
Immediate Environment and Its Influence on Entrepreneurship of Generation Z Representatives

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the study was to analyze the role of the environment in shaping entrepreneurial attitudes among Generation Z representatives. An attempt was made to address the question of whether decisions regarding future business activities are influenced by the immediate environment, including family and friends. Furthermore, a hypothesis was proposed that the sector of parental professional activity significantly impacts their children's career plans.

Design/methodology/approach: The research method used was a survey conducted using a questionnaire developed by the authors of the current study. The study was carried out on a group of students from disciplines within the field of sports sciences, including students of physical education, sport, tourism and recreation, and personal training. The research was conducted at John Paul II University in Biala Podlaska and at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Biala Podlaska, Poland.

Findings: The study revealed that more than half of Generation Z representatives consider starting their own business, with the vast majority preferring micro-enterprises (50.4%). Both work experience and the presence of entrepreneurs in their immediate environment had a significant impact on higher self-assessment of entrepreneurial abilities and soft skills. Students rated their communication and problem-solving skills the highest, while their practical knowledge of starting a business was rated the lowest.

Practical implications: The research results indicate low self-assessment of practical knowledge related to starting a business. It seems beneficial to introduce practical courses and workshops on business registration procedures. Universities should support entrepreneurial development through business incubators, mentoring programs, and collaboration with experienced entrepreneurs. Given the growing interest in the health sector, universities should adapt their curricula to meet the needs of this dynamically evolving market.

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Originality / Value: *This study stands out as it provides new insights into the entrepreneurial attitudes of Generation Z in the context of sports-related fields. The findings can be used to design educational programs and develop tools that support entrepreneurship among students.*

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, business activity, Generation Z.*

JEL codes: *I15, P12, I23.*

Paper type: *Research article.*

1. Introduction

When analyzing the definition of entrepreneurship, it is essential to start with the fundamental economic category of economic resources, which include natural resources, land (its surface, atmosphere, waters, plants, minerals, etc.), human resources (education, skills, qualifications, etc.), capital (machines, equipment, buildings, structures, etc.), technology and entrepreneurship (PWN).

Therefore, entrepreneurship should be seen as a timeless socio-economic phenomenon, whose development creates opportunities for the growth of all economies. The concept of entrepreneurship is interdisciplinary, as it is the subject of research and interest in many scientific fields. It can be analyzed as an attitude, behavior, and process.

According to Piecuch, attitude encompasses personality traits, qualifications, predispositions, skills, and knowledge on a given topic. It influences an entrepreneur's behavior, activity, and willingness to act. Entrepreneurship as behavior refers to an individual's activity, where they utilize their personality traits, respond to environmental conditions, and take advantage of available opportunities. Finally, entrepreneurship as a process, as defined by Piecuch, involves the actual creation of new ventures. These three elements – attitude, behavior, and process – are interconnected and form a unified whole (Piecuch, 2010).

In this context, it should be noted that entrepreneurship is inherently linked to human activity and has always existed, regardless of the era in which people lived or the economic system in place.

Entrepreneurship cannot exist without entrepreneurs. The term "entrepreneur" originates from the French word *entreprendre* (13th century), which meant "to undertake or do something" (Oxford Encyclopaedia). The development of entrepreneurship is directly linked to people and successive generations. The future of these generations depends on the education and development of young individuals

who are now entering the educational system and labor market, commonly referred to as Generation Z.

In the literature on the subject, various classifications of generational groups can be found. These classifications are distinguished primarily to analyze attitudes and consumer behaviors. Among the numerous classifications presented in the literature, one particularly worth mentioning is the classification proposed by Howe and Strauss in 2007 (Howe and Strauss, 2007):

- The GI Generation (born 1901-1924) – this generation built the post-war welfare society, was highly engaged in civic life, and, according to researchers, focused more on actions and behavior than on values and beliefs.
- The Silent Generation (1925-1942) – members of this generation became leading American civil rights activists, rock and roll musicians, anti-war leaders, feminists, and public interest lawyers.
- The Boom Generation (1943-1960) – in the 1970s, women from the baby boom generation began challenging the glass ceiling in the workplace. In the 1980s, many baby boomers transformed into individualistic yuppies.
- Generation X (1961-1981).
- The Millennial Generation (1982 – approx. 2005).
- The Homeland Generation (approx. 2005-2025).

Based on analyses of several other researchers, Hysa identified the following generational groups, which are largely similar to those proposed by Howe and Strauss (Hysa, 2016):

- The Silent Generation – born between 1922 and 1944, also known as the builders of modern Europe.
- Baby Boomers – born between 1945 and 1964, referred to as the generation of demographic and economic boom.
- Generation X – born between 1965 and 1980, who grew up during the economic crisis of the 1970s.
- Generation Y (also known as Millennials) – born between 1981 and 1994, raised in the era of globalization and widespread Internet access.

Focusing on generations that are active in the labor market, Stopczyńska presents the following classification (Stopczyńska, 2021):

- The Silent Generation – this generation consists of people born between 1922 and 1944, often referred to as the builders of modern Europe. It is characterized by a strong belief that hard work determines one's ability to earn a living, and career progression is the result of experience and performance.
- Baby Boomers – this generation includes those born between 1945 and 1964 (also known as the generation of demographic and economic boom). When characterizing this generation, it is important to highlight the following

aspects: a higher level of wealth compared to their parents and an increase in consumerism. In the current economic reality, they are a group compelled to acquire new skills, including technological ones.

