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Prior business experience, entrepreneurial intentions, and intention implementation among refugees: an application of the theory of planned behavior

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Abstract

Although refugees are often perceived as a burden to the socioeconomic fabric in some places, entrepreneurship offers a promising avenue for refugees to participate in the economy, secure decent work, and achieve self-reliance. However, refugee entrepreneurship is largely seen as necessity-driven and thus limited personal agency in refugees' entrepreneurial behavior, which has negative connotations for persistence and success. This paper demonstrates the role of prior entrepreneurial experience in boosting refugees' personal entrepreneurial agency (represented by entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions) through its effects on the antecedents specified in the theory of planned behavior (TPB). The study uses survey data from 404 refugees in Uganda. The participants were drawn from three large refugee settlements. A serial mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro in SPSS. The results indicate prior entrepreneurial experience positively predicts the TPB antecedent variables, suggesting that entrepreneurial experience is essential for a positive entrepreneurial attitude, subjective norm, and a strong perceived behavioral control (PBC) among refugees. These TPB antecedent variables mediated the effects of prior entrepreneurial experience on entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions. Significant double mediation paths were mainly observed via entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions, as well as via perceived behavioral control and entrepreneurial intentions. The results indicate that prior experience is a vital resource that can be a foundation for successful refugee entrepreneurship promotion. Thus, active learning approaches that boost experience acquisition can be useful in entrepreneurship training and education interventions. Arrangements such as innovation hubs, apprenticeships, and internships for refugees can be vehicles for active and experiential learning. The study extends the TPB by integrating prior experience as an antecedent of entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, PBC, and implementation intention.

Keywords Entrepreneurial attitudes, Entrepreneurial experience, Entrepreneurial intentions, Implementation intentions, Perceived behavioral control, Refugees, Subjective norm, Theory of planned behavior

Introduction

The successful socioeconomic integration of refugees remains a daunting task for many host countries, primarily due to institutional, cultural, and individual-level constraints. However, personal factors, including entrepreneurialism, personal initiative, and career adaptability, are essential to successfully integrating refugees [21, 84, 107]. Specifically, there is increasing interest in refugee

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entrepreneurship [81, 105] as one of the feasible pathways to fast and effective integration of refugees, since it benefits both the refugees and the host community. Entrepreneurship is an opportunity for refugees to participate in the economic space, hence a driver for socioeconomic inclusion, decent work, self-reliance, and well-being [72, 95], as well as career advancement or transition [1, 29]. Refugee entrepreneurship also contributes to the overall economic development of the host community through innovations, wealth creation, and employment opportunities [1, 108]. Thus, refugee entrepreneurship shifts the social position of refugees from being perceived as burdens to the host community to being significant economic contributors and transformers.

Whereas the host communities might provide an enabling environment, several barriers and challenges could hinder engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Refugees often lack adequate access to capital resources [56, 82] and face cultural and institutional challenges in the process of founding businesses [8, 82]. Thus, an entrepreneurial mindset is essential for the formation and strengthening of entrepreneurial intentions among refugees [84]. Entrepreneurial intentions represent personal agency [84] that drives entrepreneurial action even under challenging circumstances. The current study examines how prior entrepreneurial experiences and the constructs of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) influence refugees' readiness to initiate entrepreneurial activities in host settings.

Entrepreneurial intentions, along with planning specific actions toward starting a business when enabling factors arise (implementation intentions), are critical steps in the entrepreneurial process and predict entrepreneurial entry [13, 35, 87]. Although refugees' entrepreneurial activities seem to be driven by necessity, including limited employment opportunities and the need to earn income for survival [50, 109], there is also evidence suggesting the important roles of personal agency [12, 84], entrepreneurial experience [108], opportunity recognition and innovativeness [31, 109] in refugee entrepreneurship. The systematic literature review of Liñán and Fayolle [60] highlighted that entrepreneurial education and learning, personality, and the environment contribute to fostering entrepreneurial intentions. There are also interventions focused on acquiring entrepreneurial skills, social capital, business incubation, and access to startup capital [72, 99] as mechanisms for fostering refugee startups.

Entrepreneurial intentions and their implementation have been studied from various perspectives. In their systematic review, Newman et al. [81] highlight the different theories employed to explain entrepreneurial intentions, motivations, and entry into

entrepreneurship. The "TPB" [2], the entrepreneurial Events Model [94], the social capital theory [9], and the disadvantage theory seem to be the most applied perspective in refugee entrepreneurship studies. The TPB is considered one of the most robust models in predicting entrepreneurial intentions and their implementation, as well as actual business creation [35, 45, 65], highlighting the roles of behavioral attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. However, existing research has predominantly focused on refugees in developed countries. Recent systematic literature reviews show that there is limited knowledge concerning refugee entrepreneurship in less-developed contexts, given that most research focuses on refugee entrepreneurship in the global north due to the long history of refugee entrepreneurship in these regions [1, 55]. A similar gap is highlighted in the general entrepreneurship literature [57]. Given the role context plays in refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and acting on those intentions [81], it is important also to generate empirical evidence from refugees in less-developed countries who are less represented in the extant literature, but also noting that entrepreneurship is increasingly the most feasible socioeconomic integration mechanism in such contexts where high unemployment rates already characterize the labor market.

