

University students' career choice intentions: Guesss Colombia study

Intención de elección de carrera en estudiantes universitarios: Estudio Guesss Colombia

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ABSTRACT:

This article aims to describe the university students' career intentions from the theory of planned behavior. Data are obtained from GUESSS, an international research that examines students' career intentions (founders, employees, successors). The main findings show that in Colombia prevails the intention to be an entrepreneur and students' career intentions seem to follow the international pattern of being an employee and later a founder. Also, the study states significant differences for career intentions in the study fields, education level and academic performance, while gender and age range of students are not significantly different for career intentions.

Keywords: Career Intention, University students, GUESSS, Colombia.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo describe las intenciones de carrera de los estudiantes universitarios desde la teoría del comportamiento planificado. Para esto, se obtuvieron datos del GUESSS, una investigación internacional que examina las intenciones de carrera de estudiantes (fundadores, empleados, sucesores). Se encuentra que en Colombia predomina la intención por ser emprendedor, y que las intenciones de carrera siguen el patrón internacional de ser primero empleado y luego fundador. Además, el estudio señala diferencias significativas en las intenciones de carrera según el campo de estudio, nivel de educación y desempeño académico, mientras que el género y rango de edad no generan diferencias significativas.

Palabras clave: Intención de carrera, estudiantes universitarios, GUESSS, Colombia.

1. Introduction

In the last years, an important amount of scholar studies has highlighted the importance of understanding the university students' career choice intentions (Zhao, Hills, and Seibert, 2005; Sieger and Moen, 2015) and identifying the antecedents to entrepreneurial intentions in more

detail (Liñán and Chen 2009). One of the most distinguishing frameworks analyzing this phenomenon has been the theory of planned behavior (TPB) which has particularly been helpful to analyze entrepreneurial intent and activity of students in several and relevant studies (Zellweger, Sieger and Halter, 2011; Bernhofer and Li, 2014; Bergmann, Hundt and Sternberg, 2016). However, few scholars have described and analyzed the university students' entrepreneurial intentions in emerging countries (Lima, Lopes, Nassif, and Da Silva, 2015) and much less using a wider set of career choices with varying degrees of entrepreneurial content. Thus, the study intends to fill this gap by describing the university students' career choice intentions from the theory of planned behavior. Consequently, we conduct a descriptive analysis from data generated in the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS), which considers a country sample of 801 students from 22 different universities in Colombia. The main results of this research suggest that career choice intention of university students are oriented to be founders after having accumulated experience as employees in the first five years, differing from the international sample that shows a lower range of entrepreneurship intention.

The paper provides exploratory evidence about entrepreneurial career choice intention of university students in Colombia and thus it fills an important gap in the entrepreneurship literature by adding up insights from emerging countries to the debate. The research could be useful for designing policies to foster university entrepreneurial intentions in different environments and it offers research future directions based on its limitations.

The article is structured as follows. After this brief introduction, in the second section we introduce the theoretical framework. The third section presents the details of the research methodology. The fourth section discusses the empirical results of the study. Finally, the article points out the most relevant conclusions and future lines of research.

2. Theory of Planned behavior and Career Choice Intention

Entrepreneurial behavior is not easily measured or determined, since it is a phenomenon hard to observe and involves unpredictable time lags (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994). Thus, the theory of planned behavior proposed by Ajzen (1991) has emerged as a critical theoretical framework that explains that intentions are the most effective predictor of actual behavior and become the fundamental element towards explaining behavior not only in employment but also in academic intentions. According to Ajzen (2002), human behavior is guided by behavioral, normative, and control beliefs or perceptions.

The behavioral belief deals with attitudes that reflect the degree to which the individual holds a positive or negative personal valuation about being an entrepreneur (Armitage and Conner, 2001). The normative belief refers to the opinion of others (parents, friends, or fellow students) and their expected reactions when a certain type of action is performed. The control belief refers to a person's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and it comprises the concepts of entrepreneurial self-efficacy or self-confidence and locus of control or perception of having one's own fate under control (Ajzen, 2002). In simpler words, this TPB theory claims that intentions will be greatest when an individual holds a favorable attitude toward the intended behavior, strong experiences social norms and expectations to perform the behavior successfully.