- Generation X – this generation, consisting of people born between 1965 and 1980, grew up during an economic crisis. The differences between Generation X and Baby Boomers include the fact that this was the first generation for whom work was not the primary focus of life. Individuals from Generation X seek intellectual development opportunities rather than concentrating on accumulating wealth.
- Generation Y (also known as Millennials) – individuals born between 1981 and 1994, whose adolescence coincided with market globalization and widespread Internet access. This generation has experienced the effects of high unemployment and economic instability.
- Generation Z (often referred to as iGeneration, digital natives, or digital X) – people born after 1995, for whom the Internet is a natural environment. They are highly proficient in new technologies, and social media platforms are a natural space where they spend their time.

2. Theoretical Aspect of the Research

Generation Z is the subject of interdisciplinary research due to the fact that it currently represents a large group – 6.1 million people (GUS), of whom 2.5 million are adults. They are shaping or will soon shape various markets, including the market for goods and services, the capital market, and the labor market.

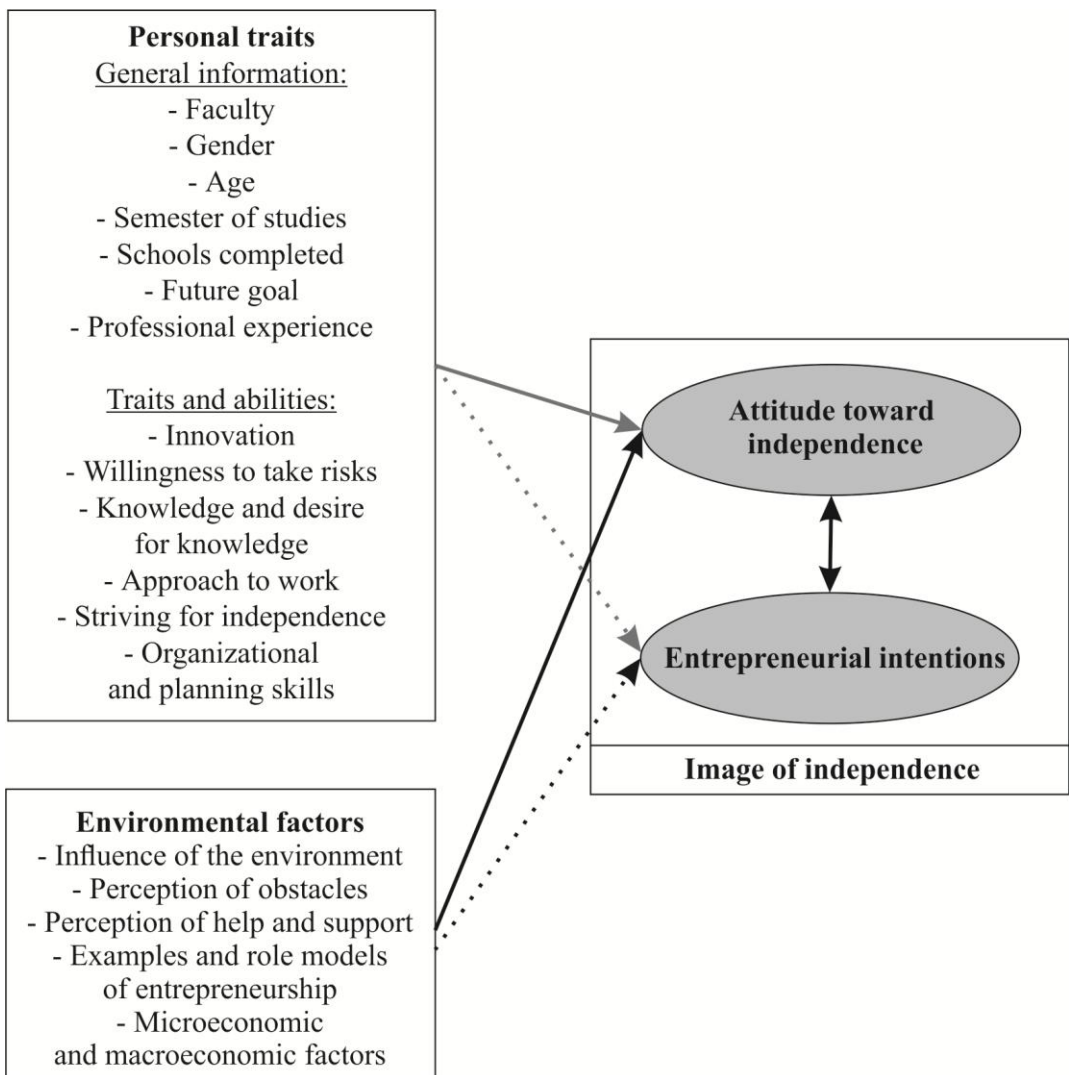
Research on the entrepreneurial attitudes of various socio-economic groups helps identify the determinants that shape these attitudes. A community of particular significance in this context is students who are part of Generation Z. They form a group that, over time, through their professional activities, may utilize their personality traits, acquired skills that enhance creativity, and entrepreneurial attitudes.

