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PERCEIVED DESIRABILITY AS A PREDICTOR OF ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER CHOICE IN BUEA, CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of perceived desirability on students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career choice in selected higher institutions in the Buea Municipality. It was hypothesized that perceived desirability does not significantly affect students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career choice. With this, it was argued that perceived desirability has the capacity to shape student career decisions, including their actions, reactions, choices, goals, interactions and emotional states regarding business creation. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Shapero and Sokol's (1982) Entrepreneurial Event Model, and Moscovici's (1961) Theory of Social Representation formed the theoretical foundation for the study. The sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design was adopted for the study, prioritizing the quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. Three hundred and eighty-five final-year students from higher institutions in Buea made up the sample size for the quantitative phase, while a purposive sub-sample was drawn for the qualitative phase. A structured questionnaire measuring perceived desirability and career choice, alongside an interview guide, were the instruments used for data collection. The validity index of the instrument stood at 0.89, and reliability coefficient value for perceived desirability stood at 0.960, and 0.823 for the overall instrument. Data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 27 and thematically. Results showed that perceived desirability significantly predicts students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career with a strong positive relationship ($\beta = .502$, $R^2 = .252$, p-value $0.000 < 0.05$). However, a paradox was discovered where 76.5% of students found entrepreneurship highly desirable, yet 59.7% exhibited no actual intention to start a business. The qualitative findings introduced concepts such as "Forced Desirability" (desiring business out of necessity rather than opportunity) and the "Safe-Job Pull" (willingness to abandon entrepreneurship for a stable salary) to explain this gap. This study contributes to knowledge by bringing out the contextual nuances of perceived desirability which constitute psychological barriers that significantly affect student career choice. Students are aware of the benefits of entrepreneurship but are constrained by fear and the lack of a safety net. Thus, pedagogical shifts from inspiration to practical execution, and stronger social support systems, would help convert high desirability into actual business creation. The study concluded that perceived desirability is a powerful but insufficient predictor of

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entrepreneurial career choice in Buea. This could be supported by adequate implementation of policies on graduate employment, practical entrepreneurship education, and stronger institutional support.

Keywords:

Perceived Desirability, Entrepreneurial Career Choice, Mixed-Methods, Buea, Cameroon.

Résumé

Cette étude a examiné l'effet de la désirabilité perçue sur le choix de l'entrepreneuriat comme carrière professionnelle chez les étudiants de certains établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buéa, au Cameroun. L'hypothèse formulée stipulait que la désirabilité perçue n'exerce pas d'influence significative sur le choix de l'entrepreneuriat comme carrière professionnelle chez les étudiants. Dans cette perspective, il a été avancé que la désirabilité perçue est susceptible d'orienter les décisions professionnelles des étudiants, notamment leurs comportements, leurs réactions, leurs choix, leurs objectifs, leurs interactions et leurs états émotionnels à l'égard de la création d'entreprise. L'étude s'est appuyée sur la théorie du comportement planifié d'Ajzen (1991), le modèle de l'événement entrepreneurial de Shapero et Sokol (1982), ainsi que la théorie des représentations sociales de Moscovici (1961). Une approche méthodologique mixte de type séquentiel explicatif a été adoptée, privilégiant une première phase quantitative suivie d'une phase qualitative. L'échantillon de la phase quantitative était constitué de 385 étudiants en dernière année d'études, issus de différents établissements d'enseignement supérieur de Buéa, tandis qu'un sous-échantillon a été sélectionné de manière raisonnée pour la phase qualitative. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'un questionnaire structuré mesurant la désirabilité perçue et le choix de carrière, ainsi que d'un guide d'entretien. L'indice de validité de l'instrument était de 0,89, tandis que le coefficient de fidélité était de 0,960 pour la dimension relative à la désirabilité perçue et de 0,823 pour l'ensemble de l'instrument. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide du logiciel Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27, tandis que les données qualitatives ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats ont révélé que la désirabilité perçue constitue un prédicteur significatif du choix de l'entrepreneuriat comme carrière professionnelle, avec une relation positive relativement forte ($\beta = 0{,}502$; $R^2 = 0{,}252$; $p < 0{,}001$). Toutefois, un paradoxe a été observé : alors que 76,5 % des étudiants considéraient l'entrepreneuriat comme une option professionnelle hautement désirable, 59,7 % ne manifestaient aucune intention réelle de créer une entreprise. Les résultats qualitatifs ont permis de dégager des concepts tels que la « désirabilité contrainte », qui traduit l'attrait pour l'entrepreneuriat motivé davantage par la nécessité que par la recherche d'opportunités, et « l'attraction de l'emploi stable », qui désigne la disposition à renoncer à l'entrepreneuriat au profit d'un emploi salarié offrant une sécurité financière. Ces concepts permettent de mieux comprendre l'écart entre l'attrait pour l'entrepreneuriat et l'intention effective de créer une entreprise. Cette étude contribue à l'avancement des connaissances en mettant en évidence les particularités contextuelles de la désirabilité perçue ainsi que les obstacles psychologiques qui influencent considérablement les choix professionnels des étudiants. Bien que ces