The TPB model suggests that behavioral attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (PBC) are a function of a belief system that results from a mixture of personal and situational influences [5]. Prior business experience is one of those individual factors that could be essential for refugees to develop and implement entrepreneurial intentions. However, empirical findings are contradictory, suggesting that experience could be crucial among some populations but not relevant in all situations [17]. Most refugee entrepreneurs in less-developed countries tend to establish small businesses. It is not known to what extent prior entrepreneurial experience influences entrepreneurial intentions and startups in this population of refugees. Previous research has indicated that the role experience also depends on its nature, whether it is a learning experience, experience working in a business, or experience establishing and owning a business [17]. The present study focuses on refugees' experience of owning a business in their country of origin or home country. Owning or managing a business is a valuable mechanism for building human capital that supports recognizing and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities [1]. However, there is a gap concerning whether the experience obtained in the home country or country of origin necessarily translates into entrepreneurial intentions and the readiness to implement the intentions.

The study examines the TPB antecedents as mediators of the association between the prior business experience (the experience of having owned a business venture in the home country before migrating) and entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions. The study contributes to the understanding of refugee entrepreneurship in the context of less-developed countries, as driven by personal agency and opportunity rather than necessity. We consider prior business experience critical for refugees' readiness to create business ventures in the host communities through its influence on entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and perceptions of controllability. The paper has interesting implications for practice and theory. First, the study provides a test for the robustness of the TPB model in determining and steering entrepreneurship among refugee populations hosted in resource-constrained settlements in less-developed countries. In practical terms, the study highlights the need to use refugees' entrepreneurial experience as a resource for boosting refugee entrepreneurship. Providing avenues for boosting refugees' entrepreneurial experience through experiential learning approaches could be beneficial. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The second section analyzes the literature on the TPB and entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions, and the role of entrepreneurial experience in forming entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC. Section three presents the methods used in collecting and analyzing the data. Section four presents the results of the serial mediation analysis of the effects of prior experience on entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions via the TPB antecedent variables. The last section presents the main results and discusses their implications for refugee business creation.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions from the TPB perspective

The TPB portrays engagement in a given behavior as mostly planned and best predicted by behavioral intentions [2, 4]. The likelihood of performing a behavior is also higher when an individual can exercise volitional control [2, 3, 101]. The TPB posits that the intention to perform a behavior is determined by a belief system consisting of three sets of beliefs, including attitude (an individual's preference regarding the behavior), subjective norms (the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior), and PBC (the perceived ability to exercise control over performing the behavior). Behavioral intentions represent the motivational influences on behavior because they show how much effort an individual is willing to exert toward performing a given behavior [62, 101]. Whereas intentions mediate the effects of

attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC on behavior, PBC can also exert a direct influence on behavior [3].

Entrepreneurship is a process that involves several planned and goal-oriented steps [19]. The performance of entrepreneurial activities is largely self-determined; hence, the TPB can be instrumental in explaining how individuals develop entrepreneurial drive, the readiness to implement their entrepreneurial intentions, and the actual entrepreneurial behavior. The application of the TPB in entrepreneurship has primarily focused on understanding entrepreneurial intentions, as these intentions predict actual entry into entrepreneurship [13, 19, 34, 54]. Entrepreneurial intentions refer to an individual's conviction to engage in entrepreneurial activities [59]. The measures of entrepreneurial intentions often focus on the desire to establish a business, the preference for an entrepreneurial career, and the probability of starting a business in the foreseeable future [33].

Studies using the TPB model demonstrate that entrepreneurial intentions result from entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC (e.g., [39, 51, 67, 75]). Entrepreneurial attitudes and PBC are notably reported in previous research as the most significant contributors to the formation of entrepreneurial intentions [48, 85]. The general entrepreneurial attitude is likely to result from the perception that engagement in entrepreneurial activities will lead to positive outcomes [52, 59, 62], hence the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur. PBC concerns the perceptions of one's ability and the enabling or impeding factors in the performance of the behavior [3, 103]. Empirical findings show that PBC is a strong determinant of entrepreneurial intentions [48, 52, 103]. However, extant literature suggests that refugee entrepreneurs are challenged by the socioeconomic, institutional, capital, and legal constraints [8, 40]. These challenges suggest that controllability could be an illusion for refugee entrepreneurs. Subjective norms, on the other hand, represent the perception of approval or disapproval from one's significant others, such as family, friends, colleagues, and role models [58, 59]. Perceived approval may result in stronger entrepreneurial intentions [11]. However, some studies show that subjective norm is less significant in developing entrepreneurial intentions [48, 61, 85]. For refugees with few close relationships, subjective norm may be less important in engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Refugees in less-developed countries tend to live in secluded places that not only limit their social capital [14], but also a structure for social approval.

The present study focuses on implementation intention as the outcome variable. Entrepreneurial intentions are sometimes measured by focusing on the plans to start a business [33]. However, there is a distinction between entrepreneurial intention, which is a goal intention, and

implementation intention, which represents the concrete plans for realizing the goal intention [101]. Therefore, on the one hand, entrepreneurial intentions depict the eagerness to start a business [59]. On the other hand, implementation intentions refer to plans to act on one's entrepreneurial intention when specific facilitating conditions are present; and are also known as "if-then" plans [16, 37]. Such plans are essential for initiating action and buffering against influences that may discourage efforts in pursuing a given behavioral goal [38].