Among the numerous studies, aspects such as students' individual personality traits influencing the formation of entrepreneurial attitudes (Eider *et al.*, 2012; Adeel *et al.*, 2023), social skills (Bieńkowska-Gołasa and Krzyżanowska, 2023) and competencies (Chlebiej, 2022) are considered. Another area of research on student entrepreneurship focuses on identifying factors that facilitate entrepreneurship among young people (Dick-Sagoe *et al.*, 2023).

At the same time, efforts are being made to identify instruments that support the development of entrepreneurship among students (Passavanti *et al.*, 2023).

Higher education institutions, as promoters of behavioral change, can significantly influence and stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives among young people through educational programs (da Costa and Miragaia, 2024).

Figure 1. Determinants of entrepreneurial intentions – GI Model



Source: Peters et al. 2006.

Studying the level of entrepreneurial competencies among students is highly necessary for both societal and economic reasons (Malik *et al.*, 2023); however, it requires the development of modern research tools (Kłobukowski and Glinka, 2022).

This challenge is undertaken by successive groups of researchers, as the design of these tools depends on the specific characteristics of the student groups being studied, as well as the disciplines and fields in which they expand their competencies and acquire knowledge.

3. Research Methodology

Entrepreneurship is a driving force of economic development, both for individual sectors and the economy as a whole. A particularly important aspect is the entrepreneurship of young individuals representing Generation Z. The research problem raised in this article concerns Generation Z students in the field of sports sciences. An attempt was made to understand the determinants of entrepreneurship development in the sports sector, with a particular focus on the young individual's immediate environment.

This study was conducted as part of the project “Entrepreneurial Intentions of Sports Science Students – Cross-Sectional Study 2022-2024” funded by John Paul II University in Biala Podlaska (PB/16/2022).

The survey research was conducted using a questionnaire developed by the authors of the current study. It included students from the following fields of study: physical education, sport, tourism and recreation, and personal training. The research was carried out at John Paul II University in Biala Podlaska and at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport in Biala Podlaska, Poland. The survey was conducted twice. In 2022, it covered students beginning their education at B.A and M.A. levels. In the following year (2023), it included second-year B.A. and M.A. students. In subsequent years, the study involved the same research sample. The sample selection was purposive:

- The inclusion criteria were:
 - consent to participate in the study,
 - enrollment in a program within the field of sports science.
- The exclusion criteria were:
 - lack of consent to participate in the study,
 - Enrollment in a program outside the field of sports science.

The obtained database was verified. The analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 26.0 with the Exact Tests module. Quantitative variables were presented using descriptive statistics: mean, median, and standard deviation. In statistical analyses for questions constructed on nominal scales, the Chi-square test for independence was applied. To determine the strength of the correlation, coefficients based on the Phi test and Cramer's V were used.

The Phi coefficient also indicates the direction of the correlation (positive or negative), while the dependent variable was measured on a quantitative scale and the independent variable on a qualitative scale. When the assumptions for parametric tests were not met, non-parametric tests were used: the Mann-Whitney U test (for two samples) and the Kruskal-Wallis test (for more than two samples).

Additional tests, particularly relevant for small sample sizes, were conducted using the Monte Carlo method. Correlations between ordinal or quantitative variables (when parametric test assumptions were not met) were assessed using Spearman's rho coefficient, which provides information on the strength and direction of the correlation (positive or negative).

The obtained values range from -1 to 1 , where (-1) indicates a perfect negative correlation and (1) a perfect positive correlation (Górniak and Wachnicki, 2008). Statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

4. Analysis of Research Results

4.1 Characteristics of the Study Group

The study conducted in 2022 and 2023 included 262 respondents, with 136 participants in the first year. The vast majority of the study participants were B.A. students (three-year programs), with 81 and 59 individuals in 2022 and 2023, respectively. The second largest group consisted of participants who were long-cycle M.A. students (five-year programs) – 81 individuals (Table 1).

Table 1. *Structure of the study group – level of studies*

Specification			Year		Total
			2022	2023	
What program are you studying?	B.A. studies (3 years)	N	81	59	140
		%	59.6%	46.8%	53.4%
	M. A. studies (2 years)	N	27	14	41
		%	19.9%	11.1%	15.6%
	Long-cycle M.A. studies (5 years)	N	28	53	81
		%	20.6%	42.1%	30.9%
Total		N	136	126	262
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: *Analysis based on research findings.*

The analysis of the structure of students participating in the study, taking into account the demographic variable of gender, indicates a balanced distribution (Table 2).

Table 2. *Structure of the study group – gender*

Specification			Year		Total
			2022	2023	
Gender	Female	N	70	67	137
		%	51.5%	53.2%	52.3%
	Male	N	66	59	125
		%	48.5%	46.8%	47.7%
Total		N	136	126	262

		%	100,0%	100.0%	100.0%
Phi	-0.017	0.076 ^a	1	0.783	0.805
coefficient	value	Chi-square	df	p	exact p-value

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

In both 2022 and 2023, women slightly dominated; however, the distribution of this variable was not significantly dependent on the type of the study group ($p > 0.05$).