derniers soient conscients des avantages de l'entrepreneuriat, leurs aspirations entrepreneuriales demeurent limitées par la peur de l'échec et l'absence de dispositifs de protection et de soutien adéquats. Par conséquent, une réorientation des pratiques pédagogiques, passant de la simple sensibilisation à l'entrepreneuriat vers l'acquisition de compétences pratiques et la concrétisation des projets entrepreneuriaux, associée au renforcement des mécanismes de soutien social, pourrait favoriser la transformation d'une forte désirabilité entrepreneuriale en initiatives effectives de création d'entreprise. L'étude conclut que la désirabilité perçue constitue un facteur prédictif important, mais insuffisant à elle seule, du choix de l'entrepreneuriat comme carrière professionnelle chez les étudiants de Buéa. La concrétisation des aspirations entrepreneuriales pourrait être renforcée par une mise en œuvre efficace des politiques d'insertion professionnelle des diplômés, une formation entrepreneuriale davantage axée sur la pratique et un accompagnement institutionnel plus soutenu.

Mots-clés : Désirabilité perçue, choix de carrière entrepreneuriale, *méthodes mixtes, Buéa, Cameroun.*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship means starting and running one's own business. It is a way for people, especially young people, to create work for themselves instead of waiting for someone else to give them a job (Audretsch & Thurik, 2001). Across Africa, and in Cameroon in particular, many young people finish their studies and cannot find formal jobs. Because of this, governments and universities are increasingly encouraging students to start their own businesses instead of only looking for salaried employment.

However, wanting to start a business and actually starting one are two different things. Researchers call the first one "intention." The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) explains that before someone forms the intention to start a business, three things must be in place: they must see entrepreneurship as something good and attractive (perceived desirability), they must believe they are capable of doing it (perceived behavioral control), and they must feel that the people around them support the idea (subjective norms). Shapero and Sokol (1982), in their Entrepreneurial Event Model, add that perceived desirability, that is, how attractive and worthwhile a person finds the idea of starting a business, is one of the strongest forces that pushes someone toward entrepreneurship.

Several studies (e.g., Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015) show that young people generally view entrepreneurship in a positive light. Yet, in many developing countries, this positive view does not always lead to action. Students may say they admire entrepreneurs and would like to start a business one day, but very few actually do so after graduation. This gap between what students say they want and what they actually do is not yet well understood in Buea, Cameroon, where graduate unemployment is high and entrepreneurship is often presented as a solution. This study therefore examined the effect of perceived desirability on students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career choice in selected higher institutions in the Buea Municipality.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the effects of perceived desirability on students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career choice.
This objective was supported by the following hypothesis:
Perceived desirability does not significantly affect students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career choice in selected higher institutions in the Buea Municipality.

