilan sendiri agar saya dapat membeli barang yang saya inginkan sendiri tanpa meminta kepada orang tua."

The findings also reinforce the role of personal values, such as achievement and meaningfulness, in shaping entrepreneurial awareness. Tari's narrative illustrates this dynamic.

"Saya ingin menciptakan lapangan kerja bagi orang lain dan ingin membantu meringankan pekerjaan bapak dan ibu supaya tidak mengeluarkan banyak biaya untuk kebutuhan saya."

This reflects a strong internalized sense of social purpose, mirroring research by [Botha & Sibeko \(2022\)](#) and Li, Kang, and Fen ([2024](#)) who highlight how Gen Z entrepreneurs are increasingly motivated by impact-oriented goals.

Digital nativity has emerged as a reinforcing factor, allowing participants to utilize social media as a platform for visibility and connection. As Tari shared, "Dari media sosial, banyak cerita atau pengalaman owner ... yang memulai merintis usahanya dari 0 sampai bisa menjadi jutawan bahkan milyader," reflecting the inspirational and aspirational roles of online platforms.

As Li, Kang, and Fen ([2024](#)) contend, the integration of digital tools into everyday business operations among Gen Z reflects an instinctive affinity for innovation and disruption.

Reflective Experience

Critical turning points and reflective evaluations of personal experiences significantly shaped the participants' entrepreneurial awareness. For instance, Ayla and Tari recounted how early exposure to school bazaars and limited entrepreneurial competition sparked their curiosity and inspired their initial ventures in entrepreneurship. Tari described, "*Saya menjadi koordinator kelas untuk acara bazar ... waktu acara bazar berjalan belum ada sampai acaranya selesai jualan saya sudah laku semua.*"

These seemingly modest events created pivotal moments of realization, confirming what [Morris et al. \(2012\)](#) described as the transformational power of early entrepreneurial experience.

Participants emphasized the role of sustained reflection in processing the challenges and outcomes of businesses. Raka noted, "*Saya selalu melakukan inovasi dan evaluasi dalam usaha saya ... kritik dan saran juga membantu dalam berkembangnya usaha.*"

This aligns with the findings of [Hägg and Kurczewska \(2020\)](#), who underscore the role of reflective practice in facilitating adaptive learning and resilience.

Self-reflection has emerged as a cognitive mechanism for aligning entrepreneurial pursuits with one's core personal values. Tari recounted meaningful encounters. "*Pernah ada seorang nenek yang pesan ke saya untuk dibuatkan buket ... hadiah kecil dari seorang nenek ke cucunya sangat membuat saya berkesan.*"

Such stories underscore the complex interplay between internal values and external expressions, reinforcing how reflective experiences guide entrepreneurs in navigating uncertainty and redefining success beyond financial benchmarks.

Reflective learning allowed participants to reframe their adversities as a source of strength. Ayla reflected, "*Saya harus mempertimbangkan harga bahan baku, strategi pemasaran, hingga bagaimana cara menarik pelanggan,*" exemplifying how entrepreneurial challenges contribute to technical and financial learning.

Contextual Factors

Generation Z participants' entrepreneurial awareness was also shaped by various external influences, including family, educational environments, peer support and institutional infrastructure. All participants acknowledged the crucial role of family encouragement in their success. Ayla shared, "*Keluarga memberikan dorongan membantu mengelola modal awal dan membantu saya mengalami kendala.*"

The university context also plays a significant role. Tari and Raka cited peer encouragement and academic projects as motivating factors for persistence. Ayla mentioned, "*Pengalaman ikut bazar dan terinspirasi orang terdekat,*" illustrating how educational exposure and mentorship shaped her entrepreneurial journey. These examples reflect [Chahal et al. 's\(2024\)](#) assertion that educational institutions act as incubators of entrepreneurial talent.

Peer influence and community engagement are important motivational factors. Raka expressed, *"Dengan support dari orang sekitar semangat saya untuk berwirausaha bisa bertambah."* This mirrors the literature that positions social capital as a critical enabler (Weligodapola et al. 2023).

Institutional support structures were cited as instrumental. Ayla stated, *"Saya ikut seminar dan pelatihan online untuk mengembangkan usaha printing saya,"* emphasizing how structured support facilitates entrepreneurial growth. These findings echo those of Chahal et al. (2024) and Li, Kang, and Fen (2024), who underscored the importance of targeted interventions.