From a career development perspective, students' career choice intentions examine what students intend to do after their studies and what they want to do both short-term or long-term in their career plan by taking demographic variables such as age, gender, academic performance and the field of study. According to different authors the variables of age, gender and the field of study turn out to be important predictors for students' career intentions (Schröder, Schmitt-Rodermund and Arnaud, 2011; Hartung, Porfeli and Vondracek, 2005).

3. Methodology

On this study, we conduct a descriptive analysis about the university students' entrepreneurial intentions from data generated in the Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS), an international research project that adopts and tests the Theory of Plan Behavior Model. This GUESSS project organized and conducted by the UGC-HSG Institute of the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) originally has the participation of 34 countries and more than 700 universities worldwide with more than 109,000 students. This Swiss institute sends an online survey to each participating country so that a country team is responsible for implementing the survey at universities who wish to participate.

The survey contains 16 sets of multiple-choice questions employing scales of five and seven points and it examines different aspects such as basic student information, education level, career choice intentions (founder successor, employee, and reasons for career choice, among others). For the edition 2013-2014, Colombia takes part for the first time of this international research project and with the leadership of the Universidad de Medellin the survey is conducted in six universities, providing a final sample size of 801 students.

The survey considers control variables such as age, gender, academic performance, years of study and field of study. In this line, Table 1 describes the study sample for the average age, percentage of participation of men and women, as well as the academic performance of university students, rated on a scale of 1 to 5.

Table 1. Sample study characterization

Average age	Male	Female	Academic Performance
22 years	49%	51%	3.5

Source: Authors

Similarly, Table 2 outlines the percentage of students belonging to different fields of study by a grouping methodology proposed by Sieger, Fueglistaller & Zellweger (2011) and Sieger, Fueglistaller & Zellweger (2014). Administrative sciences include fields of knowledge relating to economy, business administration, accounting and law. In turn, natural sciences include fields of knowledge relating to mathematics, health sciences, medicine, engineering, agriculture, nutrition, architecture, computing and information technology. Social sciences include fields of knowledge relating to linguistics, psychology, philosophy, religion, cultural studies, pedagogy, sociology and political science.

Table 2. Participation of students by field of study

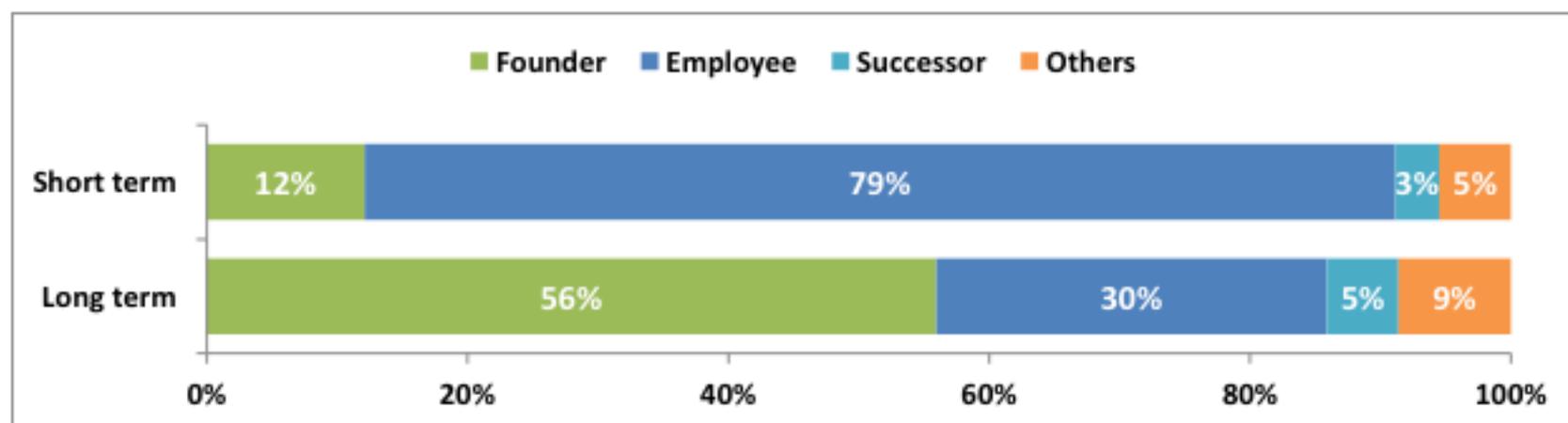
Administrative Sciences	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences	Others
41.3%	48.7%	3.8%	6.2%