Statement of Problem

Cameroon's higher institutions turn out thousands of graduates every year, but the formal job market cannot absorb all of them. Entrepreneurship has therefore become an important alternative, and universities have worked to help students see it in a positive light, hoping this will lead them to start businesses of their own. On the surface, this appears to be working. Many students say they find entrepreneurship appealing: they admire successful business owners, would like to be their own boss, and see starting a business as a worthwhile path. If perceived desirability alone were enough, a large number of these students would be expected to go on and start businesses after graduation.

However, this is often not what happens. Many students who say entrepreneurship is desirable still end up looking for salaried jobs instead, or do not take any real steps toward starting a business. This creates a puzzle: if students already see entrepreneurship as attractive, why do so few of them act on it? Existing theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Entrepreneurial Event Model do not fully explain this gap between what students find desirable and what they actually do, especially in a setting like Buea, where the economic pressures on graduates are strong. This study was designed to investigate this problem, that is, the extent to which perceived desirability actually influences students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career in selected higher institutions in the Buea Municipality, and why a strong sense of desirability does not always translate into the decision to start a business.

Review of Related Literature

Entrepreneurial Intention and the Theory of Planned Behavior

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior explains how a person's intention to do something, such as start a business, is formed. According to this theory, intention is shaped by three things: how much the person wants to do it (attitude, or perceived desirability), how much control they feel they have over doing it (perceived behavioral control), and how much support they feel from the people around them (subjective norms). The stronger these three are, the stronger a person's intention will be to actually start a business.

Krueger, Reilly, and Carsrud (2000) compared different models of entrepreneurial intention and found that a person's attitude toward entrepreneurship, that is, whether they see it as a good and desirable path, is one of the strongest predictors of whether they will eventually try to start a business. Liñán and Fayolle (2015), in a review of many studies on entrepreneurial intention, confirmed that this attitude consistently plays a

central role in why some people choose entrepreneurship while others do not, across different countries and cultures.

Perceived Desirability

Perceived desirability was introduced by Shapero and Sokol (1982) as part of their Entrepreneurial Event Model. It refers to how attractive, appealing, or worthwhile a person finds the idea of starting a business. A person with high perceived desirability admires entrepreneurs, would prefer to be their own boss, and finds the idea of creating a business exciting. Shapero and Sokol argued that this positive feeling toward entrepreneurship is often the first step that pushes a person to consider it as a real career option, even before they think about whether they are capable of doing it or whether others will support them.

Douglas and Shepherd (2002) found that people who value independence and self-direction, that is, who want to be in charge of their own decisions rather than working for someone else, tend to see entrepreneurship as more desirable. This suggests that perceived desirability is closely tied to a person's need for autonomy: the more a person dislikes being told what to do, the more attractive entrepreneurship appears to them.

Social Representation Theory

Moscovici's (1961) Social Representation Theory explains how people's shared ideas, beliefs, and images about a topic, in this case entrepreneurship, are shaped by the society and culture they live in. According to this theory, whether entrepreneurship is seen as desirable does not depend only on the individual; it also depends on how the community around them talks about and values entrepreneurs. In societies where entrepreneurs are respected and admired, young people are more likely to see entrepreneurship as desirable. In societies where secure salaried jobs, such as government positions, are viewed as the safer and more respected choice, entrepreneurship may be seen as desirable in theory but risky in practice. This theory is useful for the present study because it helps explain why students in Buea may say they find entrepreneurship desirable while still being drawn toward the security of formal employment.

Methods

Research Design: A sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design was used. The quantitative phase was conducted first, and a qualitative phase followed in order to explain the quantitative results and add depth to the findings.