4.2 Entrepreneurship

Thinking about becoming an entrepreneur is one of the initial indicators of possessing the necessary conditions for running a business. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which is the most commonly adopted framework for studying students' motivation toward entrepreneurship, an individual's intention is a prerequisite for starting a business (Passavanti *et al.*, 2023).

The Theory of Planned Behavior includes three factors that determine intention. The first is the attitude toward the behavior and refers to the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question. The second is a social factor called the subjective norm; it refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. The third is the degree of perceived behavioral control, which refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior and is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated obstacles (Ajzen, 1991, p. 183).

At the early stage of a professional career, i.e., during higher education, the proportion of students considering this form of career development is significant. Among the surveyed students, nearly 54% stated that they had seriously thought or were seriously thinking about becoming an entrepreneur.

Table 3. Opinions of the surveyed students regarding plans to start a business

					Total
			2022	2023	
Have you ever seriously thought of becoming an entrepreneur?	Yes	N	71	70	141
		%	52.2%	55.6%	53.8%
	No	N	65	56	121
		%	47.8%	44.4%	46.2%
Total		N	136	126	262
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Phi	-0.034	0.295 ^a	1	0.587	0.621
coefficient	value	Chi-square	df	p	exact p-value

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

It is also worth noting that no statistically significant differences were observed in opinions on this matter across the individual years of the educational process ($p > 0.05$). The obtained results do not differ significantly from the findings of other researchers, who found that approx. 40-50% of surveyed students associated their future career paths with running their own business.

These findings come from the study conducted among students of Rzeszów University of Technology (Wyrwa and Sołtysiak, 2016), the 2017 nationwide survey of students (Bernat and Barwińska-Małajowicz, 2018), and the 2017 study at the Pedagogical University of Kraków (Czyżewska, 2018).

The business activity considered by the surveyed students may encompass a variety of areas. Currently, the market for sports and health services is highly developed. Respondents were asked to indicate their interest in sectors they might engage in if they were to run their own business. They could choose from the following areas: health, recreation, fitness, sports events, and others.

The analysis of the research results revealed that respondents in 2023, more often than those in 2022, believed that if they were to run a business, they would be more likely to engage in the Health sector and less likely in Recreation, Fitness, or Other sectors. The correlation coefficient is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and indicates slight strength of correlation (Cramer's $V = 0.198$).

Table 4. *Students' opinions on plans related to a potential business sector*

			Year		Total
			2022	2023	
If you were to run a company, which sector would you choose? Please tick one option only	Health	N	40	58	98
		%	29.4%	46.0%	37.4%
	Recreation	N	32	24	56
		%	23.5%	19.0%	21.4%
	Fitness	N	23	17	40
		%	16.9%	13.5%	15.3%
	Sports events	N	21	19	40
		%	15.4%	15.1%	15.3%
	Other	N	20	8	28
		%	14.7%	6.3%	10.7%
Total		N	136	126	262
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Cramer's V	0.198	10.225 ^a	4	0.037	0.036 ^b
coefficient	value	Chi-square	df	p	p Monte Carlo

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

In 2022, only 29.4% of the respondents indicated the health sector as a potential area for future business activity, while in 2023 this figure increased to 46%. When it comes

to sports events as a type of activity that could be carried out within businesses opened by the respondents, the percentage remained unchanged at 15%.

It is worth attempting to identify the factors that may have contributed to such a significant shift in the perception of the importance and feasibility of running a business in the health services sector. One possible factor is the growing awareness and knowledge of the development of the medical services market, not only in Poland but also globally.

According to the latest PMR report “Private Healthcare Market in Poland 2024,” the value of the Polish private medical services market increased by nearly PLN 4.5 billion compared to 2023 (PMR Market Express, 2024).

Combined with the fact that in 2029, the post-working-age population (retired individuals) will make up 25% of Poland's population, it is clear that services in this area will become an increasingly essential consumer demand.

In addition to questions about the planned business sector, respondents were also asked about the size of the company they would like to establish, defined by the number of employees.

Table 5. *Planned company size for intended business activity*

			Year		Total
			2022	2023	
What company size would you like to achieve (number of employees)?	Self-employed (no employees)	N	18	22	40
		%	13.2%	17.5%	15.3%
	Micro (up to 10 employees)	N	65	67	132
		%	47.8%	53.2%	50.4%
	Small (10 to 50 employees)	N	32	26	58
		%	23.5%	20.6%	22.1%
	Medium (50 to 250 employees)	N	11	6	17
		%	8.1%	4.8%	6.5%
Large (more than 250 employees)	N	10	5	15	
	%	7.4%	4.0%	5.7%	
Total		N	136	126	262
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Cramer's V	0.121	3,812 ^a	4	0.432	0,440 ^b
coefficient	value	Chi-square	df	p	p Monte Carlo

Source: *Analysis based on research findings.*

There was no statistically significant correlation between the responses given in the respective years. In both cases, the most interest was shown in micro-enterprises employing up to 10 people – 47.8% in 2022 and 53.2% in 2023 – followed by small enterprises, at 23.5% and 20.6%, respectively.

Students showed a clearly stronger preference for self-employment (mean score⁶: 5.04; standard deviation: 1.79) over running a business that involves employing others (mean score: 4.72; standard deviation: 1.97).