Once the sample is characterized, we analyze the students' career intentions 5 years after they finish university studies. This type of intention reflects the long-term students' intention, which is more consistent and stable with respect to students' career intentions than the one they may have immediately they finish university. This approach to study the career intentions is similar to that applied by Sieger and Monsen (2015), because students tend to be employed in companies upon graduation to gain experience and then start their own business in the long

4. Results and discussion

With the information collected, the study describes the career intentions of university students in Colombia. These different career intentions are grouped into the categories of founder (entrepreneur), employee (public, private, academic, NGOs, among others), successor (family business and other companies), and other intentions. In the first instance, Figure 1 shows the evolution of the career intentions of students, contrasting these intentions once studies end (short term) with the intentions 5 years after finishing university studies (long-term).

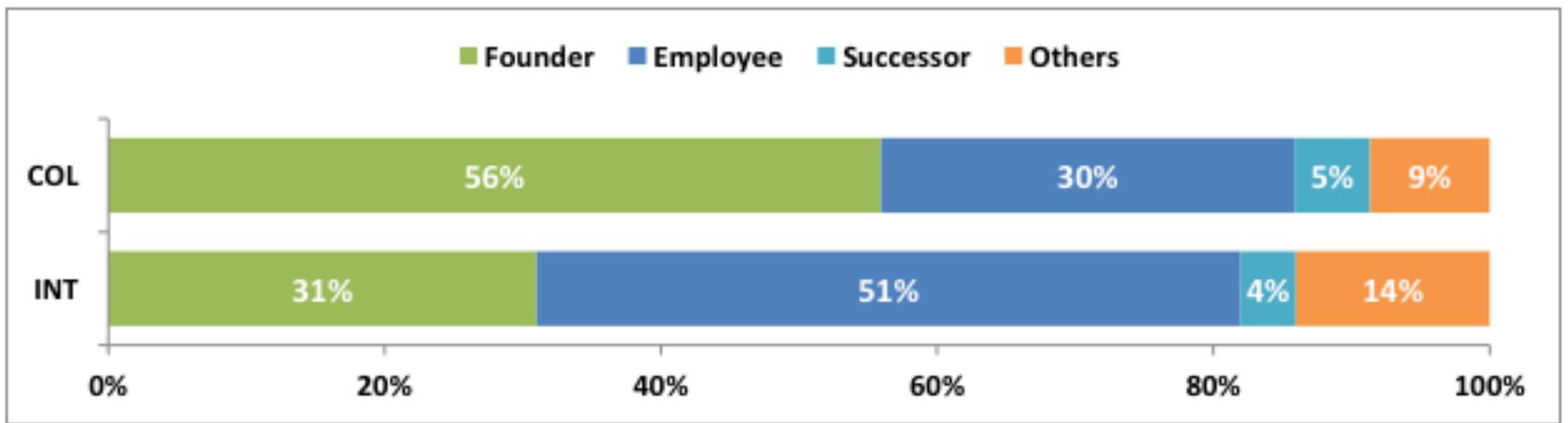
Figure 1. Evolution of career intentions



Thus, the study identifies that an intention to be an employee predominates in the short-term; meanwhile an intention to be a founder predominates in the long-term. This behavior change in career intentions is because students wish to gain work experience as employees after completing their studies, learning from good business practices and then applying them in the long-term at their own business. This idea is supported with information that shows that only 12% of students in the short-term want to be an entrepreneur and 79% an employee. Conversely, 56% of students want to be founders in the long-term, while 30% of them want to be employees. The results also indicate that being a successor of a familiar business is the intention with the lowest percentage of participation. The latter information calls the attention in this study since 51% of successors have had one or both parents with their own business or companies (self-employed).

