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Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Behaviour among Undergraduate Students in Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of entrepreneurship education in the university on student's entrepreneurial behaviour, in terms of their entrepreneurial attitudes and start-up intention. The paper aims to investigate the perceived influence that various entrepreneurship education courses have had on third-year undergraduate students from business and non-business study programs in University Malaysia Sabah. The questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms, which gathers students' perspectives on their entrepreneurial attitudes (achievement, innovation, personal control and self-esteem), and start-up intention. The results of chi-squared test revealed that innovation, personal control and self-esteem are the most influential impacts of entrepreneurship education among undergraduate students. In addition, the results of One-Way ANOVA showed significant differences among types of student's degree programs in terms of their achievement, innovation, external support and start-up intention. The study also provides qualitative insights from students' perspectives about the challenges that they think could hinder students to start a business. This study hopes to contribute to the university and other institutions of higher learning in Malaysia in preparing the appropriate entrepreneurial education approach for the students towards materialising the government agenda to become 'Entrepreneurial Nation' by 2030.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurial Attitudes, Start-up Intention

1. Introduction

1.1 The Entrepreneurship Education in the University

Several universities in Malaysia reported a notable proportion of graduates do not find employment even after a year of their graduation, despite of concerted efforts that have been made by the government and universities on entrepreneurial embeddedness in the faculty curricula. Although some researchers have paid attention to factors for entrepreneurial intention among university students, little research has been carried out in relating to perceived factors that drive and hinder start-up intention. Therefore, this study aims to study the significant difference between students of three study programs in the university in terms of their entrepreneurial attitudes and start-up intention. In addition, the study gathers student's perceptions on challenges to start a business via open-ended

question. A total of 168 third-year undergraduate students from three different degree programs, including the entrepreneurship, non-entrepreneurship and non-business program were involved in this study.

In 2016, The Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia reported that the graduate employability (GE) rate of Malaysian universities over the past five years recorded only minor increases of 2.8 percentage points. The report reveals only 56.5 percent of almost 225,000 graduates in Malaysian universities were reported able to find job within six months of completing their studies (Graduate Tracking Survey, 2016). These thought-provoking numbers convey that the remaining of more than 127,000 graduates of those unemployed every year as quite disturbing and should be treated as an alarm to educators to improve the quality and competencies of students for their future careers. A notable proportion of unemployed graduates of Malaysian universities may portray that a good academic achievement is no longer the only guarantee to get job. Hanapi and Nordin (2014) in their studies on unemployment among Malaysia graduates found that lack of soft skills and personal qualities as the main reasons for not being employed by employers. Previous surveys done by several leading job matching companies confirms the issues, in which JobStreet.com (2012) revealed that 60 percent of surveyed employers mentioned poor personality characteristics among graduates are among the main reasons leading to not hiring them. Furthermore, as revealed by TalentCorp Malaysia (2016), lack of self-esteem, self-initiative and soft skills are among the main factors leading to employability among fresh graduates in Malaysia.

Undoubtedly, concerted efforts have been made by the government and universities to inculcate entrepreneurial mind-set and competencies, through embedding entrepreneurship education as part of the faculty curricula. In fact, developing a holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced graduate becomes the first agenda under the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education). The aim is not merely to produce graduate entrepreneurs but to prepare students with entrepreneurial qualities to become an independent and resourceful person in the future. Entrepreneurial education in most universities includes program or activities that seek to develop entrepreneurial behaviour, attitude, skills and values through lectures, hands-on activities, industrial engagement and entrepreneur's talk. It is believed that entrepreneurship embeddedness not only could motivate students towards entrepreneurship career but also could produce graduates with entrepreneurial competencies, that is to behave and think as an entrepreneur (Gibb, et al, 2010). Currently in Universiti Malaysia Sabah, the university has always encouraged the students to engage themselves into entrepreneurial activities by organizing innovation expo, entrepreneurship carnival, creativity competition, as well as collaborating with various entrepreneurial development organizations (EDOs) like MARA, SMECorp, Amanah Ikhtiar, CEOs and successful entrepreneurs of small enterprises, as an effort to create more students with entrepreneurial behaviour and mind-set.

Much research has been done on the start-up intention per se, however, there is still lack of research on the direct outcome of entrepreneurial embeddedness program on student's entrepreneurial behaviours, skills and attitudes. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of entrepreneurship education embedded in faculty curricula towards entrepreneurial attitude and start-up intention among business and non-business undergraduate students in Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). More specifically, this paper has two main objectives, (i) to identify the significant difference between types of student's courses in terms of their entrepreneurial attitudes and start-up intention and (ii) to explore student's perception on what hinders or delays entrepreneurial start-up in the university. The online questionnaire posted in Google Forms has received 168 responses from final year undergraduate students in UMS. The URL link of the online questionnaire was shared to students in three different faculties via lecturers as well as student club. The findings of this research are expected to give some insights to university educators in developing effective work-based learning and teaching approaches to instill entrepreneurial attitudes and skills among students in preparing them for job market.

