Paid work activity and entrepreneurial cognitions of students – evidence from European emerging economies

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate whether paid work activity (PWA) experience of students from five emerging economies is related to academic results and self-assessment of possessed entrepreneurial traits. Additionally, the authors verify the relationship between obtaining work experience and the willingness to start own business among students.

Design/methodology/approach – Participants included 3,631 students of the first level of higher education at six universities in five countries (Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine). A survey questionnaire was used which included questions on the previous work experience, paid work during university studies, the assessment of competencies related to entrepreneurship and the assessment of the desirability of entrepreneurship as a career choice.

Findings – Findings indicate that students who engaged in PWA before studies are more likely to do it during studies. PWA during studies is related to perceiving oneself as a worse-performing student, but also to the perception of oneself as an entrepreneurial person. No such relationship was found for the PWA experience before entering the university. It was also found that students are likely to start their businesses after obtaining work experience.

Practical implications – Practical implications pertain to the role of the contemporary academic institutions that should consider their approach to enabling students' PWA and teaching them how to engage in it for the benefit of their own and the societies to which they belong. It is argued that it may be particularly essential in emerging economies.

Originality/value – The correlates of PWA of students have been underexplored. This paper allows broadening the current understanding of this phenomenon. The authors investigated its relationship with feeling entrepreneurial and academic achievements among young people from five emerging economies, which provides valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions. It is argued that such insights may be particularly essential in emerging economies. Additionally, the authors contribute to advancing two theories that have not been extensively used in the entrepreneurial context: expectancy theory and social learning theory of career development.

Keywords Entrepreneurship, Emerging economies, Entrepreneurial education, Entrepreneurship in emerging economies, Work activity of students

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

Higher education institutions should seek to provide quality education to students for their successful preparation for future professional activity and to form harmoniously developed, personally mature and socially active individuals capable of ensuring the sustainable development of social systems. The formation of such qualitative traits of students can be ensured by the conditions created in universities, which allow combining different types of activity: study, research, social, work and others (Gayle and Lowe, 2007). Moreover, it is vital in emerging economies where the institutional context can be regarded as a source of barriers and potential opportunities for shaping the entrepreneurial mindset (Tracey and Phillips, 2011).

Students' paid work activity (PWA) has existed since the emergence of universities, acting as a source of improving students' financial situation, fulfilling their own needs and helping relatives. Students have also been motivated to work by the desire to implement knowledge in practice, expand the circle of communication and gain practical and social experience. Under current conditions, when educational services provided by universities are becoming more flexible in terms of the regulation of their temporal and spatial aspects and the labor market is undergoing a rapid transformation because of the increased influence of information and communication technologies, the necessity to make the combination of studies and PWA more accessible is even more pressing. The manifestation of the potential positive impact of the PWA on students lies in promoting their social integration, professional self-realization and expansion of opportunities for better capitalization of their potential (Määttä and Uusiautti, 2012). It can be particularly important in emerging economies where the necessity to obtain qualifications quickly may be especially pressing (Yiu and Lau, 2008).

Entrepreneurial potential embodied in highly educated young people is an integral part of the development of society. Therefore, university education is aimed at forming the business competence of students. The bearers of a business potential show the intention (plan, desire) to create a business organization. Ward *et al.* (2019) emphasize the variability of such intentions in different geopolitical structures. The level of prevalence and strength of entrepreneurial intentions determine the level of business development. As noted by Meoli *et al.* (2020), the study of the relationship between entrepreneurial intentions and business behavior has been gaining popularity in the scientific literature.

These arguments corroborate the relevance of the chosen research area – examining a relationship between PWA and students' entrepreneurial intentions in different countries. The authors identify consistent patterns based on the survey results conducted among students of leading technical universities in neighboring countries: Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Bulgaria and Lithuania. In addition to territorial proximity, the similarity between those countries is related to the fact that their higher education systems used to be focused on the formation of specialists without an entrepreneurial mindset when all these countries were a part of the communist bloc. Even though they differ in terms of size and the level of development, they can all be described as emerging economies. Results presented in the present paper were obtained within the Survey on Entrepreneurial Attitudes of Students (SEAS) project, which involves several collaborating universities from Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Bulgaria and Lithuania. The authors of the study aim to fulfill the following objectives:

- to investigate whether the PWA experience of students from five emerging economies, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Bulgaria and Lithuania, in the preuniversity period is related to paid employment during their studies, as well as to perceiving oneself as a well-performing student;
- to verify whether students' experience of PWA is related to assessing oneself as an entrepreneurial person; and

- to identify the relationship between obtaining work experience and the willingness to start own business among students in emerging countries.

