

FRENCH STUDENTS OF MAGHREB BACKGROUND AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Hicham Meghouar¹

¹Assistant Professor, National School of Commerce and Management of Settat, Hassan 1^{er} University, Morocco

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the theoretical motivations for entrepreneurship among French students of Maghreb background (hereafter FSMB). Indeed, there are two opposing logics: the entrepreneurial logic, and the social integration one. Is entrepreneurship still seen as a last chance for these young students who are stigmatized (Goffman, 1975) and socially labeled (Becker, 1985), and who remain very often unemployed after graduation? Or does it fit in the context of the ambitious individual who wants to find a place of one's own in an increasingly competitive social environment. This study also addresses the question of ethnic entrepreneurship by analyzing the specificity of the potential corporate projects of the French students of North African origins.

Keywords: Corporate, Entrepreneurship, Ethnic entrepreneurship, Immigration, Maghreb, Motivation, Project.

Contribution/ Originality

Our study confirms and enriches the results of works done on the subject. Firstly, the French students, of Maghreb background, interviewed expressed a very important entrepreneurial intention. When access to executive positions is difficult, the entrepreneurial path is considered, by most of them, as the only means for professional employability. Our study also specifies a crucial point that the specificity of these corporate projects mentioned by these students do not necessarily reflect their profile and their educational qualifications. These business activities reinforce the links to France and to the countries of origins of these French students of Maghreb background.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has established itself as a major challenge for wealth creation, evolution of the economic structure and employment. Promoting entrepreneurship is at the heart of political debate. The objective of this work is to contribute to better understand the intentions,

motivations and interests in entrepreneurship among French students from the Maghreb¹ (noted below FSMB). Indeed, many new graduates from immigrant families are facing real discrimination in hiring; they experience a very difficult choice: stay as a job seeker or create their own job as entrepreneur. Unfortunately, they are facing such a situation alone.

The intention allows predicting behaviors. Understanding this process will inform us why an individual is engaged in the entrepreneurial process well before seeking an opportunity or to decide which type of activity to start. Entrepreneurial intention will explain the personal and situational factors involved in the decision process where we undertake a growing interest in attitudes and perceptions. According to Bird (1988), the study of entrepreneurial intention provides advanced research path that overcomes the descriptive studies. Krueger and Carsrud (1993) reported that entrepreneurship is a fairly rare event. The intent analysis has provided an idea and an adequate understanding of this complex process.

Thus, many research has confirmed the value of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial status among immigrants, among others the study by PACE² and the consulting firm Maghreb Human Resources in 2002 highlights the passion for entrepreneurship by immigrants or young immigrant from Maghreb in particular case. Thus, we propose to recheck this observation targeting this time the French students from immigrant families to better understand their motivation for entrepreneurship. Behavior *vis-a-vis* entrepreneurship resulted in FSMB is it a personal ambition? Or is it a decision of necessity? We also analyze the issue of consistency between the training (degree) and specificity of expected projects. This article is organized as follows. In the first section, models of intention from the literature and their application are discussed in entrepreneurship. In this context, we place the entire population of immigrants, and particularly North African students. The second section describes the methodology and sample characteristics. The results will be interpreted in the third section. And finally, the conclusion.

2. ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS APPROACH: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Crant (1996), the entrepreneurial intention is defined as individual judgments on the likelihood of the acquisition of one's own business. For Brockhaus (1975), it takes on the sense of internal control vs external control. As to Bruyat (1993), the entrepreneurial intention is a will. Bird (1988; 1992) also defines it as an individual will and freedom, a state of mind that directs attention, and therefore experience and action of the individual to a specific target in order to accomplish a mission (to create a business, growth or change decisions). Bird (1988), as Krueger and Carsrud (1993), considers intention as a process that stems from the needs, values, habits and beliefs of the individual; intention structures and guides action (Bird, 1988; 1992). It is a personal will, but it also depends on the contextual variables (Vesalainen and Pihkala, 1999).

¹ essentially three countries : Morocco, Algérie and Tunisia

² www.apce.com

2.1. Models of Intention and Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship brings interests to individuals who find entrepreneurial situations a source of personal satisfaction. This topic was the object of many contributions. On the theoretical level, several researchers were inspired by psycho-social models of intention, such as [Ajzen \(1991\)](#) theory of planned behavior in the field of social psychology « *Intentions are assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behavior; they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior.* », as well as the model of the entrepreneurial event of [Shapiro and Sokol \(1982\)](#). These two works provide a similar explanation of entrepreneurial intention of the individual and they offer a coherent and robust process to properly identify the business creation. The links forged between the theory of planned behavior of [Ajzen \(1991\)](#) and the theory model of [Shapiro and Sokol \(1982\)](#), highlighted a scope of a theory of social psychology applied on the field of Entrepreneurship: the prediction of the act of undertaking which manifests itself in a well-defined context of entrepreneurial training.

