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A Qualitative Study of Mindset, Self-Efficacy, and Students' Interest in Local Food Product Development

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ABSTRACT

Local food resources offer students a basis for entrepreneurship, yet their availability does not ensure that students become interested in turning them into products. This qualitative case study explored how entrepreneurship education, digital awareness, entrepreneurial mindset, self-efficacy, and perceived opportunity shape students' interest in local food product development within the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Entrepreneurship Program. Data came from semi-structured interviews with 20 students and three focus group discussions with 25 students at universities in Jombang and Kediri, East Java, Indonesia, and were analyzed through thematic analysis. Five themes were identified. Experiential entrepreneurship education supported the formation of an entrepreneurial mindset. Digital awareness served as a starting resource that needed practice before it became capability. Entrepreneurial mindset appeared central to interest, and self-efficacy appeared to link mindset to interest. Perceived opportunity was widely shared among students and did not lead to stronger interest when capital, market access, and support were lacking. Interpreted through social cognitive theory, the findings separate awareness, entrepreneurial orientation, and perceived capability, and they suggest that access to resources shapes how opportunities are acted upon. The study suggests that entrepreneurship education should move from an awareness-oriented approach toward a capability- and action-oriented approach that combines mindset development, supervised digital practice, and access to start-up support.

Keywords: Digital Awareness, Entrepreneurial Mindset, Entrepreneurship Education, Local Food Product Development, Self-Efficacy

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia holds a wide range of local food commodities, including cassava, corn, and tropical fruits, that can be processed into products with higher economic value. The availability of these resources does not, however, guarantee that young people will treat them as a basis for a business. Developing a local food product requires students who can notice a market opening, use digital tools to learn about consumers, and believe that they are able to carry an idea through to a working venture. Understanding how these personal and contextual conditions come together is therefore a practical concern for entrepreneurship education, especially in study programs where graduates are expected to create jobs instead of only looking for them.

Entrepreneurship education is widely regarded as a means of building the capabilities and intentions that lead students toward business creation. Studies conducted with Indonesian

university students indicate that entrepreneurship education is linked to entrepreneurial intention through the growth of an entrepreneurial mindset and self-efficacy (Ganefri et al., 2024; Prawesti & Cahya, 2024). Wardana et al. (2020) similarly reported that entrepreneurship education shaped students' entrepreneurial mindset, with attitude and self-efficacy acting as intervening factors. Evidence from vocational students points in the same direction, since digital competencies were found to relate to entrepreneurial intention through entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial mindset (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy allows students to spend part of their study period, up to three semesters, in learning activities outside their home study program, and the Entrepreneurship Program is one of the pathways available under this arrangement (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). The program is built around experiential learning in which students work on real business projects with the guidance of mentors and partners. Evaluations of MBKM have so far dealt mainly with general implementation and perceived benefits (Nadeak, 2023), and little is known about how its entrepreneurship activities shape students' interest in a particular sector such as local food.

Digital technology has changed how young people search for information, read consumer demand, communicate with customers, and promote products. In this study, digital awareness refers to students' awareness of digital developments, information, opportunities, and risks that can support entrepreneurial activity. Research on digital competencies shows that digital capability is associated with entrepreneurial intention (Bachmann et al., 2024), although the relationship appears to depend on the confidence students have in their own entrepreneurial ability and on their mindset (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2025). Knowing that digital platforms exist therefore seems to be a different matter from feeling able to use them for a business, and this difference is central to the present study.

Social cognitive theory offers a useful way to interpret these observations. The theory describes human functioning as the product of reciprocal interaction among personal factors, behavior, and the environment, and it places self-efficacy among the internal processes that influence the activities people choose, the effort they invest, and how long they persist (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). From this view, information about digital tools and markets forms part of the environment that students encounter, while mindset and self-efficacy are personal factors that influence whether such information is turned into action. Experiential learning in the MBKM program adds a behavioral element, because students test ideas and receive feedback on them.

Within this framework, four constructs are examined alongside entrepreneurship education. Digital awareness is treated as an informational resource. Entrepreneurial mindset refers to an orientation toward recognizing opportunities, taking initiative, experimenting, tolerating uncertainty, and learning from failure. Self-efficacy is understood as students' belief in their capability to perform entrepreneurial and digital tasks, and it is explored as a psychological mechanism through which awareness and mindset may be translated into interest. Perceived opportunity refers to students' judgment that workable entrepreneurial opportunities exist in their surroundings. Opportunity recognition has been linked to entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention in earlier work (Otache et al., 2024), yet whether perceiving an opportunity changes how students respond to their own awareness and mindset has received little attention. The theoretical background of each construct is elaborated in the literature review that follows.