Two acclaimed theories are used as a theoretical framework of the present paper: expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) and social learning theory of career development (Krumboltz, 1979). These theories have not been used so far extensively in the entrepreneurial context. We thus contribute to their advancement in the domain of entrepreneurship. Using acclaimed models allows us also to adopt a necessary focused approach.

2. Literature analysis, theoretical framework, problem statement

Several research works were devoted to studying the significance of the secondary employment of students. Hodgson and Spours (2001) examined a sample of UK students and found that 70–80% of those enrolled in full-time educational programs were engaged in PWA. Riggert *et al.* (2006) showed that in the mid-2000s, almost 50% of students worked in the USA, while in 1970, this proportion reached only 34%. Jach and Trolian (2020) argue that most undergraduate students participate in PWA, and a significant part of them begin during the first year of university studies. Rodionova (2012) stated that the PWA of students in Russia is widespread: it reached 62% and increased with the duration of studying at a higher education institution.

The motives for students' participation in PWA have changed over time (Creed *et al.*, 2015). Fedorenko (2014) argues that the purely pragmatic motive (to meet the needs of material existence) in the 21st century gave way to the desire to be independent of parents, obtain and manage own financial resources and expand the network of social contacts. For students planning their future careers, a more comprehensive social capital network influences their career intentions, including the possible choice to become an entrepreneur (Meoli *et al.*, 2020).

We use two acknowledged theories as the conceptual underpinning of the present paper: Vroom's expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) and Krumboltz's social learning theory of career development (Krumboltz, 1979). Both of these models have been used in the entrepreneurial context, but to a considerably limited extent. Calls have been made to involve these models to a greater extent in entrepreneurial research (Renko *et al.*, 2012).

Expectancy theory has been predominantly used within the context of organizations and the actions of their members (Van Eerde and Thierry, 1996). It attempts to explain behavioral choices made by people. In many cases, an individual can select among several different behaviors. Selecting one results in the reduced ability to engage in others. According to the theory, this selection is an effect of a reasoned process based on assessing expected outcomes' value. Three essential elements of motivation are distinguished within this theory: expectancy, instrumentality and valence. Expectancy is the conviction that given actions will allow achieving a desired performance level or goal. Instrumentality is defined as a belief that this achievement will lead to a greater reward, and valence is the value personally attached to this reward.

University students can either decide to focus entirely on their studies or choose to perform additional PWA. The latter is associated with certain rewards discussed in the present paper and with certain drawbacks related to devoting less time to studying. Most likely, those students who perceive these rewards as valuable enough to pursue them are likely to display a solid propensity to continue this activity. On the contrary, they may consider themselves as worse-performing students because their choice is likely to be associated with a smaller amount of time devoted to academic activities.

The second model used as a theoretical underpinning of the current paper is Krumboltz's (1979) social learning theory of career development. It proposes that people's selection of a given career path results from social learning. People observe others and themselves and make sense of their professional experiences. Engaging in additional paid activity apart

from studying allows students to gain additional exposure to people who run businesses. Furthermore, it helps to develop the skills and abilities necessary to deal with professional challenges and build a self-image of a person who can act effectively or even entrepreneurially. Both these aspects can facilitate the development of the conviction that one could establish own business in the future. According to Krumboltz (1979), such learning experiences are among crucial determinants of career development and conscious career choices.

One cannot disagree with the opinion of Henley (2007) that running own business should be considered a purposeful activity and a result of a conscious choice. Van Gelderen *et al.* (2008) noted that an integral aspect of such activity is a person's intention to search, identify and exploit a business opportunity. Thompson defines entrepreneurial intentions as:

> A self-acknowledged conviction by a person that they intend to set up a new business venture and consciously plan to do so at some point in the future. (Thompson, 2008, p. 676)

Students' entrepreneurial intentions are formed under the influence of various factors, including early career experience of paid work.

The context of emerging economies where the present study was conducted should also be highlighted. It is important to emphasize that these economies are heterogeneous, but to some extent, they face similar challenges (Chan and Mustafa, 2021). One of them is the lack of competent workplace competencies (Yiu and Lau, 2008). Students' inclination toward engaging in PWA may allow them to develop the skills that may later be useful in either paid work or after becoming an entrepreneur. Engaging in PWA thus builds their competitive advantage over their peers. We also know from other studies conducted in the context of emerging economies that it is often the case for young people to start their businesses after obtaining some professional experience somewhere else. It allows them to develop self-confidence, gather financial resources and feel more mature (Barbara and Li, 2014). There is thus a sound link between the experience of paid work and the possible willingness to make a conscious choice to pursue an entrepreneurial career. The link can be manifested in emerging economies.