Population of the study: The population of this study constituted final-year students in selected higher institutions in the Buea Municipality. Statistics from 2022 to 2026 showed that there were over 10,000 students in the target institutions. Sample size: The sample consisted of three hundred and eighty-five (385) students drawn from four institutions. They were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. They were recruited with the collaboration of the heads of departments.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age range (n=385)		
21-24 years	250	64.9%
25-29 years	95	24.7%
30 years and above	40	10.4%
Gender (n=385)		
Female	195	50.6%
Male	190	49.4%
Institutions (n=385)		
University of Buea	230	59.7%
Biaka University Institute	62	16.1%
Catholic University Institute	62	16.1%
HIMS	31	8.1%

Among the three hundred and eighty-five participants who took part in the study, age range, 64.9% (250) of them were within 21-24 years, 24.7% (95) were within 25-29 years, and 10.4% (40) were 30 years and above. Gender wise, a near-equal number of females 50.6% (195) and males 49.4% (190) were sampled for the study. This gender balance reduces the likelihood that gender influenced the results. In terms of institutions, the majority were from the University of Buea 59.7% (230), followed equally by Biaka and CUIB 16.1% (62 each), and HIMS 8.1% (31).

Instruments for Data Collection: This study made use of two data collection instruments; a questionnaire on perceived desirability and career choice, and an interview guide for students. The instrument used to collect data was a 10-item Perceived Desirability scale and a 10-item Career Choice scale measured on a 4-point Likert scale. The PD scale assesses attraction, admiration for entrepreneurs, and preference for autonomy. The career choice scale assesses intention to start a business post-graduation. Scores are calculated by summing the scores for the relevant items.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument:

Table 2

Content Validity Index of the Perceived Desirability Construct

Component/Scale	Number of Items	Number of Judges	Content Validity Index (CVI)
Perceived Desirability	10	5	1.0

Note: The Content Validity Index (CVI) is calculated by dividing the number of items rated as valid by the total number of items. A CVI of 1.0 indicates that all 10 items measuring Perceived Desirability were unanimously validated by the expert judges, confirming excellent face and content validity.

The validity of the instrument was considered from two dimensions: face validity and content validity. Face validity refers to whether an indicator seems to be a reasonable measure of its underlying construct "on its face." To achieve this stage of the validation process, the questionnaire was given to some classmates for preliminary corrections mainly in the domain of spellings and grammatical errors. The corrected version was then submitted to the research supervisor to scrutinize the items and spot out technical defects. Thereafter, the necessary corrections were made after which the questionnaire was approved to have face validity.

Content validity refers to the extent to which the content of the instrument corresponds to the theoretical concept it was designed to measure. Content validation of the data collection instruments, which focused on the extent to which the content of the instruments corresponded to the theoretical concept of perceived desirability, was tested using the CVI. To result in the statement that an instrument is judged valid, the inter-judge coefficient of validity was computed. The outcome provided a mathematical assurance that the items were adequate and properly structured to measure perceived desirability.

Table 3

Reliability Coefficients for the Perceived Desirability Construct

Component/Scale	Sample Size (N)	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha)	Interpretation
Perceived Desirability (Pilot Study)	20	10	0.730	Acceptable
Perceived Desirability (Main Study)	385	10	0.960	Excellent
Overall Instrument (Main Study)	385	60	0.823	Good

Note: The overall reliability statistics of the instrument was 0.823. According to George and Mallery (2003), an alpha coefficient above 0.8 is considered "Good," while a coefficient above 0.7 is "Acceptable." Therefore, the instrument is considered valid and highly reliable for the study.

To ensure that the instruments are reliable for the study, a pilot study was carried out on twenty (20) persons. Quantitative data collected from the participants were tested using the Cronbach Alpha test. For the Perceived Desirability construct specifically, the pilot study yielded a coefficient of 0.730. When the main study was conducted with the complete field data gathered from the 385 students, the coefficient rose to 0.960. Some variation between the two sets of coefficients is therefore expected, given the change in sample composition and size between the pilot and the main data collection exercise. The relatively high value of the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient implied that the respondents were consistent and objective in their responses. The relatively low variance in error implied that respondents did not differ significantly in their high perception of desirability by demographic factors. Generally, when the Cronbach Alpha coefficient value is above 0.7 in a study context where the test items are directly linked to one another, the instrument is considered valid and reliable for the study.