Implementation intentions concern the planned steps toward entry into entrepreneurship and are considered important in explaining the link between behavioral or goal intention and performance of the behavior [35, 37]. The planned steps can be executed when certain circumstances present themselves [37]. Given that entrepreneurship is a phased process involving several activities, implementation intention becomes relevant in actualizing the entrepreneurial intentions. The phasing of entrepreneurial actions into specific achievable milestones strengthens the commitment to the goal intention and, therefore, the possibility of translating entrepreneurial intentions into entrepreneurial action [101]. Consequently, implementation intentions mediate and moderate the association between entrepreneurial intentions and behavior [11, 35, 87]. For the present study, we expect entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC to be associated with implementation intentions via entrepreneurial intentions.

Despite empirical evidence demonstrating the relevance of the TPB to promoting entrepreneurship, the precarious situation of refugees may have implications for applying the TPB model to explain entrepreneurial intentions and business creation among refugee populations. Subjective norm is measured by focusing on the likelihood of approval from family and friends [59]. However, many refugees migrate without their close relatives or may not have constant contact with friends to provide that approval. Consequently, support from family and friends may not have a significant influence on the motivation for entrepreneurs to engage in business activities [7]. Moreover, the psychological trauma and mental health challenges that many refugees experience tend to have a negative influence on entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, and success [7, 79]. Relatedly, refugee entrepreneurs also tend to have weak and unstable resilience [106], indicating that their psychosocial realities may have a negative impact on controllability and, consequently, on entrepreneurial intentions and behavior.

Moreover, there are further challenges that limit the application of the TPB to populations such as refugees. The theory has been criticized for ignoring contextual and sociocultural influences or for assuming that the

belief variables mediate the effects of such factors [96]. In addition, intentions do not always result in behavior, which may result from changes in attitudes or a change of mind over time [101], suggesting that the intention may change with changing circumstances. The gap relating to the movement from intention to behavior has been addressed by increasing focus on implementation intentions.

Linking prior entrepreneurial experience to TPB constructs and intention implementation

The study of van Gelderen et al. [33] suggests that background factors such as experience, gender, and personality influence entrepreneurial intentions; moreover, the TPB constructs are essential in the association between these background factors and entrepreneurial intentions. Although scholars have focused on different forms of experience, such as work context experience and life experience that come with age [74], at the general level, one's prior entrepreneurial experiences shape entrepreneurial attitudes, intentions, and behavior. To highlight the usefulness of experience in the formation of entrepreneurial intentions, exposure to practical entrepreneurial education has been linked to the acquisition of both entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial experiences, which enhance the perceived desirability and feasibility of an entrepreneurial career [36, 86]. Similarly, prior experience of starting up a business and experiencing success directly or through role modeling tend to be associated with positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship [68]. The disruptive nature of the migration process may imply that their entrepreneurial experience in their home country is suddenly halted. It is also possible that some refugees have experienced entrepreneurial failure, which may have a negative influence on entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions of controllability and risk [28, 98]. There is empirical evidence indicating a weak relationship between entrepreneurship experience and entrepreneurial intentions or behavior [74], suggesting that the effects of the experience can be better observed indirectly through factors such as perceptions and attitudes that are proximal to entrepreneurial behavior. For the present study, we focus on antecedent factors in the TPB model as possible mediating links between prior entrepreneurial experience, entrepreneurial intentions, and implementation intentions.

Prior entrepreneurial experience is a source of knowledge about the tasks and roles of entrepreneurs [73]. Experience enables a better understanding of the market, suppliers, and customer needs. Such knowledge facilitates the identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities [91, 93]. This type of knowledge, obtained from experience, may differ from that gained

through entrepreneurial education or training and could have a stronger impact on entrepreneurial intentions, which may occur through the antecedent variables in the TPB model [73, 110]. If the experience enables individuals to identify more unattractive aspects of entrepreneurship, it may negatively impact entrepreneurial attitudes, perceptions of controllability, and expectations of support from significant others [73, 110]. On the other hand, previous experience strengthens these determinants of intention and behavior if it facilitates the identification of more positive aspects of entrepreneurship. The experience of positive entrepreneurial characteristics such as autonomy and flexible working hours that accrue from working in small businesses can positively influence entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions [17, 110], consequently translating into action. Concerning refugees, previous entrepreneurial experience is considered a motivational factor for refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and startups [81, 108]. Therefore, we propose a serial mediation model of the effects of prior business experience on entrepreneurial intentions and intention implementation via entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC. As summarized in the conceptual model in Fig. 1, we investigate the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Refugees' prior business experience is positively related to their (a) entrepreneurial attitudes, (b) subjective norms, (c) PBC, (d) entrepreneurial intentions, and (e) implementation intentions.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between refugees' prior business experience and implementation intention is mediated by (a) entrepreneurial attitudes, (b) subjective norm, (c) PBC, and (d) entrepreneurial intentions.

Hypothesis 3. The relationship between refugees' prior business experience and implementation intentions is serially mediated through (a) entrepreneurial attitudes

and entrepreneurial intentions, (b) subjective norm and entrepreneurial intentions, and (c) PBC and entrepreneurial intentions.