The authors of the present article have found that despite the relevance and importance of interrelations between PWA and students' entrepreneurial intentions, this issue is still understudied. For example, there has been no study based on a survey of representatives of several countries, which would investigate the relationship between PWA and the self-assessment of entrepreneurial abilities. This prompted the authors to carry out an empirical study to fill an existing gap partially. The following hypotheses were formulated:

H1. Students who engaged in PWA before studies are more likely to do it during studies.

H2. Engaging in PWA during studies is related to perceiving oneself as a worse-performing student.

H3. Students with the PWA experience are more likely to feel entrepreneurial.

H4. Students are likely to start their businesses after obtaining work experience.

3. Methods and results

The analytical component of this study was performed based on the materials of the SEAS research project which has been running since 2009. In the present article, the authors present the results of the survey that was conducted in the spring of 2019. Participants included 3,631 students of the first level of higher education at six universities in five countries. Bulgaria was the only country represented by students of two universities.

The authors combined the survey data from those two universities into a single group of 205 Bulgarian respondents. This combination is explained, first, by the focus on identifying typical features in the answers of respondents who are the representatives of the analyzed countries, and, second, by the focus on reducing the frequency of the emergence of small values of the number of individual features in contingency tables. The number and percentage of respondents from each participating university are presented in Table 1.

To analyze the survey results, the authors used methods of analysis and visualization of the shares of aggregate elements, methods of data summarizing and grouping. The answers to the questionnaire items analyzed in the article were presented in the form of scales: dichotomous, nominal, Likert scale. The authors used a nonparametric relationship analysis method, which consisted of summarizing responses to alternatives. To assess the relationships between the respondents' alternative answers ("yes" and "no") to the individual questions of the survey, the authors used the method of analysis of a four-cell contingency table. Based on this table, the authors determined the indicators: the Pearson chi-square (χ^2) – to prove the significance of a relationship at a certain level of substantiality ($<p$); an odds ratio (OR), its lower ($OR_{L95\%}$) and upper limits ($OR_{U95\%}$) – to justify the influence of the factoring feature on the effective one with the probability of 95% of the content ($OR_{L95\%}\&OR_{U95\%}<1$ or $OR_{L95\%}\&OR_{U95\%}>1$); contingency ratio (K) – to identify the direction and strength of the influence of the factoring feature on the effective one:

$$\chi^2 = n\left[\sum_i \sum_j \frac{f_{ij}^2}{f_{i\sum} \cdot f_{\sum_j}} - 1\right] \tag{1}$$

$$\mathrm{K} = \frac{f_{11} \times f_{22} - f_{12} \times f_{21}}{\sqrt{f_{1\sum} \times f_{2\sum} \times f_{\sum_1} \times f_{\sum_2}}} \tag{2}$$

$$OR = \frac{f_{11} \times f_{22}}{f_{12} \times f_{21}} \tag{3}$$

$$OR_L = \exp\left(\ln(OR) - c_{\alpha/2} \times \sqrt{\frac{1}{f_{11}} + \frac{1}{f_{12}} + \frac{1}{f_{21}} + \frac{1}{f_{22}}}\right) \tag{4}$$

Respondents' characteristics	Gdansk University of Technology	Lviv Polytechnic National University	Riga Technical University	Sofia University	Technical University Sofia	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University
Sample size	1,029	746	372	140	65	1,279
University's share (%)	28.3	20.5	10.2	3.9	1.8	35.2
Country	Poland	Ukraine	Latvia	Bulgaria		Lithuania
Symbols of the sample in the country	GUT	LPNU	RTU	SU		VGTU
Country's share (%)	28.3	20.5	10.2	5.6		35.2

Table 1. Characteristics of the set of respondents

$$OR_U = \exp\left(\ln(OR) + c_{\alpha/2} \times \sqrt{\frac{1}{f_{11}} + \frac{1}{f_{12}} + \frac{1}{f_{21}} + \frac{1}{f_{22}}}\right) \quad (5)$$

where:

f_{ij} = is the frequency of the trait in the ith factor and jth resultant groups;
$f_{i\Sigma}\, i\, f_{\Sigma j}$ – = final frequencies by groups of factor and result characteristics;
n = is the volume.
$c_{\alpha/2}$ = is inverse to the standard normal distribution with a probability of $1 - \alpha/2$;
α – = level of significance.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had worked before they started studying. They were asked to select one of two answers (A = "No", or B = "Yes") (Figure 1). Sixty percent of the respondents chose the answer "B." This response was most common among GUT and RTU representatives (78% and 77%, respectively) and least common among VGTU representatives (47%).