Results

Quantitative Findings: The Descriptive Paradox Descriptive statistics revealed a fascinating and contradictory baseline regarding the dependent variable. An aggregate of 59.7% of the 385 sampled students indicated a negative sentiment toward actually picking up entrepreneurship as a career choice immediately after graduation, while only 40.3% expressed positive intentions. Specifically, 68.6% disagreed that they intend to start a business immediately, and 68.6% disagreed that entrepreneurship was their first choice among various career paths. This established that, behaviorally, the "job-seeking syndrome" is dominant. However, when isolating the independent variable (Perceived Desirability), the results shifted drastically. As depicted in Table 4, an overwhelming majority of students expressed highly positive attitudes toward the *concept* of entrepreneurship.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Responses for Perceived Desirability Items

Test Items	Disagree	Agree	Total
I find the idea of being an entrepreneur very appealing.	88 (22.9%)	297 (77.1%)	385 (100.0%)
I admire people who have successfully started their own businesses.	72 (18.7%)	313 (81.3%)	385 (100.0%)
I would prefer to be my own boss rather than work for someone else.	72 (18.7%)	313 (81.3%)	385 (100.0%)
I believe entrepreneurship is a highly desirable career path.	88 (22.9%)	297 (77.1%)	385 (100.0%)
The prospect of creating my own business excites me.	77 (20.0%)	308 (80.0%)	385 (100.0%)
I enjoy the challenge and potential rewards of being an entrepreneur.	88 (22.9%)	297 (77.1%)	385 (100.0%)
I think being an entrepreneur is more fulfilling than being an employee.	99 (25.7%)	286 (74.3%)	385 (100.0%)
I am attracted to the lifestyle that entrepreneurship can offer.	110 (28.6%)	275 (71.4%)	385 (100.0%)
I believe entrepreneurship is a prestigious career choice.	127(33.0%)	258(67.0%)	385(100.0%)
I would be proud to tell others that I am an entrepreneur.	82 (21.3%)	303 (78.7%)	385 (100.0%)
MRS	**903(23.5%)**	**2947(76.5%)**	**3850(100.0 %)**

Table 4 presents a compelling case for the high desirability of entrepreneurship, with an overwhelming 76.5% (2,947) viewing it positively. The highest agreement scores were for admiring successful entrepreneurs and preferring to be one's own boss (both at 81.3%).

This strong endorsement extended across nearly every dimension of desirability measured. A large majority found the idea of being an entrepreneur appealing (297, 77.1%), considered entrepreneurship a highly desirable career path (297, 77.1%), and reported being excited by the prospect of creating their own business (308, 80.0%). Similarly high agreement was recorded for enjoying the challenge and potential rewards

of entrepreneurship (297, 77.1%) and for taking pride in the entrepreneurial identity, with 303 (78.7%) agreeing they would be proud to tell others they are an entrepreneur.

Agreement was comparatively, though still substantially, lower on items tied to fulfillment, lifestyle, and status. A total of 286 (74.3%) considered entrepreneurship more fulfilling than employment, and 275 (71.4%) reported being attracted to the entrepreneurial lifestyle. The weakest item on the subscale concerned prestige: only 258 (67.0%) agreed that entrepreneurship is a prestigious career choice, the sole item on which agreement fell below 70%, suggesting that students value entrepreneurship chiefly for what it offers personally rather than for the social status it confers.

This near-uniform enthusiasm, with agreement never falling below two-thirds on any item, marks perceived desirability as the most consistently endorsed construct in the survey, and it foreshadows its emergence, confirmed in the regression analysis below, as the single strongest predictor of entrepreneurial career choice among the five determinants examined.