Earlier studies have examined these constructs largely in isolation and mostly through survey-based quantitative designs. Ganefri et al. (2024) investigated entrepreneurial mindset,

digital literacy, and self-efficacy in relation to entrepreneurial intention among university students. Otache et al. (2024) tested self-efficacy, alertness, and opportunity recognition as mechanisms linking entrepreneurship education to intention, and Sutiadiningsih et al. (2025) examined digital competencies through self-efficacy and mindset among vocational students. These contributions concentrate on general entrepreneurial intention or digital entrepreneurship, so the specific case of interest in local food product development, which involves local raw materials, product trials, and market access, remains underexplored. Statistical models can also show that variables are related, but they say little about how students themselves describe the move from awareness to capability, or why a perceived opportunity may or may not lead to action. A qualitative approach is well suited to uncovering these accounts, and few studies appear to bring the constructs together in a single qualitative explanation.

This study addresses that gap by exploring how entrepreneurship education, digital awareness, and entrepreneurial mindset shape students' interest in local food product development within the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program in Jombang and Kediri, East Java. Self-efficacy is examined as a psychological mechanism and perceived opportunity as a contextual factor. The study contributes to entrepreneurship education research by presenting students' own experiences, barriers, and supporting conditions in a setting that has received little qualitative attention, and its findings are intended to inform how experiential entrepreneurship programs are designed.

Five research questions guided the inquiry. The first asked how entrepreneurship education contributes to the development of an entrepreneurial mindset among students in the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program, and the second asked how digital awareness features in their interest in developing local food products. The third examined how entrepreneurial mindset shapes that interest. The fourth explored how self-efficacy functions as a psychological mechanism in the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and students' interest, and the fifth considered what role perceived opportunity plays in students' accounts of that interest.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore how entrepreneurship education, digital awareness, entrepreneurial mindset, self-efficacy, and perceived opportunity relate to students' interest in local food product development. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study sought students' own accounts of their experiences and the meanings, they attach to entrepreneurship education and local food product development. A case study design suited this aim because it allows a contemporary phenomenon to be examined in its real-life setting (Priya, 2021). The case was the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program at universities in Jombang and Kediri, East Java, Indonesia, which was selected because the program offers students experiential entrepreneurship learning as part of a national initiative.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling because the study required students with direct experience of entrepreneurship-oriented learning in the MBKM program. Students were eligible if they were active university students in the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program, had taken part in the program for at least one semester, and agreed voluntarily to participate. Twenty students took part in semi-structured interviews, and 25 students took part in three focus group discussions (FGDs). The participants came from a range of study programs, with the largest share from food, agriculture, and animal science. The number of

participants was guided by data saturation, and data collection ended when no new themes emerged from the interviews and FGDs (Guest et al., 2020).

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were held in person at places convenient for the participants. An interview guide drawn from the conceptual framework and research questions covered six areas, namely experiences of entrepreneurship education in the MBKM program, awareness and use of digital technologies for entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurial mindset and approach to opportunities, confidence in using digital technologies, perceptions of available entrepreneurial opportunities, and interest in developing local food products. The three FGDs, each with eight or nine participants, ran for 90 to 120 minutes and were facilitated by the researchers using a discussion guide. They gave participants the chance to compare experiences, discuss barriers and enabling conditions, and reflect together on the factors that shape their interest in local food product development. All interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and transcribed verbatim.

The transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis, following the six-phase approach to reflexive thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2021). The researchers first became familiar with the data by reading the transcripts repeatedly and listening to the recordings. They then generated initial codes across the dataset, grouped the codes into candidate themes, and reviewed these themes against the coded extracts and the full dataset. The final themes were defined and named, and the report was written by selecting illustrative extracts and relating them to the research questions and the literature. NVivo software was used to organize and manage the data. Two researchers independently coded a subset of the transcripts, and differences in coding were discussed until they were resolved by consensus.

The trustworthiness of the findings was addressed through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Johnson et al., 2020). Credibility was supported by prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of interview and FGD data, and member checking, in which preliminary findings were shared with selected participants. Transferability was supported by thick description of the research context and the participants. Dependability rested on an audit trail of research procedures and analytic decisions, and confirmability on a reflexive journal and discussion of interpretations with colleagues to limit researcher bias.

The study followed ethical principles for research with human participants, and approval was obtained from the institutional review board of the authors' university. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and they gave written informed consent. Anonymity was protected through the use of codes and pseudonyms in the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

The analysis of the interviews and FGDs produced five themes. They describe how experiential entrepreneurship education shaped an entrepreneurial mindset, how digital awareness served as a resource that needed practice, how mindset and self-efficacy appeared to underlie interest in local food product development, and how perceiving opportunities differed from acting on them. Participants are identified by code, gender, and study program, and extracts from the

FGDs are labeled as FGD participants. The punctuation of the extracts was lightly edited for readability.