Methods

The sample and procedure

To test our assumptions, we collected data from refugees living in Bidibidi and Kiryandongo settlements in Northern and Western Uganda and urban refugees living in the Kampala metropolitan area. These are some of the largest refugee settlements in Uganda. For example, with over 230,000 refugees, Bidibidi is the largest refugee settlement and hosts a variety of ethnic backgrounds [66]. Similarly, the Kampala metropolitan area hosts over 80,000 refugees; hence, it is home to most urban refugees in Uganda [10]. To reach a broader range of the refugee population in these settlements, and since most refugees in Africa tend to have low levels of education [47], the survey questionnaire was translated into Juba-Arabic and Somali, the most widely spoken languages in these settlements. The back translation procedure was used to ensure the accuracy of the translated items [20]. In addition, research assistants who were refugees and fluent in these languages supported the data collection process, especially in clarifying information about the study and responding to participant inquiries.

Data were collected at a time when the government of Uganda was implementing strict measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic, hence restrictions on movement and physical interactions. We, therefore, used the group questionnaire administration approach with the support of settlement commandants (managers) since gatherings of up to 20 people were allowed. The settlement commandants identified potential participants and transported them to a community center where they

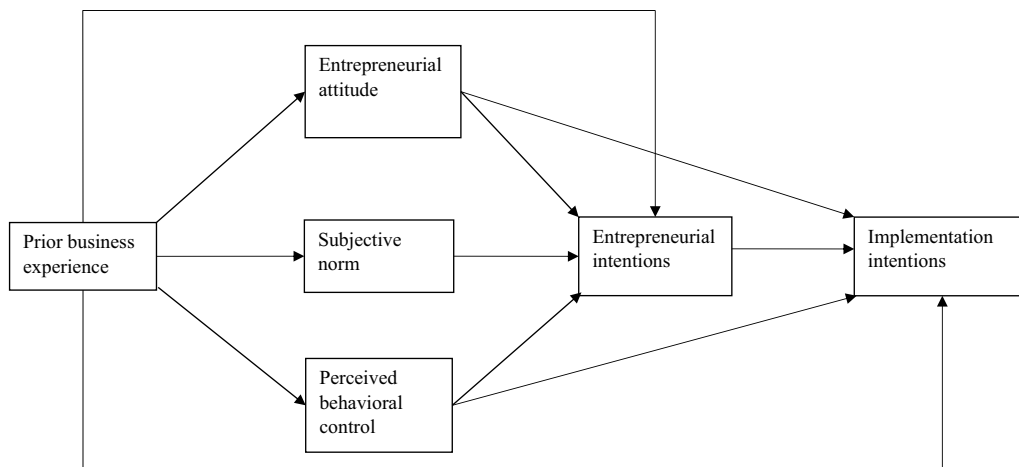


Fig. 1 Conceptual model

completed the questionnaire. Other approaches were not possible since the majority of refugees, specifically in rural settlements, have limited access to internet services. However, this approach resulted in a convenient sample of 422 refugees who are not yet engaged in entrepreneurial activities. This sample was obtained from a total of 620 refugees requested to participate (a response rate of 68.07%). However, the current study uses data from 394 participants (35% female, 65% male) who provided complete responses. The participants comprised two nationalities: South Sudan (80.5%) and Somalia (19.5%). The majority of the participants (79.9%) were from rural settlements (277 from Bidibidi and 38 from Kiryandongo), while 20.1% were urban refugees. The mean age of the participants was 28.45 years ($SD=8.62$). Most participants had lived in Uganda for an average of 3.67 years ($SD=2.82$). Participants generally had low levels of education, with 21.6% indicating that they had not completed primary education, while only 4.3% had attained a university education.

Measures

Prior business experience: To measure participants' prior business experience, we asked them to indicate if they had been engaged in business before arriving in Uganda. Thus, a single item, "Were you engaged in business before coming to Uganda?" (responses on a binary scale of 1=no, and 2=yes) was used. The responses indicated that a significant number of participants (48.5%) were involved in business activities in their home countries or countries of origin.

Entrepreneurial attitudes were measured using the questionnaire developed by Liñán and Chen [59]. The questionnaire was developed to measure the different aspects of the TPB model in the domain of entrepreneurship. The questionnaire assesses entrepreneurial attitudes using five items. These were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. A sample item is "A career as an entrepreneur is attractive for me" (responses ranging from 1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree). The items showed an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha=0.73$).

Subjective Norm was also measured using the Liñán and Chen [59] questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses subjective norm using three items that focus on where the close people or significant others, including family, friends, and colleagues, would approve of an individual's decision to start a business venture. Given that refugees often migrate without their close family members, we replaced the item with whether the leaders in the refugee settlement would approve the decision to start a business. The items were assessed on a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (total disapproval) to 5 (total approval). The items revealed an internal consistency of $\alpha=0.69$,

which is slightly below the threshold of 0.70 [83]. However, the inter-item correlations ranged from 0.35 to 0.50, which are within the range considered acceptable for internal consistency for instruments with few items [24]. Therefore, the items for subjective norm can be considered adequate and reliable for the current study.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) was measured using the Liñán and Chen, [59] questionnaire. The aspect of PBC is six items that focus on assessing the individuals' perceptions of their entrepreneurial capacity. A sample item is "To start a firm in the settlement or host community and keep it working would be easy for me." The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree, 5=totally agree). The items were contextualized to the settlement context. For example, the item "To start a firm and keep it working would be easy for me" was adjusted to "To start a business in the settlement or host community and keep it working would be easy for me." The items showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha=0.71$).