4.3 Entrepreneurship and Social Environment

The literature of the subject indicates a range of diverse factors influencing entrepreneurship. Among them are psychological, cultural, and social determinants (Majkut, 2021). The environment plays a significant role, as certain entrepreneurial traits are acquired through the process of socialization, which begins within the family and household setting.

When looking at our immediate environment, we can refer not only to family, but also to friends and neighbors. These are individuals or groups who influence us from an early age, shaping our attitudes and behaviors.

Considering the responses of the surveyed students regarding their thoughts about starting a business in the future, a hypothesis was formulated that one's environment influences such decisions.

To verify this relationship, an analysis of two variables was conducted: the willingness to start a business and the presence of an entrepreneur or business owner in the respondent's close social circle. Research findings from 2022 and 2023 revealed a statistically significant correlation between positive entrepreneurial intentions and having someone in the immediate environment who owns a business ($p < 0.001$).

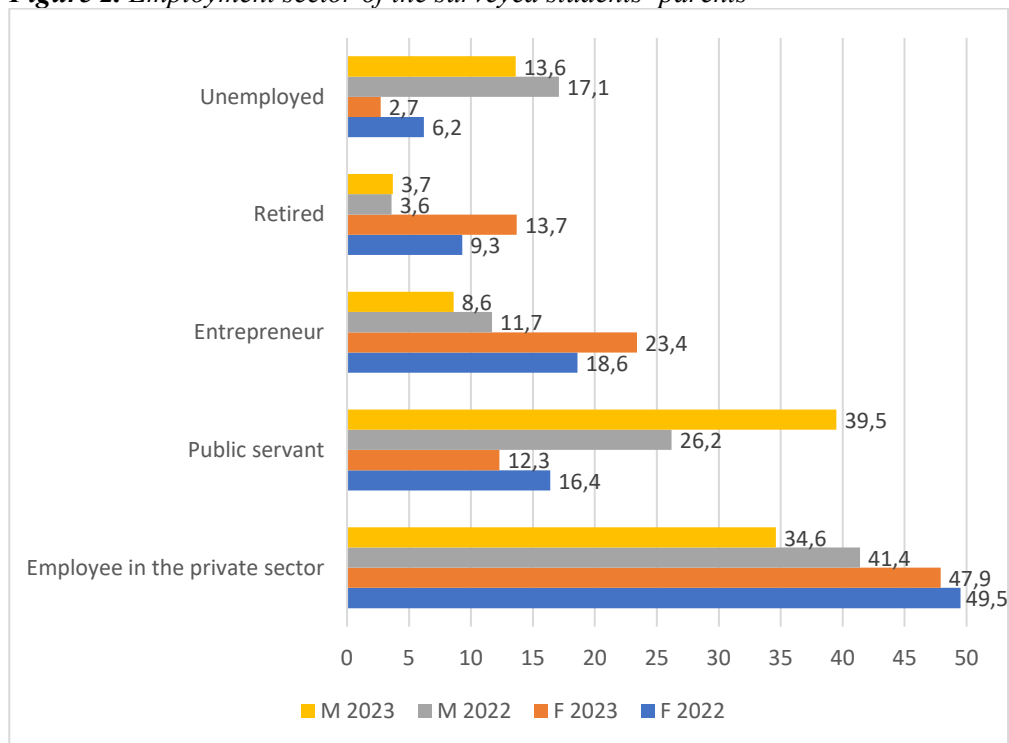
This relationship shows notable strength of correlation (Cramer's $V = 0.412$ for 2022; Cramer's $V = 0.366$ for 2023). This means that individuals who have entrepreneurs among close relatives or friends are significantly more likely to consider a career path related to running their own business.

A significantly smaller role in shaping students' future considerations regarding starting their own business is played by the professional status of their parents. Among the surveyed students, the vast majority of parents – both fathers and mothers – are employed in the private sector.

Over the one-year period between the two waves of research, a noticeable decrease in private sector employment among parents was observed. However, there was a significant increase in public sector employment among the respondents' mothers (from 26.2% in 2022 to 39.5% in 2023).

⁶The assessment was made on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated low preference and 7 indicated high preference.

Figure 2. *Employment sector of the surveyed students' parents*



Notes: *M – mothers, F – fathers.*

Source: *Analysis based on research findings.*

When analyzing the entrepreneurial activity of the surveyed students' parents, a decrease in the number of mothers running their own businesses can be observed – from 11.7% in 2022 to 8.6% in 2023. In the case of fathers, however, there was an increase of nearly five percentage points over the same period.

A statistically significant correlation between students' consideration of starting a business and their parents' occupational activity was observed only in the case of the father's employment sector in 2022 ($p = 0.023$; Cramer's $V = 0.342$, indicating clear strength of correlation). The hypothesis that the professional sector of parents has an influence on their children's career plans was only partially confirmed.

Entrepreneurial activity as well as thinking about career opportunities aligned with such a path often stem from one's self-assessment and evaluation of their entrepreneurial abilities. These included six practical areas, as shown in Table 6 below. Respondents assessed their entrepreneurial abilities by responding to specific statements on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 7 meant "strongly agree."