In order to find an international benchmark to compare the entrepreneurship intention in university, Figure 2 compares career intentions in Colombia (COL) with those of the international (INT) study carried out by Sieger, Fueglistaller, & Zellweger (2014). Therefore, in the long-term an intention to be a founder predominates in Colombia, while an intention to be an employee predominates in the international sample. This difference represents a 25% between Colombian individuals and the international average regarding to the intention to start a business. For those who want to be a successor in a family business, the percentages are similar in both samples.

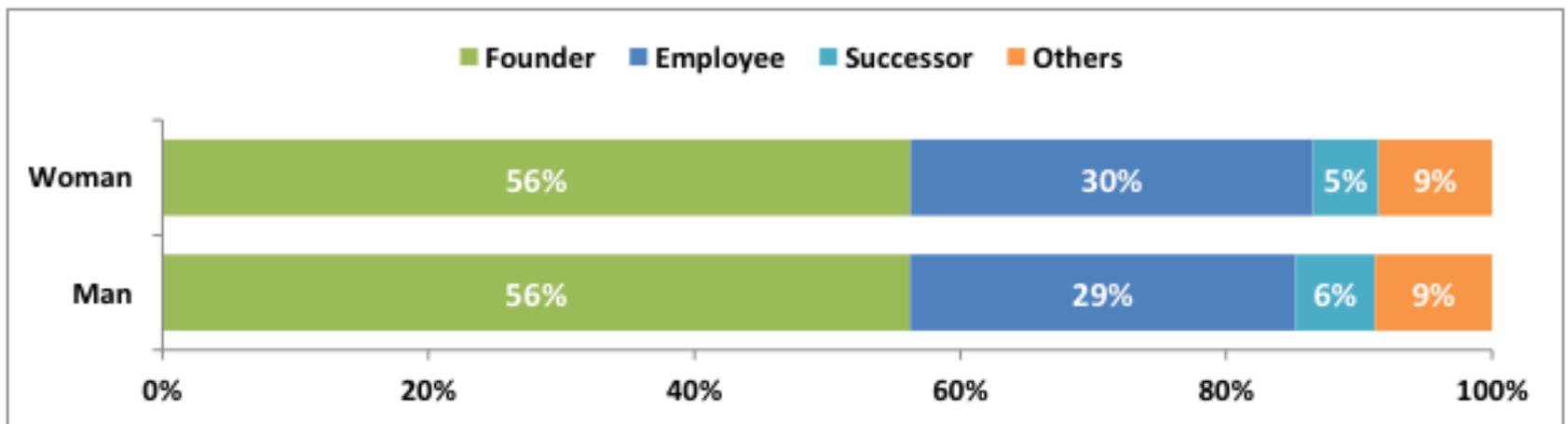
Figure 2. Career intentions in Colombia and Worldwide



This behavior can be explained to the extent that Colombia is a developing country, which means that there are greater business opportunities in different business sectors, and that the market needs a wide range of services and products with different levels of innovation. Worldwide, Colombia is the second country with greater entrepreneurial intention after Mexico, and with an average similar to several other developing countries such as Argentina, Malaysia and Russia (Sieger, Fueglistaller, & Zellweger, 2014). Thus, scholar studies show that developing countries have high rates of entrepreneurship, while developed countries have lower rate of entrepreneurship and less focus to evolve and strengthen established businesses (Álvarez, Cano, Yepes, & Aparicio, 2013).

