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# ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET, GRIT, AND INNOVATION BARRIERS: A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION OF THEIR INFLUENCE ON SELF-EMPLOYED PERFORMANCE AMONG VOCATIONAL UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and self-employed performance among vocational university graduates in China. Using self-determination theory (SDT), the study examines how factors interact to influence performance. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, employing quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The quantitative data is collected through a survey questionnaire administered to a sample of self-employed graduates from vocational colleges in Kunming, China. The qualitative data is gathered through interviews with a subset of the survey respondents. Findings reveal that grit positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and self-employed performance. Additionally, innovative barriers moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and self-employed performance. The study also identifies a significant positive influence of entrepreneurial mindset on self-employed performance. These findings contribute to the existing literature on self-employment by providing a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and self-employed performance. The study's findings have implications for vocational education institutions, policymakers, and self-employed individuals seeking to enhance their performance.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial Mindset, Grit, Innovative Barriers, Self-Employed Performance

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction to research background

China's rapid economic development has significantly transformed the landscape for self-employed individuals, providing more opportunities for freelancers and independent business owners. The economic reform and opening-up policy have been pivotal in this shift, as self-employment offers the flexibility to manage working hours and daily routines, attracting more people to this way of working.

As of September 2022, there were over 111 million self-employed people in China, representing 66.7% of the country's market participants (Trade Economics, 2022). Self-employment in China spans a diverse range of businesses, including small retail stores, catering, consulting services, design, programming, art, and cultural creativity. A significant portion of the self-employed population, about 90%, is involved in retail, hospitality, and domestic services sectors (Trade Economics, 2022). With the rise of the internet, many entrepreneurs are taking their businesses online, engaging in activities such as we media, e-commerce, and online retail.

The prominence of self-employment has made it a vital part of China's labor market, with individuals working across various professions and industries. Recognizing this, the Chinese government has been proactive in encouraging self-employment through supportive laws and regulations. One such measure is the Regulations on Promoting the Development of Individual Industrial and Commercial Households, issued by The State Council of China on October 25, 2022, and effective from November 1, 2022. This regulation aims to enhance the business conditions for self-employed workers and safeguard their rights. It highlights the crucial role of self-employment in the socialist market economy and emphasizes the need to support their growth by simplifying administrative procedures, improving the business environment, and promoting healthy development. The government also offers assistance with registration, annual reporting, business premises, capital, taxation, finance, social security, and entrepreneurship and employment, ensuring that the rights of self-employed business owners are protected ([www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202210/26/](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202210/26/)).

Moreover, the Chinese government's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and innovation is evident in its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). This plan focuses on promoting employment, enhancing citizens' livelihoods, and driving economic growth through various initiatives, particularly targeting university graduates. The combination of regulatory support and strategic planning underscores China's dedication to bolstering the self-employment sector and fostering a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem.

## **1.2 Problem Description**

Tech-driven globalization and evolving labor market dynamics have led to a rise in self-employment and entrepreneurship, particularly among vocational university graduates. Despite the growing popularity of self-employment, vocational graduates face unique challenges that can impact their success and sustainability in the entrepreneurial world.

This research aims to explore the complex relationship between an entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and the performance of self-employed vocational university graduates. While having an entrepreneurial mindset is beneficial for those who are self-employed, the researcher is particularly interested in understanding the positive effects of grit. Additionally, identifying and managing the numerous innovative barriers can help self-employed students and vocational institutions better prepare for these challenges.

For those aiming to succeed in self-employment, how can mindsets that foster initiative and grit enhance career performance? Moreover, how might the challenges posed by innovative barriers influence the relationship between having an innovative mindset and career competence?

By addressing these questions, the research hopes to provide valuable insights for vocational graduates and educational institutions to better navigate the complexities of self-employment and entrepreneurship.

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **2.1 Theoretical Basis**

### **2.1.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as described by Rici and Ryan (2015), is a motivational theory that examines how social contexts and individual differences influence autonomous and controlled motivation, predicting learning, performance, experience, and psychological health. SDT provides a framework for understanding human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2023).

For optimal functioning and wellness, SDT posits that all humans need to satisfy three basic psychological needs competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Fulfilling these needs promotes optimal motivation, intrinsic aspirations, and improves mental health and engagement with the world. The theory emphasizes that these needs motivate behavior and distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is characterized by self-determined, enjoyable, proactive, and engaged behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), while extrinsic motivation is driven by the outcome it produces (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

## **2.2 Variables**

This study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and self-employed performance of vocational university graduates in Kunming City, China. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, employing quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. This study investigates the relationship between four main variable

### **2.2.1 Independent Variables**

Entrepreneurial Mindset this variable captures the attitudes, skills, and behaviors associated with entrepreneurial success. It is measured using a self-reported questionnaire that assesses the individual's perception of their passion for innovation, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition.