Together, these contextual factors provide a nurturing ecosystem in which entrepreneurial awareness emerges and evolves. The interplay among institutional, familial, and peer-based support structures not only shaped the participants' decisions to pursue entrepreneurship but also sustained their engagement through various developmental stages. Importantly, these findings reinforce the argument that entrepreneurial awareness among Generation Z is not developed in isolation but is socially constructed and reinforced through continuous interaction with the external environment of the university.

The three superordinate themes—internal motivation, reflective experience, and contextual factors—collectively illuminate the complex and dynamic processes through which entrepreneurial awareness is formed among individuals belonging to Gen Z individuals. Each participant's story underscores the convergence of personal values, lived experiences, and social contexts that shape their entrepreneurial identities and aspirations. These findings provide critical insights into how educational programs, policy frameworks, and community initiatives can be strategically designed to support the unique needs of young entrepreneurs in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape. To enhance clarity and provide a concise visual summary of the thematic findings, Table 1 presents illustrative quotes from the participants alongside the relevant supporting literature for each emerging theme.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Entrepreneurial Awareness Among Generation Z

Theme	Sub-Dimension	Description	Illustrative Quote	Supporting Literature
Internal Motivation	Autonomy	The desire to be independent and make self-directed decisions without relying on others.	<i>"Saya ingin meringankan beban orang tua saya dengan memiliki penghasilan sendiri agar tidak selalu meminta. Dari situ saya mulai jualan online dengan memanfaatkan sosial media."</i>	Nasip et al. (2017); Sefiani & Davies (2025)
	Social Purpose	Motivation to create social impact or contribute positively to others' lives through entrepreneurship.	<i>"Saya ingin menciptakan lapangan kerja bagi orang lain dan ingin membantu meringankan pekerjaan bapak dan ibu supaya tidak mengeluarkan banyak biaya untuk kebutuhan saya."</i>	Botha & Sibeko (2022); Li, Kang, and Fen (2024)

heme	Sub-Dimension	Description	Illustrative Quote	Supporting Literature
Reflective Experience	Turning Point	A critical or transformative experience that changed the participant's perception or direction.	<i>"Saya menjadi koordinator kelas untuk acara bazar dan waktu acara bazar berjalan belum selesai acaranya tapi jualan saya sudah laku semua. Dari situ saya merasa punya bakat jualan."</i>	Çağlayan et al. (2023) ; Morris et al. (2012)
	Adaptive Self-Evaluation	The ability to reflect on challenges and adapt strategies for business improvement.	<i>"Saya selalu melakukan inovasi dan evaluasi dalam usaha saya. Kritik dan saran dari pelanggan juga membantu berkembangnya usaha saya supaya lebih baik lagi."</i>	Hägg & Kurczewska (2020)
Contextual Factors	Family Support	Emotional and financial support from family that reinforces entrepreneurial intention and confidence.	<i>"Keluarga memberikan dorongan dari awal. Mereka membantu saya mengelola modal awal dan selalu mendukung walaupun saya mengalami kendala."</i>	Maritz et al. (2022)
	Institutional Learning	Knowledge and skills gained through formal/informal educational programs, mentoring, or training.	<i>"Saya ikut seminar dan pelatihan online untuk mengembangkan usaha printing saya, termasuk belajar cara membuat konten promosi dan strategi pemasaran."</i>	Chahal et al., (2024) ; Li, Kang, and Fen (2024)

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on entrepreneurial awareness by foregrounding the experiential, motivational, and contextual dimensions of entrepreneurship among Generation Z. Through the lens of phenomenology, particularly interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), this study offers in-depth insights into how entrepreneurial identities are constructed through the lived experiences of the participants. In contrast to traditional models that emphasize the cognitive predictors of entrepreneurial intention, this study illuminates the interplay between internal motivation, reflective experience, and contextual support systems, thereby enhancing both theoretical understanding and practical application in entrepreneurship education and policymaking.

Internal motivation emerged as a foundational dimension of entrepreneurial awareness among the participants of Generation Z participants. Consistent with previous studies, this study affirms that intrinsic motivators such as autonomy, achievement, and meaningfulness drive entrepreneurial engagement ([Nasip et al. 2017](#); [Sefiani and Davies 2025](#)). Participants expressed a

strong desire to control their futures and align their ventures with their personal values and ethical objectives. This finding resonates with [Botha and Sibeko \(2022\)](#), who highlighted how personality traits such as risk tolerance and self-confidence enhance internal drives toward entrepreneurial behaviors. What distinguishes the current study is the nuanced way in which these intrinsic motivators are contextualized through personal aspirations, familial responsibilities, and social-impact aspirations. The participants' narratives, illustrated by their commitment to creating job opportunities, alleviating familial burdens, and pursuing personal growth, underscore the affective depth of their motivation.