Inferential Statistics: The Predictive Power of PD To test the hypothesis regarding the extent of PD's influence; a Simple Linear Regression was conducted. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Simple Linear Regression of Entrepreneurship Career Choice on Perceived Desirability

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.115	1.040		4.918	<.001
Perceived Desirability	0.486	0.043	0.502	11.363	<.001

Model Summary: R = .502, R^2 = .252, Adjusted R^2 = .250, F(1, 383) = 129.12, p < .001

A simple linear regression was conducted. The model explained 25.2% of the variance in entrepreneurial career choice (R^2 = .252, F(1, 383) = 129.12, p < .001). The standardized beta coefficient (β = .502, p < .001) indicates a strong, statistically significant positive effect. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected. Perceived desirability is the most powerful individual predictor of entrepreneurial intention among the variables tested.

Qualitative Findings:

Thematic analysis of the interviews yielded three major themes that explain why high PD fails to convert to intention in Buea.

Theme 1: The Appeal of Autonomy vs. the Fear of Destitution

Students vividly articulated why PD was so high. The appeal was universally rooted in the desire for independence and the rejection of traditional hierarchical employment. A Fine Arts student noted: *"I like the idea of being my own boss and building my own brand... The idea of earning from my art is a dream. I don't want to be told what to do from 8 to 5."*

However, this intrinsic pull was consistently countered by an extrinsic push - the fear of absolute failure. The desirability of entrepreneurship was highly conditional upon survival. Students desired the *autonomy* of entrepreneurship but feared the *financial ruin* that a failed venture would bring in an environment with no social safety nets, no unemployment insurance, and no state bailouts. A male engineering student stated: *"The idea is beautiful. But this is Buea. If I put my small capital into a business and it fails, I don't have a rich father to bail me out. I will just die of hunger. So, I desire it, but I am terrified of it."*

Theme 2: Forced Desirability and the Necessity Narrative

The qualitative data revealed that for many students, high PD is not a genuine, opportunity-driven aspiration, but a resigned acceptance of necessity. Because the traditional promise of "study hard, get a government job" has collapsed due to high unemployment and rampant corruption in public sector recruitment, students artificially elevate the desirability of entrepreneurship as a psychological defense mechanism.

One student explicitly described this psychological framing: *"We have no other option. We have to tell ourselves that being an entrepreneur is what we want, because waiting for the government is hopeless. We convince ourselves that we desire to be entrepreneurs because the alternative - doing nothing - is too depressing to accept."* This "Forced Desirability" explains why PD scores are astronomically high in surveys, yet fail to convert to intention: an individual can cognitively desire something out of necessity, but still lack the genuine, resilient passion required to take the terrifying leap into business creation.

Theme 3: The "Safe-Job Pull"

When directly asked if they would abandon their highly desired entrepreneurial path for a stable job, the responses exposed the fragility of their PD. A Business Management student stated: *"If the government offered me a safe, guaranteed job tomorrow, I would take it in a heartbeat. I admire entrepreneurs, yes. But right now, I just need to survive."* Another noted, *"I desire it, yes. But desire doesn't pay the bills."*

This "safe-job pull" demonstrates that in Buea, perceived desirability of entrepreneurship is often relative. It is highly desirable *compared to the misery of prolonged unemployment*, but highly undesirable *compared to the absolute security of a formal salary*. Therefore, PD is not a fixed trait; it is a fluid evaluation that fluctuates based on the availability of external anchors (like a job offer).

Discussions

The findings of this study provide a granular, context-specific understanding of Perceived Desirability that challenges the conventional, linear application of intention models in developing economies.

First, the quantitative confirmation that PD is a powerful predictor, independently accounting for 25.2% of the variance in entrepreneurial intention ($\beta = .502$), aligns with the foundational assertions of Shapero and Sokol (1982) and contemporary meta-analyses (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). It reinforces the premise that before a student can

assess their capability or worry about social approval, they must first find the concept of entrepreneurship personally attractive. In Buea, this attractiveness is heavily localized around the intrinsic value of autonomy, as evidenced by the 81.3% who prefer to be their own boss (Table 4). This strongly aligns with Douglas and Shepherd's (2002) findings regarding the primacy of independence as an intrinsic motivator.