To answer the survey question "Are you working now apart from studying?" participants could select one of four options: A – yes, I have a permanent job; B – yes, I work part-time/do an internship; C – yes, I have my own business; and D – no, I am not working (Figure 2). Fifty-five percent of the respondents chose the answer "D." In terms of the

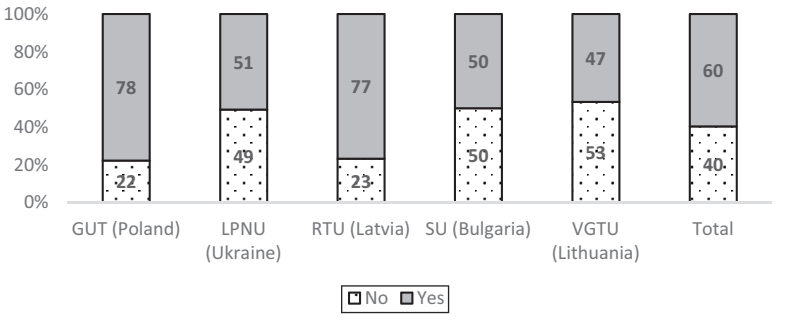
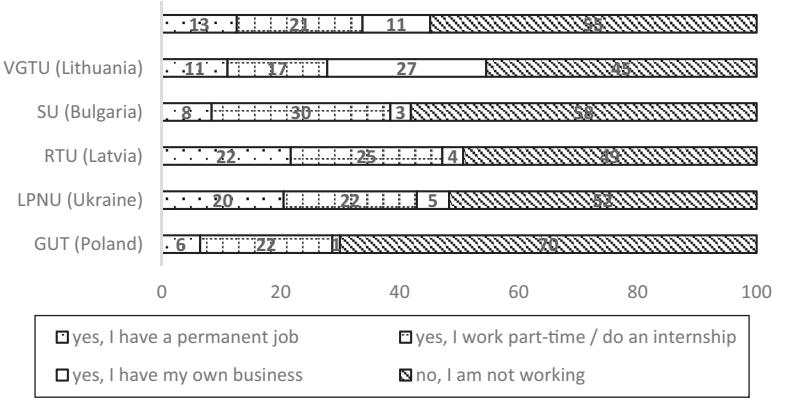


Figure 1.
Structure of the answers to the question "Had you worked before you started studying?" (in percentage)



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countries, this share ranged from 45% (Lithuania) to 70% (Poland). It can be asserted that there is already a significant number of students who are working while studying at the bachelor's level. After all, 45% of the respondents worked full time while studying. Forty-seven percent of the total number of working students worked part time or underwent an internship, 29% – had a permanent job, 24% – had their own business. More than 20% of the representatives of Ukraine and Latvia declared having a permanent job. It is noteworthy that 27% of the Lithuanian students indicated having their own businesses. Instead, the representatives of the other countries had a much lower share. It varied from 1% to 5%.

Reducing the answers to the survey question "Are you working now in addition to studying?" to two alternative options: yes ("A," "B" and "C" jointly) and no ("D") allowed building a four-cell table and exploring the relationship between having the PWA experience before and during university studies (Table 2). The calculated value of the Pearson's criterion ($\chi^2 > \chi^2(1)_{0.05} = 3.8$) for all the countries indicates the significance (nonrandomness) of this relationship. The value of the contingency ratio ($K > 0$) allows identifying the relationship direction as straight. Thus, it can be said that students who had PWA experience before studying at university tended to combine studying at university and PWA. Based on the values of an OR, its lower and upper limits ($OR_{L95\%}$ i $OR_{U95\%}$), which are calculated according to the processing of an entire array of respondents' answers, the authors can assess that the chances of working while studying are 50% higher for those students who worked before studying at university. The moderate influence of the preuniversity employment experience on the tendency to work while studying at university can be traced to the results of the analysis of the representatives' answers from Poland, Ukraine, Latvia and a relatively strong relationship of the representatives of Bulgaria. The probability that students in these countries will work while studying is several times higher if they have experience in PWA before studying at a university. Therefore, *H1* received confirmation.

The authors also focused on finding out whether student employment affects their performance. To answer the survey question "Does the statement 'I have always been, and I am a good student' describe you well?" five possible answers were provided: A – no; B – rather not; C – undecided; D – rather yes; and E – yes (Figure 3). The least frequently selected answer was A. The modal and median value by the set of countries was answer "D." Latvia, where the median value fell on answer "B," and Lithuania, where the modal value fell on answer "A" were the exceptions. The sum of shares of positive answers ("D" and "E") exceeded the sum of shares of negative answers ("A" and "B") by 11.4 times in GUT; by 4.8 times in LPNU; by 1.8 times in RTU; by 4.2 times in SU; by 13.2 times in VGTU; and by 7.1 times in Total. This excess serves as an indicator of students' propensity to assess their academic success positively.