Moreover, these intrinsic motivators were bolstered by the participants' digital nativity and ease with innovation. Consistent with [Li, Kang, and Fen \(2024\)](#), the findings suggest that Generation Z utilizes digital tools not only for operational functions but also for identity formation and community development. The digital environment serves as both a medium and motivator, offering validation, inspiration, and expanded opportunities for entrepreneurial expressions. This layer of motivation, anchored in technological fluency, extends our understanding of how Gen Z entrepreneurs internalize and enact their ambitions in entrepreneurial contexts.

Reflective experiences further define the trajectory of entrepreneurial awareness, functioning as a mechanism for meaning-making and adaptive learning during the entrepreneurial journey. Participants consistently referred to formative events, such as school bazaars and personal setbacks, as turning points that redirected their aspirations. This finding supports the theoretical framework advanced by [Hägg and Kurczewska \(2020\)](#), who argued that entrepreneurial learning is embedded in the reflective cycles of action and interpretation. Participants' willingness to critically assess their successes and failures illustrates the active role of self-reflection in consolidating their entrepreneurial identity. These findings echo those of prior research by [Morris et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Çağlayan et al. \(2023\)](#), who asserted that reflective practice fosters resilience, innovation, and value alignment.

A key contribution of this study lies in understanding the iterative nature of reflective processes. Participants not only reviewed their past decisions but also used these reflections to recalibrate their goals and strategies in real time. This supports experiential learning theories, which posit that learning from failure and adaptation are central to entrepreneurial development ([Willis et al. 2025](#)). The ability of these young entrepreneurs to reinterpret their setbacks as opportunities for growth and innovation reinforces the importance of cultivating reflective capacities in entrepreneurship education programs.

Contextual factors, ranging from familial influence to institutional support, play an equally crucial role in shaping entrepreneurial awareness in the UAE. The narratives emphasize the substantial influence of family in offering both emotional and financial support, consistent with [Maritz et al. \(2022\)](#), who identified the family unit as a fundamental socializing agent in entrepreneurial behavior. Familial encouragement and practical assistance frequently stimulated participants' entrepreneurial aspirations, providing a sense of security and initial capital for developing ventures.

Educational environments are catalysts for entrepreneurial awareness. This finding aligns with that of [Chahal et al. \(2024\)](#), who demonstrated that exposure to entrepreneurial content, mentorship opportunities, and challenge-based learning initiatives within universities significantly enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Participants identified project-based coursework and peer collaboration as key experiential learning components that enabled them to visualize entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Furthermore, their participation in seminars, workshops, and digital platforms aligns with the educational models proposed by [Li, Kang, and Fen \(2024\)](#), which emphasize the integration of both formal and informal learning experiences.

Peer networks and broader community interactions serve as reinforcement mechanisms. Observing peers' successes and receiving encouragement from friends strengthened participants'

entrepreneurial resolve. [Weligodapola et al. \(2023\)](#) support this conclusion by highlighting the importance of community and social capital in fostering entrepreneurial confidence and dedication. Many participants credited their determination to continue with the motivational impact of peers who had undergone similar experiences, indicating that entrepreneurial awareness was partially shaped by their social interactions.

Institutional infrastructure, including university incubators, online training, and mentorship programs, further enabled participants to translate awareness into action. The value of these structures lies in their ability to reduce ambiguity and provide practical scaffolding for venture creation. The present findings align with those of [Hassan et al. \(2021\)](#), who underscored that access to financial and educational resources markedly increases the probability of progressing from entrepreneurial intentions to concrete outcomes. By providing structured guidance and feedback, institutions can effectively bridge the gap between the aspirations and execution of the program.

These findings align with those documented in studies conducted in various national contexts. For instance, [Maritz et al. \(2022\)](#) identified analogous patterns within Australian universities, where integrative ecosystems facilitate the development of an entrepreneurial mindset through collaboration among academic, familial, and community stakeholders. Similarly, [Li, Kang, and Fen \(2024\)](#) reported that digital platforms and reflective pedagogies in China enhance students' entrepreneurial engagement by fostering their sense of agency. Furthermore, [Sefiani and Davies \(2025\)](#) in Saudi Arabia emphasized the role of gender norms and cultural expectations in moderating these dynamics, indicating that while reflective learning and intrinsic motivation are universal processes, their manifestation is influenced by contextual and cultural factors.