THEME 1: EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

Participants described the MBKM program as shaping how they think about entrepreneurship mainly through direct involvement. Hands-on projects, business simulations, problem-based tasks on the local food system, and work with local food businesses were the activities they linked to a stronger orientation toward opportunities, creativity, risk, and resilience. P05 (female, Food Science student) contrasted this with learning from textbooks.

> "In the MBKM program, we don't just learn about entrepreneurship from textbooks. We actually work on developing a food product, testing it with consumers, and learning from failure. This experience changes how you think. You become more alert to opportunities and more willing to try new things."

Mentorship also mattered. P08 (female, Food Technology student) said that "working with local food entrepreneurs in the program opened my eyes to the possibilities," and added that her mentor helped her "understand how to evaluate opportunities and think about business viability." An FGD participant described a change in attitude toward risk.

> "The program encourages us to try things and not be afraid of failing. We learned that entrepreneurs don't get it right the first time, they iterate. This has changed my attitude toward risk."

Together these accounts link mindset development to three features of the program, namely real tasks with consequences, mentors who showed how opportunities are judged, and room to fail and revise. The accounts were not uniform, however. P02 (Theme 3) said that she had looked at local ingredients as opportunities before joining the program. This suggests that the program reinforced and directed an existing orientation for some students and helped form it for others.

THEME 2: DIGITAL AWARENESS AS A RESOURCE THAT NEEDS PRACTICE

Participants knew about the digital tools relevant to local food products, including social media for promotion, e-commerce platforms for selling, and online sources for market research. They nevertheless separated knowing about these tools from using them. P03 (female, Food Science student) explained the difference.

> "I know that I can use Instagram to promote local food products, or use TikTok to create engaging content that attracts customers... But knowing about these platforms is different from being able to use them effectively for my business. I need more practice and experience to feel confident in using these tools strategically."

For many, the change came from doing the work. An FGD participant said that the most valuable part of the program was creating social media content for their food products and testing it with real audiences, and added, "That's when awareness became capability." Some

participants described barriers to this change. P09 (female, Food Technology student) pointed to limited chances to practice and to the need for more structured guidance.

> "I know that digital marketing is important for food businesses, but I don't have enough opportunities to practice... Awareness is not enough. I need to build confidence through practice."

In these accounts digital awareness was a starting point and not a driver of interest in itself. Movement toward capability depended on practice, feedback, access to tools, and mentoring in digital entrepreneurship.

THEME 3: ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET AS CENTRAL TO INTEREST IN LOCAL FOOD PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Participants who described a strong opportunity orientation also expressed the clearest interest in developing local food products. They described local ingredients as raw material for new products, and they treated production and market difficulties as problems to solve. P02 (female, Food Science student) described this view.

> "I see local food ingredients like cassava, corn, and local fruits as opportunities waiting to be developed... This is how I've always thought, even before the MBKM program. But the program helped me channel this orientation into concrete ideas and actions."

P07 (female, Food Technology student) described how the same orientation helped her stay with the work.

> "Developing local food products is not easy. There are challenges with shelf life, packaging, market acceptance, and competition. But my entrepreneurial mindset keeps me motivated. I see these challenges as problems to solve, not reasons to give up."

P11 (male, Agriculture student) likewise said that he looks for opportunities and sees local food as a space where he can create value, and an FGD participant said that students with this orientation look for ways to create value instead of waiting for opportunities to come to them. Across these accounts, mindset gave students a reason to engage with local food products and a way to keep engaging when the work became difficult.

THEME 4: SELF-EFFICACY AS THE LINK BETWEEN MINDSET AND INTEREST

Participants separated having a mindset from believing that they could carry an idea out. P04 (female, Food Science student) said that her interest rested on both.

> "I have an entrepreneurial mindset. I'm always looking for opportunities and thinking about how to create value. But what really makes me interested in developing local food products is my confidence that I can actually do it. I know how to use digital platforms for market research, how to create content, how to promote products online. This confidence makes the idea of developing a local food product feel realistic, not just a dream."

P14 (male, Agriculture student) similarly said that without confidence in his digital skills he would have the mindset but not the means to act. Participants also described confidence as something that grew through the program. P06 (female, Food Technology student) recalled her early doubts.

> "At first, I wasn't confident. I didn't know if I could create effective content or run a social media campaign. But through practice and feedback, I developed confidence in my digital capabilities."