Entrepreneurial intentions were also measured Liñán and Chen [59] questionnaire. This questionnaire assesses entrepreneurial intentions with six items that focus on an individual's willingness to start an entrepreneurial activity. A sample item is "I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur." The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=totally agree to 5=totally disagree). The items showed adequate internal consistency ($\alpha=0.77$).

Implementation intentions were measured using the questionnaire developed by van Gelderen et al. [35]. The questionnaire consists of three items that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree, 5=totally agree). The items assess whether an individual is ready to translate entrepreneurial intentions into action by examining whether they have developed an action plan of steps to be implemented, when conditions allow, to facilitate the startup process. The items in this questionnaire are similar to those in the Linan and Chen questionnaire [59, 80]. A sample item is "I have already planned precisely when to engage in my first step to starting a business." The items showed an impressive internal consistency ($\alpha=0.76$).

Preliminary analyses and the measurement model

Multicollinearity affects the findings in analyzing relationships. Multicollinearity is assumed to be a major concern when variance inflation factor (VIF) values are greater than 5 and Tolerance (TOL) values are below 0.2 [30]. The TOL varied from 0.63 to 0.98, while the VIF varied from 1.07 to 1.59. Therefore, it can be assumed that the data did not have multicollinearity challenges. Concerning the normality tests, the Shapiro-Wilk test revealed significant coefficients for all

variables, suggesting that the data were not normally distributed. The skew and kurtosis tests revealed that the data for all variables were negatively skewed.

To assess the adequacy of the measurement model, we used the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the comparative fit index (CFI). Accordingly, RMSEA values below or equal to 0.08 are considered a moderate fit to the data, while values below or equal to 0.06 are regarded as a good fit [64]. For CFI, values equal to or above 0.90 are considered to indicate an acceptable fit, while values equal to or above 0.95 are regarded as a good fit [44].

Since the data used for this study is cross-sectional, common method variance (CMV) is a likely challenge. One of the recommended approaches to control the effects of CMV is Herman’s single-factor test [89]. This approach involves modeling all manifest indicators used in the structural equation models as indicators of a single factor representing method effects. CMV is considered a major concern if the one-factor model is a good fit for the data. For this study, the single-factor test yielded a poor fit ($\chi^2=1038.069$, $df=252$, $CFI=0.652$, $RMSEA=0.089$). In contrast, our hypothesized model, consisting of prior entrepreneurial experience, entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, entrepreneurial intentions, and implementation intentions, showed a better fit ($\chi^2=447.996$, $df=238$, $CFI=0.907$, $RMSEA=0.047$), providing confidence that our concepts are conceptually distinct.

Results

The results are summarized in the Results model in Fig. 2. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the variables. To test our hypotheses, we used serial mediation analysis in PROCESS Macro in SPSS [43]. Model 80 of this analysis tool was used because it simultaneously generates serial and double mediation effects. Sample bootstrapping at 5000 and the confidence intervals at 95% were applied as recommended by Hayes [42].

Participants’ demographic characteristics were included in the regression analysis as covariates, given the significant correlations with some of the study variables (Table 1). Previous research indicates that demographic variables influence the TBP variables [59]. Table 2 further confirms the significant correlations. Gender was particularly associated with subjective norm and implementation intentions (with males reporting higher subjective norm and implementation intentions), and age was negatively related to entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions. The type of settlement was significantly associated with PBC and entrepreneurial intentions, with urban refugees indicating higher levels of PBC and entrepreneurial intentions. Similarly, educational attainment was positively correlated with entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive association between refugees’ prior business experience and the variables in the TPB model, as well as their implementation intention. Consistent with this hypothesis, results in Table 2