The results of the analysis of the contingency table, formed on the basis of reducing the answers of all the respondents to the questions "Does the statement 'I have always been, and

Table 2. Assessing the relationship between employment before and during university studies

Indicators	GUT (Poland)	LPNU (Ukraine)	RTU (Latvia)	SU (Bulgaria)	VGTU (Lithuania)	Total
OR	4.226	2.929	3.662	7.795	1.093	1.595
$OR_{L95\%}$	2.739	2.169	2.148	4.079	0.875	1.393
$OR_{U95\%}$	6.520	3.954	6.242	14.897	1.365	1.827
K	0.217	0.262	0.257	0.463	0.022	0.113
χ^2	47.963	50.420	24.387	42.635	0.609	45.651
p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.435	0.000

I am a good student' describe you well?" and "Are you currently working in addition to studying?" to two alternative options: "no" and "yes" (Table 3) indicate a negative relationship between the features ($K < 0$). The authors can say with the probability of 95% that the chances of assessing oneself as a good student are much lower for students who combine work and study. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of the representatives' answers from Ukraine and Lithuania. Therefore, *H2* also received confirmation.

Developing individual interest in new venture creation is vital to the economy, especially in emerging countries where entrepreneurial activities are fundamental in enhancing economic growth (Villegas Mateos and Amorós, 2019). Therefore, the authors focused a separate part of research on assessing the degree of students' self-perception as entrepreneurial individuals. Five possible answers were offered to answer the survey question "Do you feel like an entrepreneurial person?": A – no; B – rather not; C– undecided; D – rather yes; and E – yes (Figure 4). In general, according to the set of respondents and in each country, except Latvia, the modal value fell on the answer "D." The representatives of Latvia most often chose the neutral answer "E." The sum of shares by positive assessments ("D" and "E") exceeded the sum of shares by negative assessments ("A" and "B") : by 2.8 times in GUT; by 5.6 times in LPNU; by 1.6 times in RTU; by 2.7 times in SU; by 8.1 times in VGTU; and by 4.4 times in Total. This relationship between positive and negative assessments indicates students' propensity to position themselves as entrepreneurial people. A similar scale (A – no; B – probably not; C– undecided; D– rather yes; E – yes) was used to obtain answers to the question "Entrepreneurship is the best career choice for me." None of the respondents chose answers "C," "D" and "E." Ninety percent fell on answer "B," 10% – on answer "A." Even though students may consider themselves entrepreneurial, they do not necessarily see entrepreneurship as the best career choice.

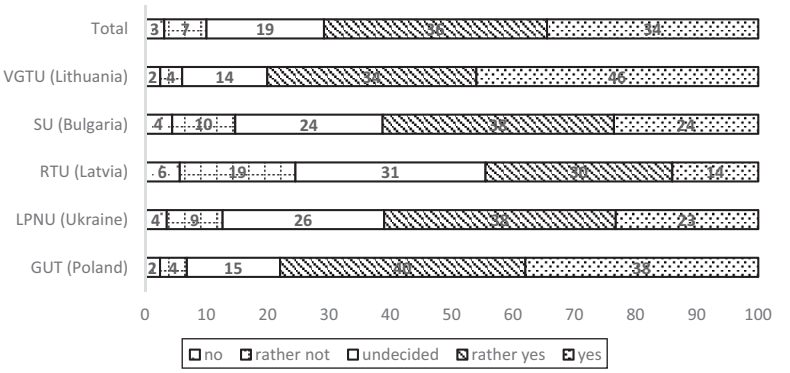

Figure 3.
Structure of the answers to the question "Does the statement 'I have always been, and I am a good student" describe you well?" (in percentage)

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Indicators	GUT (Poland)	LPNU (Ukraine)	RTU (Latvia)	SU (Bulgaria)	VGTU (Lithuania)	Total
OR	0.611	0.363	1.186	0.457	0.238	0.505
$OR_{L95\%}$	0.369	0.226	0.708	0.202	0.131	0.403
$OR_{U95\%}$	1.013	0.582	1.986	1.036	0.431	0.633
K	−0.065	−0.186	0.041	−0.153	−0.156	−0.112

Reducing the respondents' answers to the question "Do you feel like an entrepreneurial person?" to two alternative options: no ("A" and "B") and yes ("D" and "E") allowed investigating the existence and the direction of the relationship between the experience of PWA (both: before and during university studies) and the assessment of entrepreneurial traits (Table 4). In the general population, no statistically significant relationship was found between PWA experience before studying and the assessment of oneself as an entrepreneurial person. However, such a relationship appeared in the analysis of the distribution of responses from Poland, Ukraine and Bulgaria.