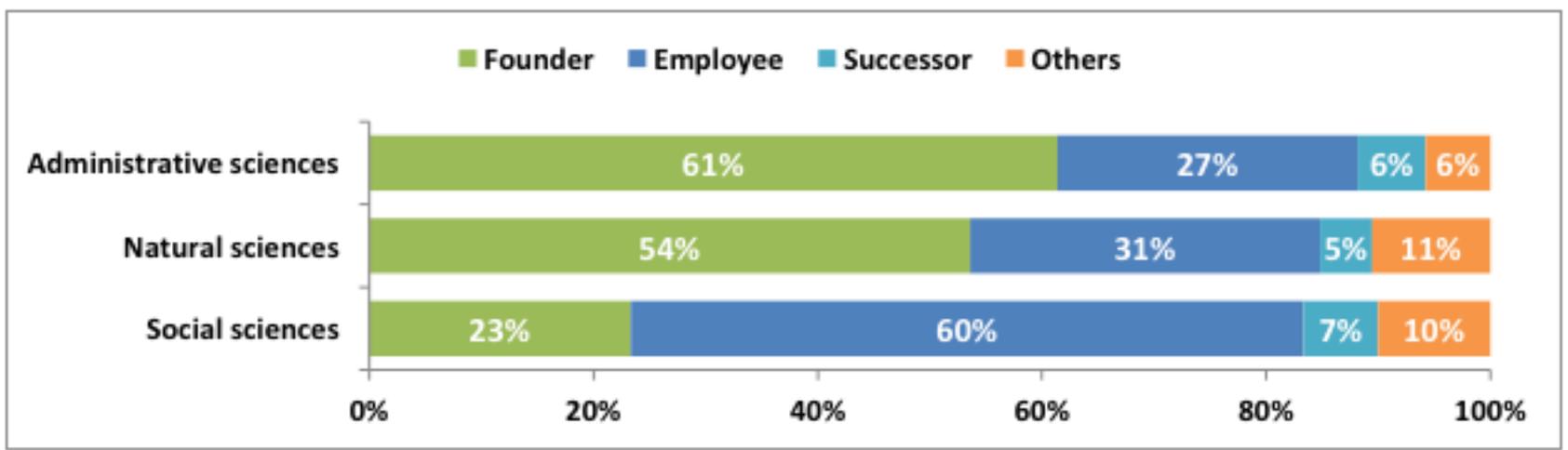
To deepen the analysis of the career intentions in Colombia, the study compares the long-term intentions between men and women, since this aspect is of great interest for the scholars, business, social and political scope (Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007; Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009; Shinnar, Giacomini, & Janssen, 2012). Figure 3 shows that both men and women career intentions are practically the same, highlighting the long-term intention to be founders, followed by a tendency to be employees, being lower the desired intention to be successors.

Figure 3. Career intentions by gender



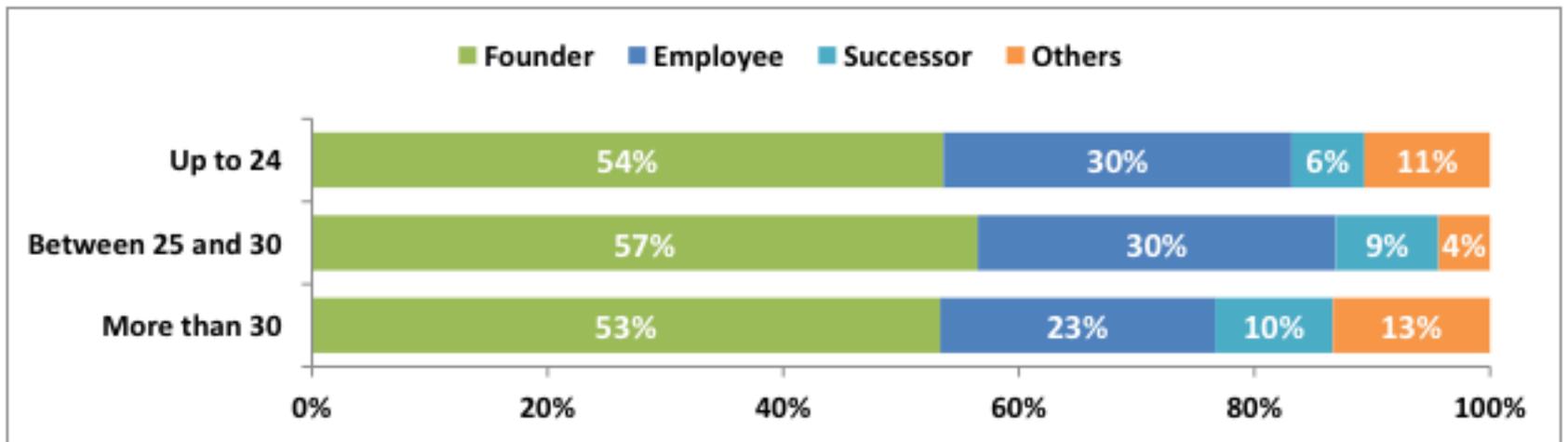
On the other hand, the field of study is a decisive factor for the career intention and this requires an analysis on the three main fields of study mentioned in the methodology section. Thus, Figure 4 indicates that students in the field of administrative sciences show a higher intention to create companies compared with students in the fields of social sciences and natural sciences. These differences are more remarkable when looking at the percentage of social science students who want to be employees in the long-term roughly double the percentage of students who wish to be employees in other fields of study. These results indicate that students are more likely to create business in the fields of administrative sciences and natural sciences: this behavior is largely explained by the business scope, development and commercialization of products and services in these fields of study.