An FGD participant put it briefly, saying that confidence "makes the difference between just being interested in the idea and actually wanting to do something about it." These accounts suggest that mindset supplied the direction and self-efficacy made product development feel feasible, and that self-efficacy was built through practice and feedback and was not a fixed trait.

THEME 5: PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITY AS A DISTAL FACTOR AND THE GAP BETWEEN SEEING AND ACTING

Participants recognized many opportunities in local food, including growing demand for local and sustainable food, government support, and consumer interest in traditional products. They did not see this recognition as a reason for stronger interest. P10 (female, Food Science student) explained why.

> "I see many opportunities in local food products. There's growing demand for local, sustainable food, and the government is supporting local food development. But just knowing that these opportunities exist doesn't automatically make me more interested or more likely to pursue them. There are other factors, like whether I have the resources, the skills, the support, that matter more."

P18 (male, Agriculture student) described the gap between seeing and acting.

> "I might see a market opportunity for a new local food product, but if I don't have the capital, the equipment, the market access, or the confidence to develop and sell it, my interest doesn't necessarily increase. The opportunity is there, but the barriers are also there."

P16 (male, Animal Science student) added that without capital, distribution channels, or a clear way to begin, the opportunity felt distant and not actionable. P13 (female, Food Technology student) said that her interest came more from her own mindset and confidence than from the environment, since many other people see the same opportunities. An FGD participant said that exposure to market gaps and government support did not raise interest by itself, and that mindset, confidence, and practical support made the difference. Opportunity perception was widely shared among participants, so it did not distinguish students who were keen to act from those who were not. What differed were the resources, confidence, and support available for acting on what they saw.

DISCUSSION

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND THE FORMATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

The findings suggest that the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program shaped students' mindset mainly through the way it was designed. Participants tied the change to real product work, mentors who modeled how to judge opportunities, and a setting in which failure was treated as part of learning. This agrees with Wardana et al. (2020), who reported that entrepreneurship education shaped students' entrepreneurial mindset with attitude and self-efficacy acting as intervening factors. It also agrees with Taneja et al. (2024), who found that experiential learning was related to entrepreneurial intention and that entrepreneurial self-efficacy strengthened this relationship. The present study adds a qualitative account of the program features students themselves connected to these changes. It also adds some variation, since one participant already held an opportunity-seeking orientation before joining. Programs may therefore work through reinforcement and direction as well as formation, a pattern that survey studies such as Ganefri et al. (2024) are less able to show.

Social cognitive theory offers a way to read these accounts. Students acted on real tasks, received responses from mentors and consumers, and revised their beliefs about risk and failure, which reflects the reciprocal interaction among personal factors, behavior, and environment that the theory describes (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET, SELF-EFFICACY, AND DIGITAL AWARENESS

Participants described mindset as giving direction to their interest and self-efficacy as making action seem feasible. This resembles the finding of Ganefri et al. (2024) that self-efficacy has a favorable influence on the link between entrepreneurial mindset and the desire to become an entrepreneur. The participants' accounts add that confidence was built through practice and feedback inside the program, which presents self-efficacy as something an educational program can develop. The accounts also show mindset applied to a specific product setting. Students treated shelf life, packaging, and competition as problems to solve, which general studies of entrepreneurial intention do not capture.

The accounts of digital awareness fit research that links digital capability to entrepreneurial development through self-efficacy and mindset. Sutiadiningsih et al. (2025) found that digital competencies were related to entrepreneurial intention through entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial mindset, and Ratnaningtyas et al. (2025) reported that digital literacy did not directly influence entrepreneurial intention without self-efficacy. Bachmann et al. (2024) likewise link digital competencies to entrepreneurial intention. One possible reading of the present findings is that competence, which involves practice, relates to intention in survey studies, while awareness of digital tools, as participants described it, was too thin a basis for interest until it was used. This reading would need testing in later work.

PERCEIVED OPPORTUNITY AND THE GAP BETWEEN SEEING AND ACTING

Otache et al. (2024) found that opportunity recognition was one of the mechanisms linking entrepreneurship education to entrepreneurial intention. The participants here recognized opportunities readily but did not describe this recognition as raising their interest unless they also had resources, skills, and support. Several explanations are possible. Opportunity recognition may count for less in a program that regularly shows students market gaps, so that nearly everyone sees them. The difference may also come from the designs, since a survey measures how strongly opportunities are recognized while interviews show what students say about acting on them. In either case, the accounts support a distinction between recognizing an opportunity and being able to pursue it. Within social cognitive theory, an opportunity in the