Notably, the lower score for "prestige" (67%) supports the integration of Social Representation Theory (Moscovici, 1961). Students are internalizing a modern, individualistic representation of the entrepreneur (the autonomous creator) while simultaneously rejecting the traditional, local representation (the prestigious civil servant). They are changing *what* they value - from societal status to personal freedom.

However, the primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in explaining the statistical paradox of high PD and low intention through the qualitative concepts of "Forced Desirability" and the "Safe-Job Pull." Traditional models (TPB, EEM) implicitly assume a positive correlation between the *level* of desirability and the *certainty* of intention. This study demonstrates that in a necessity-driven context, this assumption is flawed.

The concept of "Forced Desirability" extends Kibler's (2013) observations on necessity entrepreneurship. While Kibler noted that necessity-driven attitudes are constructed gradually through lived experience, this study finds that high desirability can be constructed instantaneously as a psychological reaction to systemic failure—a cognitive coping mechanism. Yet, because this desirability is born of desperation rather than opportunity recognition, it lacks the emotional resilience required to sustain intention when confronted with the harsh realities of resource mobilization. This explains why the intention means scores remain decisively negative despite the high PD mean scores. It is a "phantom desirability" - present in survey responses, but absent in real-world commitment.

Furthermore, the "Safe-Job Pull" reveals the conditional nature of PD in transitioning economies. In Western contexts, an individual with high PD for entrepreneurship would likely reject a corporate job. In Buea, the high PD functions merely as a secondary backup plan. The qualitative assertion that *"desire doesn't pay the bills"* illustrates a cognitive dissonance where the emotional appeal of entrepreneurship is overridden by the physiological need for security. This finding nuances Carsrud and Brännback's (2011) work on situational triggers; in Buea, the primary situational trigger is not a market opportunity, but the threat of poverty. If that threat is momentarily removed (e.g., by the offer of a safe job), the cognitive trigger for entrepreneurial PD evaporates instantly.

These findings carry profound implications for entrepreneurship education policy. If universities assume that high PD automatically equals high intention, they will misdiagnose the problem. Current educational interventions that focus on "inspiring" students are largely redundant; the students are already inspired, as proven by the data. The qualitative data clearly shows that inspiration is not the bottleneck; the bottleneck is the translation of that inspiration into feasible action in a risky, resource-constrained environment.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the extent to which Perceived Desirability influences students' choice of entrepreneurship as a career choice in Buea, Cameroon. Through a rigorous sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach, the study concluded that Perceived Desirability is indeed a powerful statistical predictor of entrepreneurial intention, independently accounting for a significant portion of its variance.

However, the study fundamentally redefines the nature of this desirability in a fragile, high-unemployment context. We conclude that high Perceived Desirability among university students in Buea is often a manifestation of "Forced Desirability" - a psychological adaptation to the collapse of the formal labour market rather than a genuine, opportunity-driven passion. Consequently, high PD is a necessary but radically insufficient condition for entrepreneurial career choice. It is easily overpowered by the "safe-job pull," where students will readily abandon entrepreneurial aspirations for the certainty of a steady salary.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are proffered:
Shift Pedagogical Focus: Higher education institutions must stop focusing Entrepreneurship Education solely on "inspiring" students or increasing Perceived Desirability. The desire is already present. Curricula must pivot entirely toward "Entrepreneurship *for* Execution," focusing on mitigating the fears that neutralize high PD (e.g., practical financial modeling, risk mitigation strategies, navigating local institutional voids, and understanding local taxation).

Address Cognitive Dissonance: Guidance counsellors and educators must directly address the "safe-job pull." This requires honest career counselling that helps students reconcile their desire for autonomy with the reality of early-stage venture fragility, rather than allowing students to harbour unrealistic, passive desires for entrepreneurship.

Policy Realignment: Policymakers must understand that high youth enthusiasm for entrepreneurship in surveys does not automatically translate to venture creation. Economic policies must focus not just on teaching entrepreneurship, but on creating micro-safety nets or graduate incubation programs that reduce the terror of absolute failure, thereby allowing genuine Perceived Desirability to solidify into actionable intention.

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