Figure 4. Career intentions by fields of study



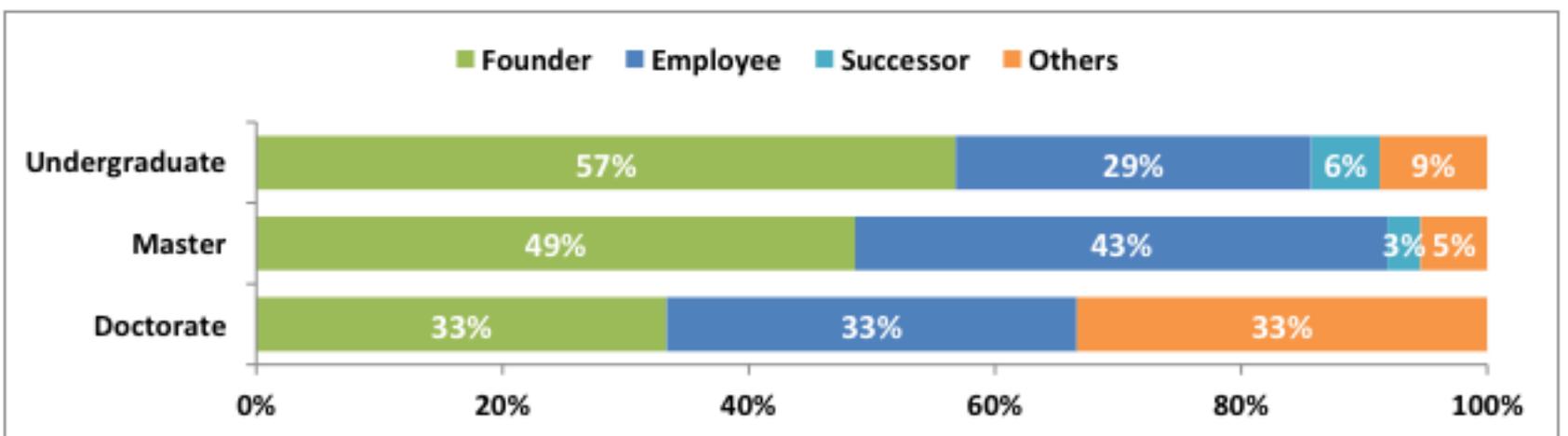
Another factor that can influence the career intention is the age of the students, which reflects the maturity and personal development, which in turn can influence the intention to be a founder, employee or successor. In this regard, Figure 5 shows that there are no major differences in the long-term career intentions among students belonging to different age ranges. Students aged between 25 and 30 years have a slightly high intention to be founders over other students, while students aged up to 24 years have a lower intention to be successors compared with the other students.