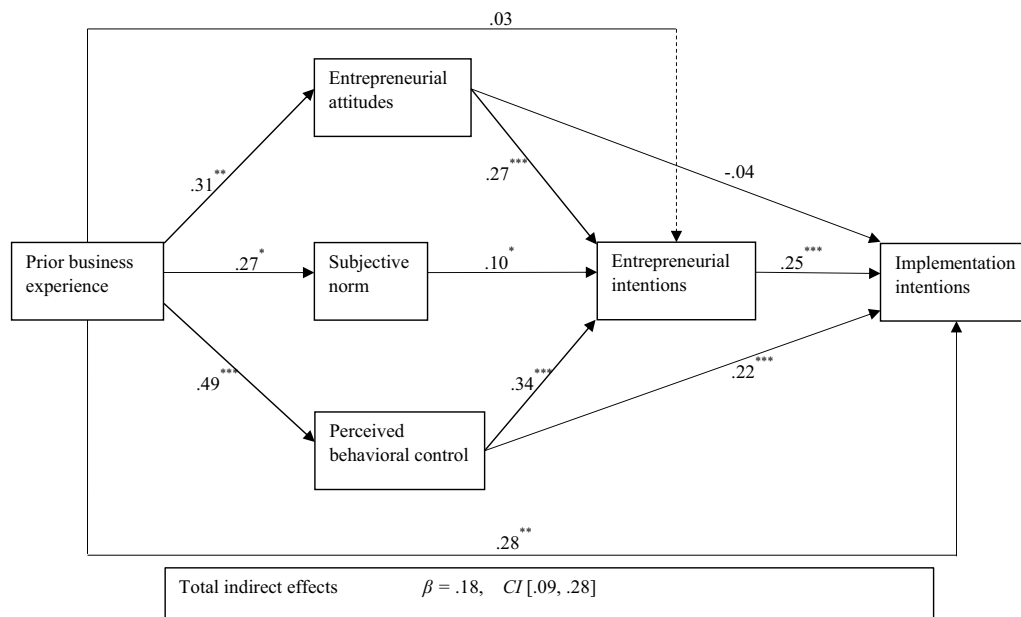


Fig. 2 Results model

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among the measures

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender ^a	–	.11*	-.39***	.21***	.17**	.19***	.12*	.04	-.002	.09
2. Age		–	-.06	-.05	.15**	.05	.04	-.01	-.04	-.14**
3. Type of settlement			–	-.07	-.28***	-.14**	-.13*	.11*	.10*	.07
4. Educational attainment				–	.09	.04	.20***	.11*	.20***	.15**
5. Prior business experience					–	.17**	.19***	.20***	.12*	.18***
6. Subjective norm						–	.15**	.24***	.20***	.12*
7. Attitudes							–	.49***	.46***	.22***
8. Perceived behavioral control								–	.52***	.38***
9. Entrepreneurial intentions									–	.39***
10. Implementation intention										–
<i>M</i>		28.45				3.75	4.06	3.90	4.20	3.93
<i>SD</i>		8.62				.88	.73	.69	.63	.86
α						.69	.73	.71	.77	.76

*. $p < .05$; **. $p < .01$; ***. $p < .001$; $N = 394$

^a Female = 0, Male = 1; ^bRural = 0, Urban = 1; ^cNo = 0, Yes = 1

show that prior experience had a significant positive relationship with three TPB antecedent variables; that is entrepreneurial attitudes ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.01$), subjective norms ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.05$), PBC ($\beta = 0.49, p < 0.001$), and implementation intentions ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.01$). We did not find significant direct effects of prior business experience on entrepreneurial intentions. Hence, hypotheses $H1(a)$, $H1(b)$, $H1(c)$ and $H1(e)$ are supported, while hypothesis $H1(d)$ is not supported. However, this is because the TPB antecedent variables fully mediated the effects of prior business experience on the intention variables.

In addition, the results in Table 2 indicate that all the three antecedents of the TPB model were positively associated with entrepreneurial intentions; that is, entrepreneurial attitudes ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001$), subjective norm ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$), and PBC ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$). However, only PBC ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$) and entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$) had significant effects on implementation intentions. These results indicate that PBC had the strongest effect on entrepreneurial intentions, while entrepreneurial intentions, in turn, had the strongest effect on implementation intentions.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that the TPB variables mediate the relationship between refugees' prior business experience and implementation intention. Hypothesis $H3$ suggests serial mediation effects through the TPB antecedent variables and entrepreneurial intentions. The direct effects of prior business experience were significant, indicating that the TPB constructs partially mediated the relationship between prior business experience and implementation intentions. Accordingly, the total indirect effects were significant ($\beta = 0.18, \text{Boot } 95\% \text{ CI } [0.09, 0.28]$). However, only the path via PBC ($\beta = 0.11,$

$\text{Boot } 95\% \text{ CI } [0.04, 0.19]$) was the only significant single mediator path. Therefore, whereas hypothesis $H2c$ is supported, hypotheses $H2a, H2b,$ and $H2d$ are not supported. Nonetheless, the double mediator path via entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.02, \text{Boot } 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.04]$) and the path via PBC and entrepreneurial intentions ($\beta = 0.04, \text{Boot } 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.08]$) were significant. Therefore, hypotheses $H3a$ and $H3c$ are also supported.

Discussion

The study aimed to contribute to the refugee entrepreneurship discourse by integrating past business experience with the TPB in understanding factors that foster refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and the readiness to implement those intentions. The study of Miralles et al. [73] suggests that the influence of previous engagement in entrepreneurial activity on entrepreneurial intentions varies across populations. The present study focused on the population of refugees hosted in resource-constrained settlements in a less-developed country. This context is vital to understanding the results of this study since, beyond inherent interest in an entrepreneurial career, entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial activity for such populations are primarily driven by necessity [63, 71, 112]. In the current study, we demonstrate that previous engagement in entrepreneurial activities is essential in the entrepreneurial process, as it influences TPB antecedents of behavioral intentions and implementation of intentions, indicating that not all refugee entrepreneurial activities are driven solely by necessity.

In line with previous findings (e.g., [41, 77, 110]), our results show that, more than any other demographic variable included in the study, previous business experience positively influences refugees' attitudes toward entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial experience is a vital source of practical knowledge about entrepreneurship, which may result in a positive attitude toward entrepreneurship [73, 74, 110]. These findings reinforce previous efforts advocating for experiential learning to improve the outcomes of entrepreneurial education [76, 78, 88, 92, 100]. Direct entrepreneurial experiences foster entrepreneurial knowledge and an entrepreneurial lifestyle [110] to which individuals become accustomed. Therefore, even when refugees are in new and unfamiliar settings, those who have owned businesses before becoming refugees might find entrepreneurship a more attractive career path in the host community. This not only challenges the hypothesis that refugees' entrepreneurial action is necessity-driven but is also essential to fastening one's economic integration and self-reliance. Refugee entrepreneurs tend to be more integrated and have higher incomes than their counterparts [15].