Different studies have ensured the validity of these models for the act of entrepreneurship ([Krueger and Carsrud, 1993](#); [Kolvereid, 1996](#); [Autio et al., 1997](#); [Begley et al., 1997](#); [Tkachev and Kolvereid, 1999](#); [Tounès, 2001](#); [Kennedy et al., 2003](#); [Tounès, 2003](#); [Audet, 2004](#); [Boissin and Emin, 2007](#); [Boissin et al., 2007](#)). Some of these studies have focused on the study of patterns of entrepreneurship among students. This is the case study of [Boissin et al. \(2007\)](#) that makes a comparison between the French and American students. The survey measures their intentions and attitudes to start up a business, their perceptions of social norms and sense of ability to conduct an entrepreneurial process; it analyzes their beliefs in order to identify what are the characteristics that distinguish them. The results are quite conventional. But they raise again the question of the influence of social norms in the model of Ajzen and the effect of context and culture on them. Americans are much more enterprising than the French, and more confident in their ability to create their own business. This can be explained by the fact that Americans grew in a highly entrepreneurial environment that would support them if they have to create a business.

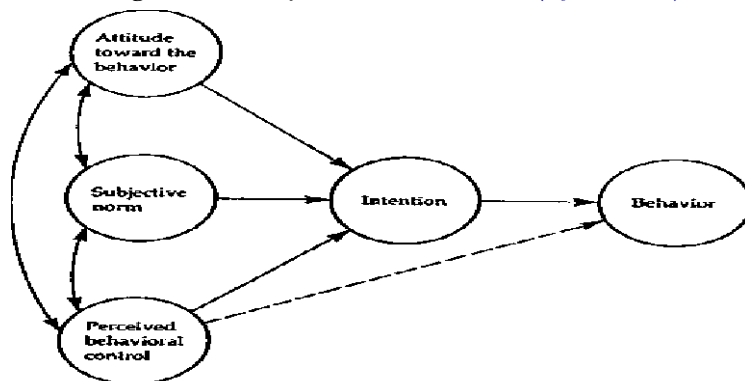
There are also studies done by [Boissin et al. \(2008\)](#) that compare the attitudes towards entrepreneurship according to the nationality of students (French and Belgian ones). The results allowed distinguishing three groups of students: the immature, the future employees, and the future entrepreneurs. An in-depth analysis of the typology shows that the impact of social norms on students who intend to undertake is positive. Regarding the type of training to promote entrepreneurship in the context of implementation of awareness program, the attraction is the dominant variable for students who intend to create their firm; attractiveness is also an important point for the category of "immature" and "future employees", who are not attracted by business creation. Besides, it tackles the skills needed to realize a creative project that are paramount for a "future business", for this ability is essential as to have the intention to start up a business. Thus, the French or Belgian students had no impact on the intent; France and Belgium are culturally

close. The second part of the analysis tested the impact of attitudes, social norms and feasibility on entrepreneurial intention. The authors found that these variables had a positive impact.

According to these models of intent, intentional behavior can be predicted by the intention to have a certain behavior. The intention to undertake is more significant than the creation of enterprise, which is seen as a desirable and feasible action. Thus, the desirability is defined according to the purposes of Shapero and Sokol (1982) as the degree of attraction a person has toward the creation of a business. To Ajzen (1991), this is more or less a favorable attitude of a person to make this choice. Entrepreneurial feasibility refers to the degree with which the individual expects to implement his entrepreneurial project. This concept refers to Shapero's works on the subject. In fact, Ajzen describes this concept in his theory of planned behavior as a perceived behavioral control. Both notions of desirability and feasibility are very close, explained by the belief that a person has on his surroundings.

In terms of entrepreneurship, Ajzen (1991) associates a student entrepreneurial attitude to his professional qualities, skills that he develops, and to his perception of entrepreneurship. As to the notion of feasibility, it may depend on the degree of confidence that a student has about his ability to perform the tasks considered essential for a successful entrepreneurial process. The operating models of intention applied on business creation are presented in the following diagram.