Additionally, the results obtained from the analysis of all the questionnaires indicate the relationship between the experience of PWA during university studies and the assessment of one's entrepreneurial traits. Here, these results harmonize with a proposition that early work experience can contribute to the development of entrepreneurial intentions (Loli *et al.*,

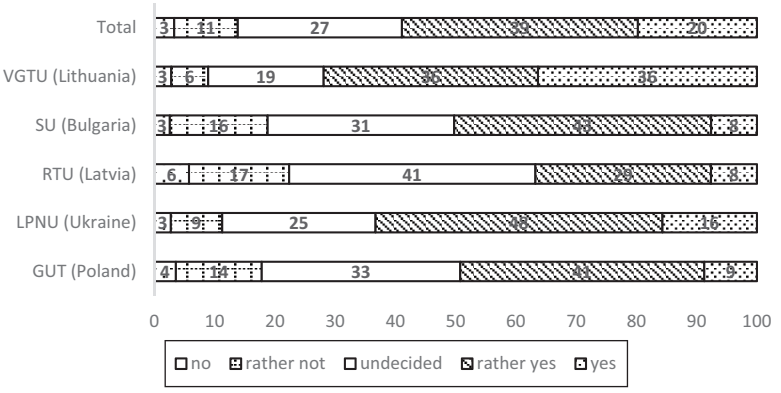

Figure 4. Structure of the answers to the question "Do you feel like an entrepreneurial person?" (in percentage).

Factor	Indicators	GUT (Poland)	LPNU (Ukraine)	RTU (Latvia)	SU (Bulgaria)	VGTU (Lithuania)	Total
PWA experience before studying	OR	2.127	2.098	1.655	2.900	0.845	1.063
	$OR_{L95\%}$	1.428	1.294	0.876	1.301	0.570	0.872
	$OR_{U95\%}$	3.169	3.403	3.126	6.464	1.252	1.296
	K	0.144	0.130	0.106	0.229	−0.026	0.012
	χ^2	14.154	9.289	2.437	7.052	0.709	0.369
	p	0.000	0.002	0.118	0.008	0.400	0.544
PWA experience while studying	OR	2.251	1.580	1.232	2.813	0.717	1.525
	$OR_{L95\%}$	1.507	0.979	0.709	1.231	0.480	1.249
	$OR_{U95\%}$	3.362	2.549	2.139	6.428	1.072	1.863
	K	0.155	0.081	0.050	0.215	−0.051	0.082
	χ^2	16.190	3.554	0.547	6.262	2.652	17.245
	p	0.000	0.059	0.460	0.012	0.103	0.000
PWA experience	OR	2.135	1.798	1.659	3.819	0.569	1.111
	$OR_{L95\%}$	1.434	1.107	0.795	1.751	0.344	0.897
	$OR_{U95\%}$	3.179	2.919	3.462	8.331	0.940	1.377
	K	0.121	0.103	0.085	0.293	−0.080	0.019
	χ^2	14.432	5.727	1.843	12.017	4.938	0.935
	p	0.000	0.017	0.175	0.001	0.026	0.334

Table 4. Assessing the relationship between PWA experience and the awareness of entrepreneurial traits

2010). Students who combine work and studying are 1.5 times more likely to assess themselves as entrepreneurial.

When choosing PWA experience (either before university or during the studying process) as a factor of influence, the calculated value of the Pearson test ($\chi^2 < \chi^2(1)_{0.05} = 3.8$) for all the countries was below the critical level, and $OR_{L95\%} < 1 < OR_{U95\%}$. So, according to the obtained set of responses, it cannot be said that students who have work experience are generally more confident that they possess entrepreneurial traits. The positive relationship of PWA with entrepreneurial intentions is visible for work experience obtained during studies and not for general work experience obtained at any point in life. According to Pino *et al.* (2014), PWA experience does not directly affect entrepreneurial intentions but acts indirectly through other factors. It seems that this relationship is much more complex and is moderated by other factors, such as the time when the experience takes place and, most likely, sociocultural aspects. Overall, *H2* should be considered as partially supported.