Figure 5. Career intentions by age



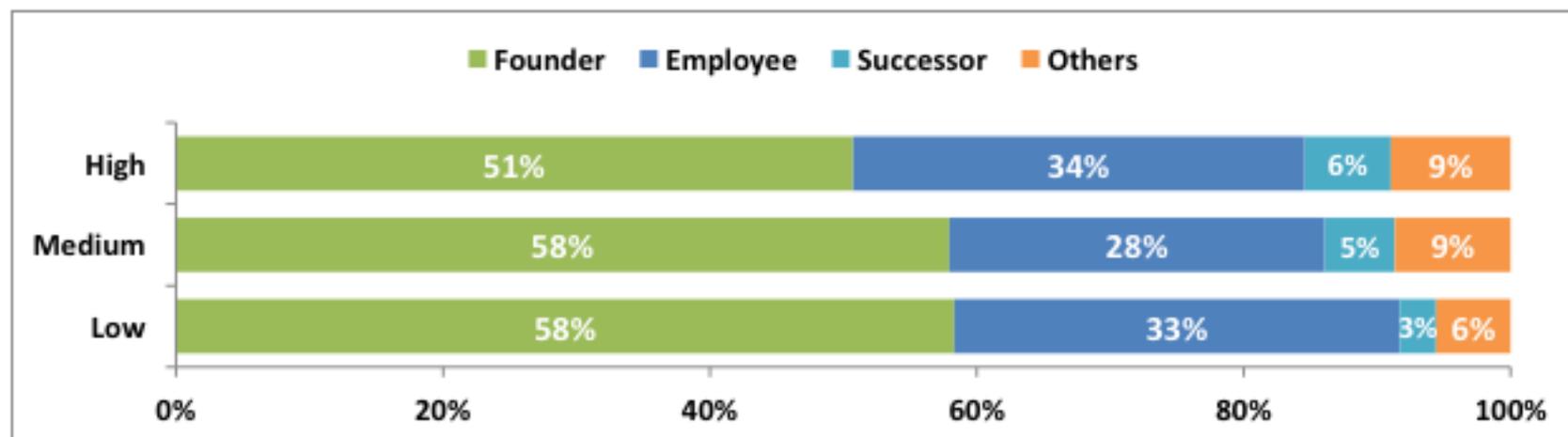
In addition to the age range, the education level can also influence the career intention of the university students. As shown in Figure 6, as the level of knowledge in university studies increases, the long-term intention for being a founder decreases. This may show that students with higher academic degree expect to find alternatives different from being an entrepreneur and instead they expect to find job opportunities corresponding to their knowledge level. However, it highlights the fact that long-term intention of starting an own business prevails in undergraduate and master students; meanwhile the intention to be a founder, an employee or others has the same participation for doctoral students.

Figure 6. Career intentions by education level



With regard to how the perception of personal abilities influences career intentions in university students (Rauch & Frese, 2007; McGee, Peterson, Mueller, & Sequeira, 2009), the study finds that students with a high academic performance have lower intention to be entrepreneurs compared to students who have lower or average academic performance. Figure 7 shows a difference of 7% in the intention to be a founder between students with high performance and the other two, students with both average and low performance. It is noteworthy that as long as academic performance decreases, the intention to be successors decreases as well.

Figure 7. Career intentions by academic performance



The results of the study highlight that Colombia presents higher rates of entrepreneurship intention compared with the rest of the world. In detail, the variables generating greater differences in career intentions in Colombia are the field of study and the education level of the university studies. The age range and academic performance generate minor differences, and gender does not influence on the career intentions. In addition to this, the evolution of career intentions demonstrates that students need to gain professional experience to later focus on creating their own company in the long-term.

5. Conclusions

The research conducted establishes the career intentions of university students in Colombia, noting that intentions focus on being employees in the short-term while intentions to be founders predominate in the long-term. This career choice intention suggests that university students wish to gain first professional experience and then create their own business in the future. Thus, the study GUESSS Colombia 2013/2014 confirms the pattern that has already been found in previous editions of GUESSS, where students prefer to be employees first, and then to be founders.

In addition, the research shows that in Colombia there is a higher intention to be a founder compared with the intentions in the international sample. In fact, Colombia is considered in this world observatory as the second country with greater force of entrepreneurial intention, which is largely explained by being Colombia a developing country with unmet demands of services and products. This reinforces the idea that entrepreneurial intentions are stronger in developing countries and weaker in developed countries.

As for gender comparison we refer, the GUESSS Colombia states that there are no significant differences between men and women in career intentions to be a founder, an employee or a successor. However, in a contrastive analysis of fields of study the research claims that in administrative sciences and natural sciences the intention to be a founder prevails, while in social sciences the intention to be an employee predominates, due partially to the approach of each field of study in the development and commercialization of products and services.

Regarding the age range of the students, there are no significant differences in the career intentions. However, by analyzing the education level of students, it is established that as long as the education level increases, the intention to be a founder decreases as well. Finally, the

research noted that students with high academic performance have stronger intentions to be employees compared with other students.

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