Figure-1. Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)



Self-employment today represents a significant economic force. Choosing this option seems to be necessary for some students. Indeed, a large portion of people said that they are forced to choose entrepreneurship. In 2001, approximately 46.1% of Quebecers admitted to have started up a business because they could not find a suitable job in the labor market (GEM, 2002). In 2003, we noted that 43% of 55-year-old people evoked the loss of their job or the poor conditions of their status employment as a decisive factor for opting for the path of self-employment and starting up their own business. Creating their own firm out of necessity is one of the explanations of entrepreneurial ventures. This was confirmed by studies about the immigrant population in France. Immigrants encounter structural difficulties in the labor market and a large portion of

them are jobless, or confined to occupy less qualified or precarious jobs. The internal dynamics of immigrants creators of free enterprise and the current economic environment tend to promote self-employment for emigrant population, even if it has to surmount some hindrances specific to its own ethnic background inside the French society.

2.2. Immigrants and Entrepreneurship

2.2.1. Case Studies of Primo-Migrants

For four decades, business creation by immigrants from countries outside the European Union is becoming noticeable in France, notably in a context of a supposed national decline. This concerns primarily the Algerians who immigrated for labor reasons and became partly entrepreneurs. Then, they were followed by other ethnic groups arrived in the 1960s and the 1970s, like the Tunisians, and in the 1980s-1990s by Moroccan immigrants as well as by South-East Asian and Turkish ones. Besides, since the 1990s, Sub-Saharan Africans and Indo-Pakistanese contribute to the vitality of immigrant entrepreneurship.

Within the active workforce, immigrants belonging to the category of entrepreneurs are more numerous than the French - craftsmen, entrepreneurs, and retailers. It is 8.4% for the former, and 6.9% for the latter. Hence, craftsmen, retailers and entrepreneurs immigrants represent 13% of all entrepreneurs in France (Koumarianos, 2004). This entrepreneurial dynamics of immigrant population might be explained first as a forced choice, but also by its own capital, or by an enabling environment of carrier opportunities. Business creation is seen as a strategy to circumvent the crisis of salaries and unemployment, which particularly affects immigrants living in the European Union³. It is also a way to escape unsatisfactory professional conditions because two thirds of immigrants are either employees or unskilled workers. The number of immigrant entrepreneurs is increasing while the number of firms created in France remained even over the last thirty years. The statistics conducted in 1999 estimated that there were 150,000 alien entrepreneurs while there were 90 000 in 1992 and only 50,000 in 1972. The magazine « Objectifs PME », in a special issue highlighted the phenomenon of "immigrant" entrepreneurial tendency that represent about 10% of all French entrepreneurs, the majority of which are South Europeans and North Africans. Thus, the study conducted by the *Direction des populations et des migrations* (DPM, Directorate of Population and Migration) has reached the same conclusion by the consultation of the alien names registered at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Paris. The study puts the figure at 61% for individual creators of new businesses and 42% for those who create private limited liability firms. Outside the European community, entrepreneurs are mostly from the Maghreb, Turkey, China, Vietnam and Sub-Saharan Africa. Immigrant entrepreneurs stand out with their poor socio-economic conditions, before starting up their own businesses as well as by the sub-representation of women in their midst. They create more firms in the trade sector and undertake less in service activities.

³ see the report by INSEE, « L'emploi des immigrés en 1999 »

2.2.2. The Entrepreneurs of the "Second Generation"

The pioneers of entrepreneurship of the 1970s had been a model to newcomers and sometimes to young immigrants having been born or educated in France. In recent years, the youths of immigrant background began to be interested in business creation: Cafes, Internet cafes, cleaning and janitorial firms, gardening, fast food restaurants, computer engineering firms. The fields of entrepreneurship are various. Simultaneously, these youths are making both their own professional future as well as giving a new image of undertaking in suburban neighborhoods.

The creation of businesses by people of immigrant origins is also motivated by a wish to claim their existence in the French socio-economic context, and a willingness to break with their family past in favor of a new form of upward social mobility. These individuals are finally benefiting from the possibility of a dual culture and a dual network, and from an entrepreneurial family model, even though there is sometimes a rejection of ethnic activities, which are not necessarily synonymous of social integration.

In a 2007 survey by the network ALEXIS⁴ in the Lorraine region of France, and INSEE (*les créateurs d'entreprises issus de l'immigration*), about half (47.6%) of immigrants having an enterprise project were hosted by the above mentioned network and were born in France. These "second generation" entrepreneurs are living better social and economic conditions than primo-migrants; women are more represented among them. However, the specificity of the projects is the same. They continue to further develop businesses that are heavily represented in the immigrant entrepreneurship: masonry, fast food, grocery's, and street trading.