A separate part of the research concerned the assessment of students' intentions to start their own business. When answering the survey question "Are you going to start your own business?" students most often chose the answer (D – I do not reject this option). The rate of exceeding the sum of shares by affirmative answers (A – I have already had a business, B – yes, in the next three years and C – yes, but first I will gain professional experience) over the negative answer (E – no) varied from 2.2 times (VGTU) to 12.6 times (LPNU). These data do not differ significantly from the Global Student Entrepreneurial Spirit Students Survey, which was coordinated by the Swiss University of St. Gallen in 2018 and covered 54 countries (Sieger *et al.*, 2019). According to this study, the average share of students in all the countries who would prefer an entrepreneurial career five years after graduation was about 35%, and in the near future – 9%. According to the authors study, the same value was obtained by the sum of answers "B" and "C." This indicates the tendency of students to realize their entrepreneurial potential in the future. Hence, *H4* can be considered supported.

The assessment of the influence of the factor of the entrepreneurial trait awareness (based on the processing of the answer to the question "Do you feel like an entrepreneurial person?") on entrepreneurial intentions according to the analysis of all the responses revealed a direct and significant relationship. The chances of aiming to start their own business are almost six times higher for those students who assess themselves as entrepreneurial.

The survey found that about half (51%) of the respondents said that their parents did not own a business. The minimum share of such answers among the representatives of Lithuania was 23%. About 60% of such answers were from the representatives of Poland and Latvia, over 75% from Ukraine and Bulgaria. The analysis of the obtained responses revealed a surprising relationship: students whose families owned a business were more likely to declare that they would not start their own business in the future. A similar conclusion is proved by the indicators of the analysis of the distribution of responses from Lithuania, where there is the highest share of having a family-run business (77%). Such results, which contradict the conclusions presented in the Global Student Entrepreneurship 2018 (Sieger *et al.*, 2019) can be explained by a much higher share of parents' business in the authors' study: 49% versus 24%. Thus, the straight direction of the statistically significant relationship was revealed on the basis of the analysis of the distributions of responses from Ukraine and Latvia, where the share of a family-run business was 24.7% and 38.8%, respectively. The students are more likely to start their businesses in these countries if they have a family business. This factor can thus serve as a significant moderator of the investigated relationships and, at the same time, as an interesting area of further research.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to partially fulfill the gap related to the lack of research spanning several countries, which would investigate the relationship between PWA and the self-assessment of entrepreneurial abilities. In the course of the empirical study of the PWA experience, based on the survey of 3,631 students from five emerging economies (Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, Bulgaria and Lithuania), the authors have drawn the following conclusions:

- Most students have experience in PWA: in the preuniversity period, it was indicated by 60% of the students, in the period of study at university – by 45% of them. Only 47% of working students had a part-time job or underwent internships. Having the PWA experience before entering university encourages students to combine learning and PWA while studying at university. This kind of activity is likely to enhance competencies required in the context of emerging economies' labor market (Yiu and Lau, 2008).
- Working students are less likely to position themselves as well-performing. The negative relationship between PWA and performance can be explained by a significant share of junior students among the surveyed, who often work out of their profession. Additionally, working students are more time-constrained and may prioritize gaining professional experience over obtaining high grades. It may be important to investigate this relationship further and verify whether it is related to, for example, the necessity to work (Mounsey *et al.*, 2013) or with gender differences (Pirtskhalaishvili *et al.*, 2021). The obtained results are in line with scientists' findings of the possible Janus effect of PWA on student achievement (Makarenko and Pershina, 2017; Fedorenko, 2014). Students who work outside of their specialization risk lower performance (Hrynkevych, 2016).
- The relationship between PWA and assessing oneself as an entrepreneurial person was only partially confirmed. Performing paid work during studies was positively related to feeling entrepreneurial, but such experience obtained before entering the university was not. Therefore, it may be cautiously proposed that only after young people become considerably more mature and are exposed to academic education, such positive effects of PWA take place. This result indicates that higher education plays an important role in shaping the entrepreneurial potential of its applicants.
- The last objective of the study referred to verifying when students are likely to start their own businesses. They often want to gain professional experience and begin pursuing an entrepreneurial career later. This result goes in line with previous findings obtained in the context of emerging economies (Barbara and Li, 2014). It can also be proposed that those students who decide to engage in PWA before and during studies may at the same time speed up the process of developing entrepreneurial intentions and be ready to take such a step earlier in their lifetime than peers who do not do it.

5. Implications and conclusions

There are several important conclusions and implications of the present study. A critical approach requires to, first of all, present implications for theory. We believe that the present paper advances the current understanding of the specificity of PWA and its correlates. It also presents PWA in the context of entrepreneurship and emerging economies. We propose that it also contributes to the development of two models used as a theoretical framework, i.e. expectancy theory and social learning theory of career development. Both these models

have been studied extensively, but to a much lesser extent in the context of entrepreneurship.