### **2.2.2 Mediating Variable**

Grit this variable acts as a mediator, meaning it explains the relationship between the independent variable (entrepreneurial mindset) and the dependent variable (self-employed performance).

### **2.2.3 Moderating Variable**

Innovative Barriers this variable represents the challenges and obstacles that individuals face when trying to innovate. It is measured using a self-reported questionnaire that assesses the individual's perception of internal and external barriers to innovation.

### **2.2.4 Dependent Variable**

Self-employed Performance this variable represents the outcomes and achievements of individuals who work for themselves. It is measured using a self-reported questionnaire that assesses the individual's perception of their autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their self-employed work.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND THEORETICAL MODELS**

### **3.1 Relationship between variables and research hypotheses**

This research delves into the intricate relationship between four key variables entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and self-employed performance of vocational university graduates. Let's unravel the dynamics between these factors Hypothesis 1 Grit positively mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and self-employed performance. Hypothesis 2 Innovative barriers negatively moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and self-employed performance.

Hypothesis 3 An entrepreneurial mindset positively influences self-employed performance.

Hypothesis 4 The relationships between entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and self-employed performance are complex and multifaceted.

#### **3.1.1 Entrepreneurial Mindset and Grit**

Grit, the unwavering passion and perseverance towards long-term goals, acts as a catalyst for translating an entrepreneurial mindset into successful self-employment. Individuals with a strong entrepreneurial mindset, characterized by innovation, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition, are more likely to possess the grit needed to overcome challenges and

achieve their goals. Studies have consistently shown a positive correlation between entrepreneurial mindset and grit, highlighting the importance of both qualities for entrepreneurial success.

### **3.1.2 Grit and Self-Employed Performance**

The relationship between grit and self-employed performance is equally crucial. Gritty individuals are more resilient in the face of adversity, committed to their goals, and optimistic about the future. These qualities translate into higher self-employed performance, as they enable individuals to persevere through challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and achieve their desired outcomes. Research has consistently demonstrated a positive link between grit and self-employed performance, underscoring the importance of this psychological trait for entrepreneurial success.

### **3.1.3 Innovation Barriers, Entrepreneurial Mindset, and Self-Employment Performance**

Innovative barriers, which encompass internal and external challenges to innovation, can hinder the positive effects of an entrepreneurial mindset on self-employed performance. Internal barriers, such as lack of resources or skills, and external barriers, such as regulatory constraints or market conditions, can impede an individual's ability to innovate and achieve their entrepreneurial goals. Studies have shown that self-employed individuals who report higher levels of innovative barriers tend to experience lower financial performance, highlighting the importance of addressing these challenges.

### **3.1.4 Entrepreneurial Mindset and Self-Employed Performance**

Despite the presence of innovative barriers, an entrepreneurial mindset can directly influence self-employed performance. Individuals with a strong entrepreneurial mindset are more likely to identify and exploit opportunities, adapt to changing circumstances, and take calculated risks. These qualities enable them to overcome challenges and achieve success, even in the face of adversity. Research has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between entrepreneurial mindset and self-employed performance, highlighting the importance of fostering this mindset among aspiring entrepreneurs.

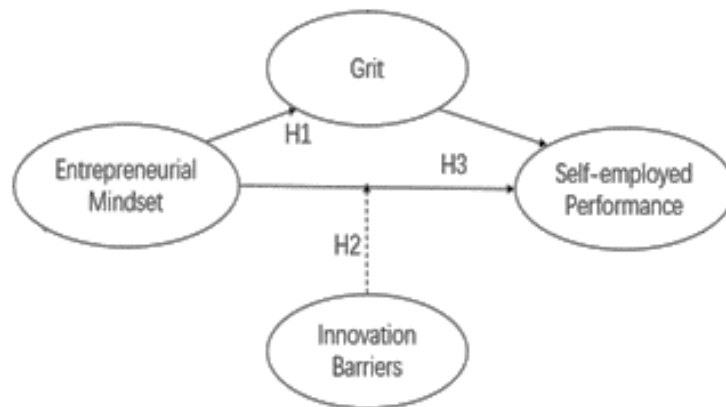
### **3.1.5 The Complexities of the Relationships**

The relationships between the variables are not simple or linear. They are complex and multifaceted, influenced by individual characteristics, environmental factors, and social support. The interplay between entrepreneurial mindset, grit, innovative barriers, and self-employed performance is dynamic and constantly evolving. Understanding these complexities is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship.