In his study, Madoui (2003) raises the value of the debate on the emergence of new entrepreneurial dynamics inside alien residents, instead of the interest that focuses on political issues or even on the politicians' use of immigration for electoral goals. The author proposes to study the conditions for enterprise creation by this population and to understand the process of upward social mobility in this new category of architects in the business community in France. The results of this study show that the immigrant population has a real desire for success, and entrepreneurship is a means to achieve upward social mobility through a process of by passing a tough job market, full of obstacles for this ethnic population. The author seeks to unravel the secret of success, to identify the factors and conditions for the emergence of entrepreneurs of North African origins as architects in the French social and economic context. This desire to succeed, to socially integrate and to emerge as architects seem to be the result of a certain image of itself that people from North African background opposes to the mechanisms of social stigma, likely to keep them in a lower social status, as was the case with their parents and grandparents.

Madoui and Kourdache (2003) analyze the motivations that led stigmatized individuals from immigrant families, and who are very often unemployed, to undertake and develop their businesses. How did they achieve their social integration that would allow them to finally put an end to the stigmatizing image of failed youth, in which each one of them attempts to get rid of?

⁴A summary of the survey is available at <http://www.alexis.fr> (accessed in December 2008)

The authors' postulate that the social stigma and labeling do not produce situations of deviance is thus verified. The entrepreneurs we interviewed found, despite the social stigma and discrimination, of which they are so often subjected, that in creating their firm they achieve their dream of social upward mobility and search for identity, thus refusing to reproduce their parents' social status, characterized by social, intellectual, and cultural subjugation. Business creation is no longer considered solely as a strategy to circumvent labor market discrimination, but it gives to these immigrant entrepreneurs the desire to succeed and gain a new social status as a symbol breaking with the lower positions at the bottom of the social ladder held by their parents and in which they no longer want or produce, or reproduce. Hence, as and when their businesses grow and become diversified, entrepreneurs of North African origins redefine with the host country - France - another process of (re) negotiation of identity, in which, symbolically they constitute the architects of this identity reconstruction. They do not want to be seen as social agents reproducing identical social positions of their parents but as innovators and architects of upward social mobility, itself a vector for a new social contract until here hardly negotiable for immigrants and their descendants.

2.2.3. French Students of Maghreb Background and Entrepreneurial Intention

We did not find any work dealing with this subject; studies dealing with French students from the point of view of their origins. As far as we are aware, no study has yet been made considering the immigrant background of students. Bearing this in mind, we propose to study the motivations of entrepreneurship among FSMB. In the present article, the relationship between ethnic entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention is verified through the analysis of the specific potential corporate projects mentioned by those FSMB interviewed.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through a questionnaire survey and interviews with university students living in the Ile-de-France-Paris region. Thus, over 108 students approached, only 78 of them agreed to answer back to our questions. The interviews were conducted between September 2007 and May 2008. The average time spent on each interview was 30 minutes. After noting the information on the educational level, age and origins of each student, we started our series of questions about the motivations to undertake and the specificity of business projects. We wish to emphasize that this is part of an exploratory phase. Therefore, the sample used in this research is probably not the overall opinion that all French students of immigrant background might have. Similarly, we cannot guarantee that it also represents the general view of university students interviewed. Also, we cannot rely on the assumption of stability of attitudes and perceptions over time (Tkachev and Kolvereid, 1999). The following results should therefore be taken with some reserve.

Sample characteristics: 78 French students of North African origins have answered to our questions. This sample was composed of 31 students from Morocco, 27 from Algeria, and 20 from

Tunisia. The composition of our sample was chosen at random. The following table describes the composition of this sample.

Table-1. French students and their immigrant background

Origins of French Students	Figures	Percentage
Morocco	31	40%
Algeria	27	35%
Tunisia	20	25%
Total	78	100%

Descriptive statistics: 65% of respondents aged 22 years old, 22% are between 22 and 24, and 13% between 25 and 26 years old. Thus, 25% are undergraduate students of Bachelor's degree, 55% of first year and 20% of second year Master's degree. The majority of them (59%) studies in the field of economics and management, 25% in the applied sciences, and 16% in other areas. Nearly half of the respondents have a family member who is an entrepreneur. Also, the vast majority, 94% has previous working experience as a temporary work or internship during the school holidays.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the answers collected allowed us to draw conclusions, and thus to confirm and enrich the results of works done on the subject. First of all, the FSMB interviewed expressed a very important entrepreneurial intention. The entrepreneurial path is considered, by most of them, as the only means for professional employability, when access to executive positions is difficult due to the widespread discrimination in the labor market. Our study also specifies a crucial point that the specificity of these corporate projects mentioned by these students do not necessarily reflect their profile and their educational qualifications. These business activities reinforce the links to France and to the countries of origins of the FSMB and hence their tendency towards ethnic trade and services.