The findings of this study align with the broader discussions on the intention–action gap in entrepreneurship. [Rohanaraj \(2023\)](#) and [Nayak et al. \(2024\)](#) contend that structural barriers, such as limited access to capital, mentorship, and policy support, hinder the conversion of entrepreneurial intentions into actions. In our study, participants acknowledged these constraints but illustrated how experiential and institutional support could alleviate them in the future. This underscores the necessity for targeted interventions that address context-specific challenges and empower youth to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations in the region's economy.

From a policy and educational perspective, the findings advocate a paradigm shift in entrepreneurship education. As suggested by [Colombelli et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Hägg and Kurczewska \(2020\)](#), entrepreneurship should be taught not merely as a set of technical skills but also as a reflective and experiential process. Curricula should incorporate activities that simulate real-world challenges and foster emotional engagement, such as narrative inquiry, peer mentoring, and community-based projects. These activities can facilitate the alignment of internal motivations with entrepreneurial actions, enhance resilience, and promote long-term entrepreneurial engagement.

Furthermore, institutions must leverage digital infrastructure to support reflective learning and peer collaboration. As digital natives, Generation Z students benefit from online platforms that offer flexibility, personalization, and interactivity in learning. Integrating digital tools into entrepreneurship education can create contextually relevant and pedagogically effective learning environments. Ultimately, these interventions must be designed with an appreciation of the lived experiences and motivational profiles of Gen Z individuals, allowing their entrepreneurial awareness to evolve organically within supportive ecosystems.

By grounding entrepreneurship research in the voices and experiences of young entrepreneurs, this study fills a gap in the literature and provides actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and institutional leaders. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive, experience-based, and culturally sensitive approaches that acknowledge the complexity of entrepreneurial awareness and support its translation into sustainable practice.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of entrepreneurial awareness among Generation Z through a phenomenological lens, emphasizing the interconnected roles of internal motivation, reflective experience and contextual influences. The findings reveal that entrepreneurial awareness is not solely the product of cognitive intention but is deeply embedded in the lived experiences, personal values, and social environments of young people. Internal motivations, such as autonomy and the desire for personal fulfillment, have emerged as powerful drivers. Reflective experiences, particularly turning points and self-evaluations, allowed the participants to reframe challenges as opportunities for growth. Contextual factors, such as family support, educational engagement, peer networks, and institutional infrastructure, are critical enablers.

The implications of this study are significant for educational and policy frameworks. Entrepreneurship education programs must adopt experiential and reflective learning modalities that resonate with the identity-driven motivations of Generation Z. Similarly, institutional ecosystems must be tailored to bridge the intention–action gap by offering mentorship, resources and digital engagement to young entrepreneurs. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by situating entrepreneurial awareness within a multidimensional framework that integrates psychological, social, and contextual elements. Future research could expand this model by examining comparative cross-cultural experiences or integrating longitudinal designs to capture changes over time and across cultures. As entrepreneurship becomes increasingly personalized and socially embedded, understanding the experiential foundations of awareness is critical for nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs.

SUGGESTION

This study's findings suggest that institutions must recognize entrepreneurial awareness as a developmental process rather than a fixed outcome. Practical steps may include facilitating structured spaces where students can narrate and reflect on their entrepreneurial journeys, such as storytelling forums, guided self-reflection modules, or digital journals, as these platforms allow students to internalize lessons from their experiences and develop authentic entrepreneurial identities. Moreover, support systems should be made more inclusive by accommodating diverse entrepreneurial pathways, especially those motivated by social value or personal purpose rather than by financial ambition. Policymakers and education practitioners are encouraged to invest in early exposure programs, not only in higher education but also in pre-university settings, to introduce entrepreneurial thinking as a life skill rather than merely as a career choice.

From a theoretical perspective, this study acknowledges the limitations of small-scale phenomenological research, particularly in terms of transferability to broader populations. To build on the current findings, future research could employ comparative phenomenology across different cultural and institutional settings to examine how contextual variations shape entrepreneurial meaning. Furthermore, the concept of entrepreneurial awareness itself could be theoretically expanded by integrating psychological constructs such as identity work, narrative self-construction, or even emotional labor, which remain underexplored in entrepreneurship discourse. By advancing these dimensions, researchers can move beyond the intention-action paradigm toward a more human-centered understanding of entrepreneurship.

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