## **3.2 Theoretical Model Construction**

Based on the literature review and analysis above, this article constructs a theoretical model, as shown in Figure 3.1.

**Figure 3.1 Theoretical Model**



## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology section outlines the approach and techniques that will be employed to address the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. This section will detail the research design, population and sampling methods, data collection instruments, and procedures for data analysis as follows:

### **4.1 Research Design**

The study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative component will involve a cross-sectional survey design, while the qualitative component will consist of semi-structured interviews. This design will provide a comprehensive understanding of the entrepreneurial performance of self-employed vocational university graduates.

Mixed-method research is essential for investigating the research problems and objectives. This approach involves the deliberate combination of methods for data collection, data analysis, and evidence interpretation. The key aspect is 'mixed,' indicating that data linkage or integration at appropriate stages of the research process is crucial (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Purposeful data integration allows researchers to gain a more comprehensive view of their research landscape by examining phenomena from various perspectives and research lenses.

The researcher will employ the explanatory sequential design model aligned with the predetermined research objectives. An explanatory sequential design aims to use narrative data to explain or interpret numerical findings, particularly unexpected ones (Creswell et al., 2003). This design aligns with the researcher's goals to determine what happened quantitatively and then derive an explanation from the relevant theoretical literature. The study will quantitatively examine events and then consult the affected population for further explanation.

Research methods are chosen based on the research question and goals. Mixed-method research questions often require a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to be fully answered. This approach gives participants a voice, enriches the evidence, and helps answer complex questions. Mixed methods illuminate issues from different perspectives, improving scholarly interaction and research quality. However, combining methods can complicate the research process. Multidisciplinary research teams need more time, personnel, and training to learn about different research paradigms and methods for sample selection, data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis or integration (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013).

## **DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

The researchers will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand people's perceptions and experiences related to the study.

**Qualitative Methods** Individual interviews and focus groups will be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives. The qualitative data will be transcribed and summarized verbatim, with the information being coded and categorized to identify emergent themes, patterns, and perspectives. Findings from the interviews and focus groups will be structured and presented by comparing and contrasting different participants' opinions and experiences. The presentation of results will include specific examples, carefully chosen quotations, and detailed accounts of individual or collective experiences, while also considering the limitations and objectivity of the interpretation (Lowe et al., 2018).

**Quantitative Methods** The researcher will initially analyze the structural equation and basic statistics of each independent variable. This will help identify a group that can provide further information about each variable based on their perceptions. The findings from this analysis will inform the development of questions for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, guided by the research questions, objectives, and hypotheses. A detailed interview outline for this study is provided in Appendix C.

### **5.1 Examine Tool Quality**

(1) **Check Validity by Knowledge Owners.** According to Dillman et al. (2016), validating research materials such as interview guides, research questions, or research reports involves presenting them to professionals or experts in the field for evaluation and feedback. In this study, however, knowledge owners refer to the informants of in-depth interviews and focus groups. Their validation ensures high reliability and credibility in the research process, confirming that the collected information aligns with reality.

**Verify Reliability via Parallel Check.** Parallel checking for reliability is a common method used to assess the consistency of data in qualitative investigations (Fan & Ling, 2017). In this study, the same data will be separately analyzed or coded by different researchers, and the findings will be compared for consistency. The data are considered reliable if 80% or more of the results are consistent (Graneheim et al., 2017).

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Will schedule and conduct interviews on major topics based on identified themes, patterns, and perspectives. The quantitative research results will highlight concerns discovered in the qualitative study. software will be used to test coding consistency by comparing the coding results from multiple researchers (Mortelmans, 2019). Comparing data interpretations using enhance the study's validity (Saldaña, 2021). The study's conclusions will be derived from an integrated analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

### **6.1 Data Integration**

Data integration will occur in three stages. Quantitative informants will describe the results through interviews and focus groups. A data-driven interpretation and discussion of the quantitative findings will be conducted. A data-driven interpretation and discussion of the qualitative findings will be done in conjunction with the results of the literature review. This integrated approach aims to provide comprehensive solutions to the research problems and identify areas for further development.

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