Relatedly, prior business experience positively predicted both subjective norm and PBC. These findings support previous research that highlights the role of experience in boosting subjective norm and perceived control in the entrepreneurial context [73, 74, 110]. However, some studies reveal that prior entrepreneurial experience can also have negative effects on entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, PBC, and intentions [68]. With respect to PBC, whereas refugees might be in an unfamiliar entrepreneurial environment, their previous business experience might be an asset for their perceived efficacy and controllability in executing entrepreneurial activities. In line with the sociocognitive perspective, experience in entrepreneurial activities strengthens entrepreneurial self-efficacy [49], an essential aspect of PBC. Refugees' perceptions of their ability to exercise control when undertaking entrepreneurial activities can be stronger if their previous entrepreneurial experience translates into stronger entrepreneurial self-efficacy and practical business knowledge. The self-perception of the ability to start a business is a mechanism through which prior entrepreneurial experience and knowledge influence entrepreneurial intentions [74], hence essential to boosting refugee startups.

Previous experience is also essential for the subjective norm. Miralles et al. [74] observe that prior entrepreneurial experience reflected in experiential entrepreneurial knowledge is positively associated with the perception of entrepreneurship as an accepted career path. Whereas the acceptability of entrepreneurship varies among societies [26], our results show that refugees with prior

entrepreneurial experience are more likely to perceive acceptability among host community members and in the refugee community, strengthening their willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities. In refugee settlements such as those in Uganda, where thousands of refugees from the same country of origin live in the same locality, the acceptability of entrepreneurial behavior is more likely to be positively perceived if the refugees have an entrepreneurial background.

Our findings show that whereas prior business experience was not directly correlated to entrepreneurial intentions, it was substantially related to implementation intentions via entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, entrepreneurial intentions, and PBC. Specifically, the mediation path via PBC was significant, as well as the double mediation path via entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions, and the path via PBC and entrepreneurial intentions. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that entrepreneurial experience is an exogenous factor influencing entrepreneurial intentions through the three TPB attitudinal antecedent variables [74, 77, 97, 110]. However, the mediation effects of subjective norm, as a single mediator and in the double mediation path, were not significant. Zapkau et al. [110] suggest that studies examining the effects of demographic characteristics on entrepreneurial intentions and behavior should apply indirect intention-based frameworks. That is, whereas individual variables such as entrepreneurial experience influence entrepreneurial intentions and the implementation of those intentions, the influence becomes effective when previous experience leads to favorable entrepreneurial attitudes, an improved perception of entrepreneurship as an acceptable career behavior, and enhanced perceptions of the controllability of one's entrepreneurial actions in the given entrepreneurial environment. Experience is crucial for refugees, as they often have limited social and financial resources, and therefore must rely on their own human and psychological capital to navigate the new, unfamiliar entrepreneurial environment. However, given the likelihood that prior entrepreneurial experience can in some situations also have adverse effects on dwindle entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and perceptions of controllability [69], scholars need to interrogate the nature of experiences that would be beneficial and those that would be detrimental to refugees' entrepreneurial competence and business creation.

The finding that subjective norm does not have a significant relationship with implementation intentions and does not mediate the effects of prior business experience on implementation intentions is essential to understanding which aspects of the TPB are relevant or should be given attention in promoting refugee entrepreneurship.

Since refugees often migrate to their host communities without their family, friends, and significant others, the need to seek approval from these categories of people becomes irrelevant and impractical. Therefore, the findings highlight that entrepreneurial attitudes and PBC are the most essential elements of the TPB in steering entrepreneurial action and startups, especially among refugees living in precarious economic conditions in less-developed countries. In addition, this finding suggests that previous business experience is essential for entrepreneurial intentions and their implementation if the experience strengthens entrepreneurial attitudes and perceptions of controllability.

Practical implications

Besides the above theoretical contributions, the study makes the following practical contributions. The results confirm that entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC are essential antecedents for refugees' entrepreneurial intentions; and particularly, entrepreneurial attitudes and PBC are directly or indirectly relevant to the implementation of entrepreneurial intentions. Therefore, refugee entrepreneurship programs, including training and education, should focus on learning activities and approaches, such as active learning, that enhance entrepreneurial attitudes and PBC.

Second, enhancing entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norm, and PBC, consequently facilitating the formation of entrepreneurial intentions and drawing plans to implement the intentions or taking action, can be enhanced by exposing refugees to entrepreneurial experience. Therefore, refugee entrepreneurship learning and training programs can result in increased prospects for startups if experiential learning is applied, given the role of experience in the entrepreneurial process and success [25, 76, 100]. Individuals with entrepreneurial experience are likely to have stronger entrepreneurial self-efficacy [49] and know how to harness resources [23, 53] to start and grow an entrepreneurial venture. Hence, deliberate efforts to foster experience learning arrangements such as innovation hubs, apprenticeships, and internships can be useful in providing experiences that strengthen the attractiveness of the entrepreneurship career, steering refugee startups.