Table 6. Respondents' opinions regarding the assessment of their own entrepreneurial abilities

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your entrepreneurial abilities? Rate them from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree):	Year							Total				
	2022			2023								
	Mean	Median	N	Standard dev.	Mean	Median	N	Standard dev.	Mean	Median	N	Standard dev.
It would be easy for me to start a new business and keep it working	3.43	3.00	136	1.96	3.20	3.00	126	1.82	3.32	3.00	262	1.89
I'm prepared to start a viable business	2.91	3.00	136	1.85	2.79	2.00	126	1.82	2.85	3.00	262	1.83
I can manage the process of developing a new business	3.17	3.00	136	1.92	3.03	3.00	126	1.88	3.10	3.00	262	1.89
I know the necessary practical details to start a new business	2.78	2.00	136	1.80	2.86	2.50	126	1.85	2.82	2.00	262	1.82
I know how to develop an entrepreneurial project	3.00	3.00	136	1.91	2.87	2.00	126	1.85	2.94	3.00	262	1.87
If I tried to start a business, I would have a good chance of succeeding	3.48	3.00	136	1.99	3.37	3.00	126	1.82	3.43	3.00	262	1.91

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

The surveyed respondents rated two areas the highest: the ease of starting a new business and maintaining it on the market, as well as the likelihood of achieving success when attempting to establish a company.

The lowest-rated area was knowledge of the procedures related to starting a new business. The average rating in 2022 was 2.78 (standard deviation 1.80), while in 2023 it dropped to 2.50 (standard deviation 1.85).

An alarming phenomenon is that, as a result of the educational process – through courses and classes taken – respondents, instead of increasing their self-assessment of skills, reported lower ratings in several areas.

This raises the question of what lies behind such a distribution of results: is it due to growing awareness of the complexity of starting and running a business, or perhaps due to the structure and content of the education system itself?

The analyses conducted allow for the conclusion that the professional experience in the field of entrepreneurship held by the surveyed students influences their self-assessment and their opinions regarding their entrepreneurial abilities.

The results obtained after one year of education (data for 2023) indicated that, in all six categories, there was a statistically significant correlation between self-assessment and the presence or absence of prior experience.

Table 7. *To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your entrepreneurial abilities? Rate them from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)*

Year – 2023 Have you got any work experience? Choose one of the following answers		It would be easy for me to start a new business and keep it working	I'm prepared to start a viable business	I can manage the process of developing a new business	I know the necessary practical details to start a new business	I know how to develop an entrepreneurial project	If I tried to start a business, I would have a good chance of succeeding
Yes	Mean	3.58	3.25	3.45	3.28	3.31	3.71
	Median	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00
	Mean rank	71.49	70.61	70.66	70.83	70.78	69.75
	N	65	65	65	65	65	65
	Standard deviation	1.82	2.07	2.05	2.02	2.05	1.97
No	Mean	2.79	2.31	2.59	2.41	2.41	3.02
	Median	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00
	Mean rank	54.98	55.93	55.87	55.69	55.74	56.84
	N	61	61	61	61	61	61
	Standard deviation	1.75	1.37	1.56	1.55	1.48	1.59
Total	Mean	3.20	2.79	3.03	2.86	2.87	3.37
	Median	3.00	2.00	3.00	2.50	2.00	3.00
	N	126	126	126	126	126	126
	Standard deviation	1.82	1.82	1.88	1.85	1.85	1.82
Mann-Whitney U		1463.000	1520.500	1517.000	1506.000	1509.000	1576.000
p		0.010	0.020	0.020	0.017	0.018	0.044
p (Monte Carlo)		0,012b	0.020b	0.021b	0.017b	0.019b	0.048b

Source: *Analysis based on research findings.*

Respondents with professional experience rated their entrepreneurial abilities much higher compared to their peers who did not report such experience. An analysis of the results reveals that these differences were significant. It can therefore be assumed that any form of professional activity and experience contributes to an improvement in self-assessment and entrepreneurial abilities.

Equally important is living in an environment surrounded by individuals engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Statistically significant correlations were observed in this context as well. In all analyzed self-assessments of entrepreneurial abilities, respondents who had relatives or friends running a business rated their competencies higher. Only minor differences were observed between the individual years of the study. In the first year, respondents with entrepreneurial relatives rated their entrepreneurial competencies higher than other groups.

In the following year, however, the presence of entrepreneurial friends proved to be the key factor influencing self-assessment (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Mean self-assessment of entrepreneurial abilities by year and presence of entrepreneurs in the respondents' environment



Source: Analysis based on research findings.

The perception of one's abilities to develop the foundations of an entrepreneurial mindset may be shaped by parental creativity and professional status, which at certain stages of a young person's life form the basis of their personal development. The conducted research did not indicate any statistically significant correlations between the professional activity of the mother or father and the respondents' self-assessment of their entrepreneurial abilities. However, it is worth noting that respondents whose parents were self-employed rated their competencies slightly higher.

In summary, the analyses suggest that direct exposure to individuals engaged in business activity – representatives of the entrepreneurial community – has an influence on the self-assessment of entrepreneurial abilities.

The perception of oneself as an entrepreneur is supported by a range of abilities that create the conditions necessary for being entrepreneurial and, eventually, becoming an entrepreneur. These include a variety of soft skills, which contribute, among other things, to a sense of self-worth. Among the abilities assessed by the respondents were creativity, leadership, communication, networking, and relationship-building skills.