Previous research on expectancy theory involved empirical tests regarding the motivational force behind a choice of certain activities (Renko *et al.*, 2012). We have shown that choosing to engage in PWA in the past is related to a greater propensity to continue such behavior. We believe that an important reason behind it is that, as proposed by the expectancy theory, the value of rewards associated with this activity is high enough, even if related limitations were considered. We also found support for the hypothesis suggesting that a choice of being engaged in PWA is related to perceiving oneself as a worse student.

This finding is in line with some previous results (Salamonson *et al.*, 2019), but overall it has received mixed support. For example, Makarenko and Pershina (2017) found that those construction and civil engineering students from one Ukrainian university, who worked in construction on part-time employment terms, had higher academic achievements. This finding may be explained by the fact that students working in the specialty area consolidate theoretical knowledge of professional disciplines in practice. The congruence between the field of study and activities performed at work seems to be a significant moderator of the discussed relationship. If students do not work in their specialty, their academic performance worsens (Makarenko and Pershina, 2017). PWA promotes a change of students' priorities in favor of valuing personal income, material and financial independence and at the same time is likely to put their academic success at risk (Hrynkevych, 2016). but it requires further investigation. There may be several important moderators that could be verified in future research (including the field of studies, the level of studies, individual skills or predispositions).

The second theory used in the article as a framework was the social learning theory of career development (Krumboltz, 1979). This model states that social learning is the basis of career choices. Krumboltz proposed that learning experiences, observing oneself and others and skills development belong to factors affecting career path selection. Students who engage in PWA and study simultaneously are likely to advance qualities that are helpful in the process of running one's own company, such as problem-solving competencies or the ability to manage different requirements. Additionally, they may be likely to observe and collaborate with business owners. Previous research confirms that early career experiences of working in the business are positively related to developing entrepreneurial intentions (Bignotti and Le Roux, 2020). According to the authors of the Global Student Entrepreneurship report from 2018, students' entrepreneurial intentions are positively influenced by their experience in startups as employees (Sieger *et al.*, 2019). Also, on the example of one university, a relationship was demonstrated between the level of students' assessment of their entrepreneurial abilities and paid work experience (Chukhray *et al.*, 2021).

It may also be the case that engaging in PWA and developing the willingness to establish one's own business is at least partly related to individual characteristics. Possessed traits or stable convictions may prompt students to gain additional experience through paid work during studying and be likely to start their ventures later. Traits are also considered one of the important social career factors in the Krumbolz's model and previous research indicated their importance in the entrepreneurial context. For example, a study conducted by Córcoles-Muñoz *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that students with higher needs for achievement and internal *locus* of control have stronger intentions to become entrepreneurs.

The present study also has practical implications for academic institutions that might (re-)consider their approach to student engagement in PWA. On the one hand, contemporary universities understand the importance of obtaining the necessary skills useful on the labor

market (Gawrycka *et al.*, 2020). On the other, there is a somewhat mixed approach to PWA also at the institutions represented by the authors of the present article. Some academic teachers understand or even encourage students' engagement in this type of activity. In contrast, others believe that it distracts students and hinders their ability to devote themselves to studying and the ability to achieve learning outcomes established in the program of studies. Both these approaches seem sensible as PWA brings positive results, but excessive engagement in paid work puts students at risk of reduced academic performance or even dropout (Salamonson *et al.*, 2019). It is also related to perceiving oneself as a worse-performing student, as indicated by the present study. Universities can develop policies and even pieces of training that will help students control and manage the volume of PWA.

Because the results of current study indicate some positive correlates of PWA (considering oneself as more entrepreneurial and holding an increased conviction that one will become an entrepreneur), academic institutions might also consider collaboration with external stakeholders – large companies and local businesses. Facilitating the process of connecting those who need employees to solve particular problems with young people (students) who are interested in finding employment within their specialization might be an essential role of an academic institution. In particular, it might be important among those institutions that operate in emerging economies where both early developed skills and entrepreneurial approach and activity are needed. At the same time, potential negative results of being engaged in PWA should be mitigated by at least raising awareness toward them. We hope that this conclusion of the present study might be valuable to academic institutions.

6. Study limitations

The present study is not without limitations. Even though the sample is quite large, the number of representatives of each country differs. Because only students were recruited as research participants, findings cannot be generalized to the entire society. Additionally, the measures used in the study are not perfect. The authors of the survey put a lot of effort into making the questions as straightforward as possible, and to demonstrate it, the content of the questions was also reported in the present paper. Nevertheless, this limitation also needs to be pointed out. Additionally, only general assumptions of employed theoretical frameworks were used. It will be beneficial to use a more detailed approach in further studies and test more specific predictions stemming from the selected models.

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