environment shapes behavior only when it is joined by beliefs about one's own capability and by access to the means for acting (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). The barriers participants named, which were capital, equipment, distribution, and uncertainty about where to begin, lie largely outside a student's control, so programs may need to address them as well as individual confidence.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study points to three contributions for social cognitive theory in student entrepreneurship. First, participants' accounts place self-efficacy between mindset and interest and describe it as built through practice and feedback, which fits the theory's emphasis on mastery experience. Second, the accounts separate three things that studies often combine, namely awareness of digital opportunities, an entrepreneurial orientation, and perceived capability. Awareness appeared as an informational resource, while orientation and capability were closer to interest. Third, the findings suggest that the environmental side of the theory may need to be understood as access to resources and support as well as perception of opportunity. As the study is qualitative, these are proposed explanations drawn from students' accounts, and they would need testing with other designs before being treated as established.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest several changes for MBKM entrepreneurship programs and for local food product development in particular. Activities can be built around local food challenges, with repeated cycles of prototyping, testing with consumers, receiving feedback, and revising, since these cycles were what participants linked to changes in mindset and confidence. Digital learning can include supervised practice, such as producing content for a real product, running a small online sales trial, and reviewing the results with a mentor, because information about platforms alone did not turn into confidence. Exposure to market opportunities can be paired with access to the means for acting on them, for example shared production facilities, small start-up funds, links to local food producers, and help with distribution. Mentors drawn from local food businesses can show students how opportunities are judged and how setbacks are handled. Taken together, these changes would move the program from an awareness-oriented approach toward a capability- and action-oriented approach.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that should be kept in mind when reading its findings. The first concerns the scope of the sample. The participants were students in the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program in Jombang and Kediri, East Java, and the themes reflect their experiences in that setting. Although data collection continued until no new themes emerged, the sample was small, and students in other regions, institutions, or entrepreneurship programs may describe their experiences differently. Future research could compare programs across regions and institutions, and it could draw on larger and more varied groups of students, including those from study programs outside food, agriculture, and animal science.

The second limitation concerns the data. The findings rest on what students said in interviews and FGDs, and these accounts may be affected by social desirability or by imperfect recall. Participants may have described themselves in a favorable light or may not have remembered their earlier views accurately. The study also looked at participants at one point in time, so it cannot show how mindset, confidence, and interest change as students move through the program. Future studies could combine interviews with observation of students'

entrepreneurial activities and with documents such as business plans and reflection journals. Longitudinal designs would allow researchers to follow the same students over the course of the program.

The third limitation concerns the focus of the study. It examined a specific set of constructs, namely entrepreneurship education, digital awareness, entrepreneurial mindset, self-efficacy, and perceived opportunity. Other factors that may shape students' interest in local food product development, such as institutional support, access to resources, family background, and cultural influences, were not explored in depth. Because the study is qualitative, the relationships it describes are explanations drawn from students' accounts, and they have not been tested for strength or generality. Future research could add these factors to the framework and could use quantitative or mixed-methods designs to test the proposed explanations.

The fourth limitation is that the study examined interest and did not follow students into action. Interest is an important step toward entrepreneurship, but it does not guarantee that students will start a venture. Future work could follow students after the program to see whether their interest in local food product development leads to prototypes, trial sales, or new businesses, and which resources and forms of support help or hinder that step.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how entrepreneurship education, digital awareness, entrepreneurial mindset, self-efficacy, and perceived opportunity shape students' interest in local food product development within the MBKM Entrepreneurship Program. The students' accounts indicate that the program helped build an entrepreneurial mindset through real product work, mentoring, and room to learn from failure. Mindset gave students a reason to engage with local food products, and self-efficacy made product development seem feasible. Digital awareness remained a starting point until students practiced with digital tools, and perceiving opportunities did not lead to stronger interest when capital, market access, and support were missing.

For social cognitive theory, the findings suggest that self-efficacy links an entrepreneurial orientation to interest and that it grows through practice and feedback. They also separate awareness of digital opportunities, entrepreneurial orientation, and perceived capability, which play different parts in the movement from knowledge toward interest. In addition, they indicate that the environment matters through access to resources and support as well as through the perception of opportunity. Because the study is qualitative, these points are explanations drawn from students' accounts and call for further testing.

For practice, the findings suggest that MBKM entrepreneurship programs would gain from repeated cycles of prototyping and consumer testing around local food products, supervised digital practice, and mentoring from local food entrepreneurs. Exposure to opportunities is more useful when it is joined by access to start-up resources and distribution. A program built in this way would shift from an awareness-oriented approach toward a capability- and action-oriented approach, which gives students a better chance of turning local food resources into products.

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