These were evaluated on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicated “no ability” and 7 indicated “very strong ability.”

Table 8. Respondents' self-assessment of soft skills

Do you think you have a satisfactory level of the following skills to be an entrepreneur? Indicate from 1 (no skill at all) to 7 (very good skill):	Year								Total			
	2022				2023							
	Mean	Median	N	Standard dev.	Mean	Median	N	Standard dev.	Mean	Median	N	Standard dev.
Opportunity recognition	4.21	4.00	136	1.55	4.16	4.00	126	1.56	4.19	4.00	262	1.55
Creativity	4.88	5.00	136	1.45	5.03	5.00	126	1.57	4.95	5.00	262	1.51
Problem solving	5.01	5.00	136	1.30	4.82	5.00	126	1.49	4.92	5.00	262	1.40
Leadership skills	4.75	5.00	136	1.54	4.52	5.00	126	1.73	4.64	5.00	262	1.64
Communication skills	5.12	5.00	136	1.42	5.02	5.00	126	1.57	5.07	5.00	262	1.49
Development of new products and services	4.27	4.00	136	1.41	4.29	4.00	126	1.62	4.28	4.00	262	1.51
Networking and professional relationship-building	4.50	5.00	136	1.62	4.40	4.00	126	1.72	4.45	5.00	262	1.67

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

Upon analyzing the collected research data (Table 8), one key observation emerges. In the first year of the study, the average self-assessment of abilities was, in most cases, higher than in the following year. While the differences are not substantial, the very fact that they trend in this direction is concerning.

The surveyed students rated their creativity higher (mean score in 2022 – 4.88; in 2023 – 5.03), as well as their ability to develop new products and services (mean score in 2022 – 4.27; in 2023 – 4.29). This raises the question: does the educational process itself contribute to the decline in students' self-assessment? This is an issue that should be taken into account in future research.

An important aspect of further analysis is the attempt to answer the question: which factors related to the respondents' environment significantly influence their self-assessment in the area of soft skills? A more in-depth analysis of the collected data indicates that having entrepreneurial experience has a slight impact on respondents' self-assessments.

The 2022 research results show that in the areas of problem-solving ($p = 0.014$; Mann-Whitney $U = 17590.0$) and leadership skills ($p = 0.050$; Mann-Whitney $U = 1870.5$), there was a statistically significant correlation between self-assessed ability levels and the presence of prior experience. The one-year gap between the two rounds of the study – and, consequently, the expansion of both theoretical and practical knowledge as well as the development of new skills and competencies – may form the basis for changes in the self-assessment of soft skills.

At the same time, a statistical correlation between self-assessment and entrepreneurial experience became more pronounced. Statistically significant differences were found in four self-assessed traits: opportunity recognition ($p = 0.038$; Mann-Whitney $U = 1566.0$), communication skills ($p = 0.029$; Mann-Whitney $U = 1543.0$), development of new products and services ($p = 0.001$; Mann-Whitney $U = 1320.5$), and networking and professional relationship-building ($p = 0.006$; Mann-Whitney $U = 1426.5$). It is important to emphasize that in all cases, the results indicate that students with entrepreneurial experience rated their soft skills higher.

These findings suggest that gaining professional experience – regardless of its specific form – has a significant impact on the self-assessment of one's abilities and competencies. This may have important implications for both future career development and educational pathways.

The presence of entrepreneurial individuals in one's immediate environment has a significant impact on respondents' self-assessment in the area of soft skills. The analysis revealed statistically significant correlations between contact with such individuals and the self-assessment of one's abilities in five out of the seven competencies examined (2023 data).

All of the traits for which this correlation was identified are associated with interpersonal interaction and relationship-building. These included: opportunity recognition ($p = 0.036$; Kruskal-Wallis $H = 8.571$), leadership skills ($p = 0.006$; Kruskal-Wallis $H = 12.449$), communication skills ($p = 0.011$; Kruskal-Wallis $H = 11.154$), development of new products and services ($p = 0.014$; Kruskal-Wallis $H = 10.547$), and networking and professional relationship-building ($p = 0.006$; Kruskal-Wallis $H = 12.609$).

Although running a business presents significant challenges, it also offers substantial opportunities for professional development – particularly in fields related to sports. Self-employment or owning a business creates a wide range of diverse possibilities. The vast majority of respondents perceive this form of labor market activity as attractive and full of potential. They recognize that running a business has more advantages than disadvantages and consider this type of career path to be appealing.

Table 9. Mean level of agreement with the following statements*

Specification	Year 2022		Year 2023	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Being an entrepreneur implies more advantages than disadvantages to me	4.23	1.66	4.26	1.59
A career as an entrepreneur is attractive for me	4.14	1.79	4.43	1.63
If I had the opportunity and resources, I'd like to start a business	4.88	1.85	4.80	1.83

Being an entrepreneur would be highly satisfactory to me	4.58	1.83	4.61	1.82
Among various options, I'd rather be an entrepreneur	4.14	1.92	4.39	1.81

Note: *Indicate your level of agreement with the following sentences from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

The analysis of the data presented in table 9 above indicates that in most cases the average values increased in 2023 compared to 2022, suggesting a more positive attitude of respondents toward entrepreneurship. An increase in the averages can be observed for all five statements.