4.1. Entrepreneurial Intention and the Path for Social Integration

Initial results highlight a strong entrepreneurial intention. This intention cannot be explained solely by the appeal of entrepreneurship, but in terms of deteriorated social conditions, which transform entrepreneurship, above all, for FSMB as a means to surmount difficulties encountered to achieve social integration. For most of them (92%), the fact of eschewing unemployment outweighs all other motivations to engage in entrepreneurship. Business creation has become the path of professional employability most preferred by this category of population. This initial result alignes with the analysis of [Madoui \(2003\)](#) in so far as the decision to create a business is a mean to achieve upward social mobility through a process of warding off a labor market increasingly closed for the ethnically marked. This result is confirmed also by that of [Tribalat \(1995\)](#) who stressed the fact that the youths of North African immigration often start up

their active working life by a longer period of joblessness in comparison with Portuguese or Spanish children with similar social status and higher education.

For the remaining students (8%), two other reasons have been advanced. Entrepreneurship is the result of a desire to work for its own account and to break with the employee status. The FSMB argue that working on their own behalf is synonymous of autonomy and the freedom to experience their own ideas. They will devote their time and energy for creativity by making their ideas efficient in the interest of their own businesses, and thus establish the general shape of the business culture. We can explain this, somehow, by the fact that building a business that fits with their personal values is an important advantage compared to working for a company whose policies they disagree with, or in which they will feel that their ethics are undermined. Finally, it emerges as the ambition of the individual challenger that assumes one's choice. FSMB display a taste for risk, justifying it by their own capacity for a potential entrepreneurial innovation. This category of FSMB surveyed wants to show their spirit of free enterprise, and thereby ensure the transition between the world of academia and scientific discovery and the world of business innovations in Schumpeter's sense (1935).

4.2. Favorite Industries

From the analysis of the responses, the projects mentioned by FSMB are not necessarily related to their own higher education. This finding is consistent with the idea that the entrepreneur is primarily driven by an individualistic ideology according to Jean-Baptiste Say, creating his own business in pursuit of freedom and independence, without taking into consideration the nature of the industries. All in all, entrepreneurial intentions of students surveyed tend towards various corporate projects, but 76% of them are inclined to choose ethnic trade and services.

All these projects connect countries, i.e France and the country of origins. Indeed, much interest is given to Import & Export projects of exotic products of the countries of origins. In this context, ethnicity becomes an advantage upon which to rely on in terms of workforce, suppliers and customers. Other types of projects were mentioned repeatedly, for exemple travel agencies relating Europe and the Maghreb countries. Thus, over half of the respondents (58.2%) plan to start up a new business in the short or medium term.

5. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship is a process of economic and social integration. This dimension is particularly important to corporate projects holders of immigrant background; especially that their socio-economic conditions before undertaking are, generally speaking, deteriorated. This socio-economic deterioration is, to a great extent, related to discrimination that exists in the French labor market. Indeed, the surveyed FSMB reported that discrimination they have encountered because of their ethnic origins accounts for the most part in their motivations to become entrepreneurs.

Nonetheless, like all scientific papers, this research has limitations to the extent that it examines the

entrepreneurial intention of FSMB in the Ile-de-France-Paris region. It would be interesting to extend the study sample to other regions of France, which will make it possible to have comparative studies between regions or between countries. However, our investigation has provided useful knowledge, including the nature of the corporate projects expected that connect France and the country of origins. New research perspectives are possible: studying the impact of awareness programs about entrepreneurship on entrepreneurial intention of the above mentioned FSMB. The results of our study should incite political debate on the factors that encourage entrepreneurship among French students of alien origins, the obstacles they encounter and the policy measures that can be implemented in order to support them. Thus, the full development of potential entrepreneurship among students in general could be a major issue for the growth of the national economy. The question posed by this research is really that of equal opportunity which unfortunately is not yet fully acquired for the French citizens of immigrant background. Meanwhile, in the absence of social equality, graduate students of immigrant origins would be entrepreneurs by default.

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