Third, policies and interventions that promote acquiring entrepreneurial experience are required. Refugee entrepreneurship policies should emphasize strategies for fostering entrepreneurial experiences among refugees, including experiential entrepreneurship education and training that expose prospective refugee entrepreneurs to the practices of business and innovations. Moreover, policies and interventions supporting startups can use entrepreneurial experience in addition to entrepreneurial

competence among the selection criteria. Given that refugees with prior entrepreneurial experience are more likely to have a more favorable attitude toward entrepreneurship and have stronger intentions for startups, support for such refugees can yield more remarkable outcomes. Moreover, refugees with an entrepreneurial background or experience can be identified and supported to continue with entrepreneurship as a career path.

Limitations

Despite the above theoretical and practical implications, the study has several limitations. First, the settlements where the study was conducted are some of the largest refugee settlements. They predominantly host refugees from South Sudan and Somalia. Whereas refugees from these countries constitute the majority of refugees in the country, Uganda also hosts a significant number of refugees from other neighboring countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (515,482), Eritrea (48,713), and Burundi (42,928), among others [102]. These were not represented in the sample, limiting the generalizability of our findings. Entrepreneurship is associated with culture or ethnicity. Some ethnicities are more enterprising than others, and some cultures are more favorable to entrepreneurship than others [6, 26, 70]. Therefore, studies among other refugee groups are necessary to generate generalizable results.

Secondly, the study is based on data collected cross-sectionally using self-report instruments. Therefore, common method bias cannot be ruled out [27, 32]. Moreover, the data were obtained from a convenient sample of refugees, which has limited generalizability potential compared to probability or random samples [46, 90]. However, this challenge is minimized by the relative homogeneity of the sample [46] since the participants were mainly from South Sudan and Somalia. Future studies could benefit from longitudinal and experimental studies.

Third, the current study considered entrepreneurial experience obtained in the home country; however, some refugees may have also gained entrepreneurship-related experience in the host community. This post-migration entrepreneurial experience could also substantially affect refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and implementation intentions. Our study did not measure and control such effects. Experimental intervention studies that enable refugees to acquire experiences through, for example, practice-based training and apprenticeship can generate valuable scientific evidence on approaches that can accelerate refugee entrepreneurship.

Fourth, previous entrepreneurial experience was measured by determining whether refugees had owned a business prior to becoming refugees. However, there

are different forms of entrepreneurial experience. For instance, some studies have focused on prior entrepreneurial knowledge as an essential aspect of entrepreneurial experience [74]. Entrepreneurial experience can also be boosted through working in a business [17], incubators, entrepreneurial education programs, and family businesses [18, 22, 76, 111]. These may have differing forms and magnitude of influence on TPB antecedent variables, entrepreneurial intentions, and behavior. Therefore, future research could benefit from considering various entrepreneurial experiences and their effect on refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and behavior. In addition, refugee entrepreneurs may also be challenged by a lack of business experience in the host context [1, 104]. Future research could investigate the differential or combined effects of prior entrepreneurial experiences in the host community and the home country or country of origin on refugees' entrepreneurial intentions and business creation.

Conclusion

This study contributes to understanding refugee entrepreneurial intentions and readiness to implement those intentions by focusing on the role of prior business experience. We primarily focus on how prior business experience acquired in the country of origin relates to the TPB concepts among refugees residing in resource-constrained settlements. Similar to studies from other contexts [74, 77, 110], our findings show strong effects of prior entrepreneurial experience on TPB constructs and entrepreneurial intention implementation among refugees. Whereas entrepreneurial attitudes and PBC were associated with entrepreneurial intentions, the effects of subjective norm were not substantial. Of the three TPB antecedent variables, PBC had the strongest direct effects on entrepreneurial intentions and implementations. PBC also had the strongest mediation effects in the association between prior business experience and implementation intentions. Moreover, significant double mediation paths were observed for the effects of prior experience on implementation intentions, both through entrepreneurial attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions, as well as through PBC and entrepreneurial intentions. The results of this study suggest that prior entrepreneurial experience is foundational to promoting refugee entrepreneurship. Refugees who have experience of founding a business prior to their migration are more likely to have stronger intentions to start a business in the host country, and more likely to act on those intentions. Refugee entrepreneurship promotion interventions may benefit from approaches that enhance entrepreneurial exposure and practical experience. Therefore, refugee entrepreneurship policies need to promote entrepreneurial experience

acquisition among prospecting refugee entrepreneurs. The existing literature suggests that practical experiences can be acquired through experiential learning and training methods, such as apprenticeships, mentoring, and innovation hubs. The results also suggest that refugees with an entrepreneurial career have a higher likelihood of self-determinedly seeking socioeconomic integration via engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Hence, entrepreneurial experience can be used as a criterion for identifying refugees for support to further their entrepreneurial careers. Refugees with entrepreneurial experience tend to have higher entrepreneurial motivation [81]; therefore, they would benefit from entrepreneurial support initiatives in the host community.

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Author contributions

M.M.B. conceptualized the paper and led all aspects of its development. E.W., S.N., and F.N. participated in data collection and curation. P.N. proofread the manuscript. All authors reviewed the manuscript.

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Data availability

Data used for this paper are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This paper reports part of the data from a research project titled "Refugee Entrepreneurship and Skilling for Self-Reliance (RESS-R)." The project received ethical clearance from Makerere University Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Clearance No MAKSS REC 03.20.393. Participants were presented with consent forms to sign. The consent forms included the details of the study, such as the research team, the purpose of the study, the selection criteria, the risks and benefits involved, confidentiality and voluntariness statements, reimbursement, and ethical clearance. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent to publish

Not applicable.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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