The most significant increases relate to the attractiveness of an entrepreneurial career (+0.29) and the preference for being an entrepreneur among various professional options (+0.25). The only exception is a slight decrease in the willingness to start a business after acquiring adequate resources (−0.08), which may suggest greater caution or concerns regarding business conditions.

The rise in average scores across most categories implies a more favorable perception of entrepreneurship during the following year of study. This could be associated with the respondents' increasing knowledge in this area, as well as the general socio-economic context.

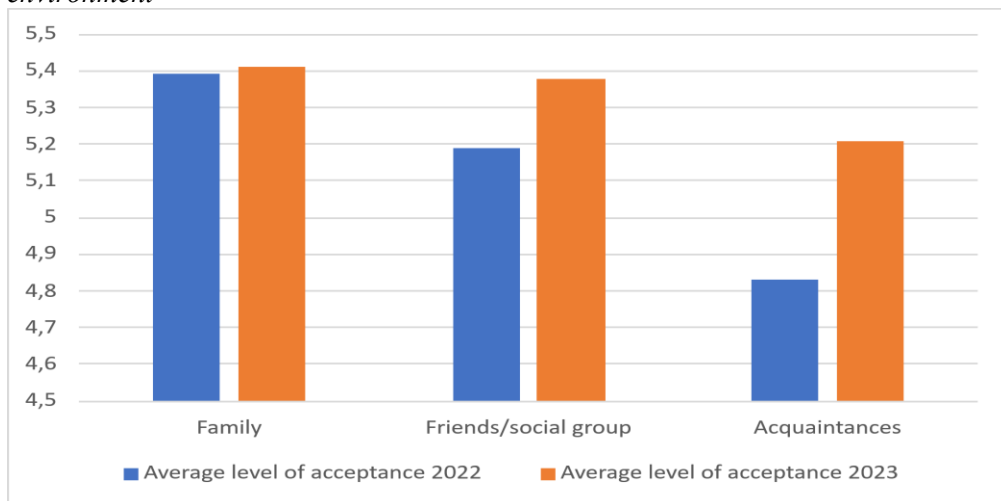
It is worth noting that the analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the level of agreement with the statements presented in table 9 depending on whether entrepreneurs were present in the respondents' close environment.

In all five cases, individuals who had family or friends running a business rated their agreement with these statements higher. This may suggest that access to first-hand knowledge broadens perspectives and facilitates the formation of personal opinions. However, no statistically significant differences were found between the expressed opinions and the professional activity of the respondents' parents or their own work experience.

According to the respondents, the perspectives related to running a business would be supported by their immediate social environment if they decided to pursue this form of professional activity.

The average level of acceptance across different groups (family, friends/social group, acquaintances) varies (Chart 3). In 2023, an increase in average ratings is noticeable across all categories, which indicates that respondents better perceive support from their surroundings for the decision to start a business.

Figure 4. *Acceptance of the decision to start a business by the immediate social environment**



Note: *Rating on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates a complete lack of acceptance and 7 indicates full acceptance.

Source: Analysis based on research findings.

As the results indicate, the family is the most supportive group, providing a foundation and shaping the career paths of young individuals. The increase in acceptance from family members may stem from a growing awareness of the importance of professional independence, as well as the observation of positive examples within the immediate environment.

Friends and acquaintances also play a key role by influencing entrepreneurial attitudes through emotional support and the sharing of experiences. The increased level of acceptance within these groups may be linked to the growing popularity of entrepreneurship as an attractive career path.

The analysis of the results also indicates that the increase in acceptance from the social environment may be associated with a general shift in societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship. The younger generation is increasingly viewing running their own business as a way to fulfill personal ambitions, be flexible and gain financial independence. Further research could focus on identifying the factors that influence changes in societal attitudes and on ways to strengthen the positive image of entrepreneurship within the broader community.

5. Conclusions

The aim of the article was to examine the role of the environment in shaping entrepreneurial attitudes among representatives of Generation Z. The research findings confirmed the hypothesis that the immediate social environment, such as

family and friends, has a significant impact on decisions related to starting a business. Respondents who had individuals running their own businesses within their surroundings were more likely to consider establishing their own enterprises and rated their entrepreneurial abilities at a higher level.

The hypothesis concerning the influence of parents' professional sector on their children's career plans was not clearly confirmed. Although some correlations were observed – particularly in the case of fathers running their own businesses – the impact was less pronounced than that of close friends and relatives outside the immediate family.

In conclusion, the research findings highlight the need to develop educational programs that not only provide theoretical knowledge but also engage students in practical activities and collaboration with experienced entrepreneurs. Raising awareness about the importance of one's environment and promoting professional activity already at the university level may contribute to an increase in the number of young entrepreneurs in the future.

Additionally, the analysis of the results indicates the need for further research into the diverse factors influencing the development of entrepreneurship among Generation Z, such as the impact of digital technologies, labor market globalization, and changing socio-economic conditions.

Understanding these aspects may enable more effective adaptation of educational and economic policies to the needs of young entrepreneurs. It is also crucial to monitor how young people's attitudes toward risk, innovation, and collaboration evolve in the context of a rapidly changing business environment.

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