1.2 Entrepreneurial Behaviour – Attitudes and Start-up Intention

Entrepreneurship education involves teaching and learning activities that focus on inculcating student's behaviour and mind-set with entrepreneurial competencies, skills and knowledge in pursuing entrepreneurial career (Ekpoh & Edet, 2011; Ooi, Selvarajah & Meyer, 2011). It has been widely viewed by many scholars that the embeddedness of entrepreneurship education in university curricula is a key strategy to instil and mould students' attitudes and

preferences towards entrepreneurial career, i.e., to venture a business (Lee, Chang & Lim, 2005; Izedonmi & Okafor, 2010). Matlay (2008) revealed that over ten year's period under scrutiny with 64 graduates in the research sample, all of the graduates who had undergone entrepreneurship education became entrepreneurs. Previous studies argued the basic entrepreneurial skills can be taught in school or university, but it does not promise to produce a successful entrepreneur (Kuratko, 2003; Johannison, 1991; Rae, 1997). Given these opposite perspectives, it is not surprising that there is an ongoing deliberation about whether universities can able to produce a significant number and quality of future entrepreneurs as wished by the government (Matlay, 2008). Despite of different opinions concerning the role of universities to create future entrepreneurs, many previous studies have showed significant influences of entrepreneurship education towards students' attitudes and entrepreneurial intentions. Tam (2009) and Dell (2008) in their studies have proved that entrepreneurship education has significant impact on student's attitude of pursuing entrepreneurial path. In addition, the studies have found that students who have not exposed to any basic entrepreneurship education showed less interest towards becoming entrepreneur. This indicates that entrepreneurship education able to enhance personal characteristics of an individual, which subsequently creates strong self-confidence to choose entrepreneurship as their future career.

Many primary entrepreneurship scholars considered entrepreneurship studies as a traits-based approach, in which they viewed certain personal attitudes able to differentiate an entrepreneur from a non-entrepreneur. Notwithstanding, Robinson, et al. (1991) argue that the use of a trait-based approach is inappropriate because those characteristics are also meant for identifying the traits of individuals in other fields like salespeople, professionals and managers. Despite of incoherent views about the personal characteristics of an entrepreneur, it is still of interest for this study to include attitude variable into the current research. This is because it is believed that attitudes influence individual's decision towards entrepreneurship among students, which may produce other significant results. Personality traits that were most commonly studied were need for achievement, locus of control and risk-taking propensity, the ones first proposed by works of McClelland (1987) and Brockhaus and Horwitz (1986) as frequently associated with entrepreneurial behaviour. Robinson, et al. (1991) studies classic personality traits like need for achievement and locus of control but investigate and measure these traits as "attitude" which involves cognitive, feelings and behavioural components that a person holds about an event or object. They suggest that attitude model as a better approach to understand the factors of entrepreneurial behaviour, that is start-up intention and growth, in which they find that innovation in business, perceived personal control of business outcomes and perceived self-esteem are all significant predictors of entrepreneurship, though only need for achievement is not significant.

Entrepreneurial intention can be defined as the willingness of an individual to start a business venture (Sesen, 2012; Dell, 2008). It typically involves intuitive inspiration, goal, desire and the feeling of independence (Zain, Akram & Ghani, 2010). Many previous studies have proved that certain entrepreneurial attributes can be antecedents to entrepreneurial intention. Utsch and Rauch (2002) and Koh (1996) explain several important personality traits for entrepreneurship namely, locus of control, need for achievement, risk propensity, innovativeness, self-confidence and tolerance to ambiguity. Some authors have also highlighted the importance of environmental factors in explaining start-up intention, namely physical and emotional support (Fabeil, 2013; Uddin & Bose, 2012). On the other hand, some authors have contended that external context is not significantly related to start-up intention (Ahmed, et al., 2011; Esuh & Najafi, 2014). Although not all studies on external context towards entrepreneurial intention found strong significant relationships, many studies include them at least as control variables that might indirectly influence entrepreneurial intention. These findings imply a need to include external context variables as possible predictors of start-up intention among undergraduates.

Dell (2008) suggests that external factors like the availability of physical resources and emotional support can enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy and in turn, strengthen their attitude toward entrepreneurship. The absence of this factor is postulated as one of the key challenges to start a business. Kreuger, et al. (2000), drawing from the Theory of Planned Behaviour, highlight how social norms influence what entrepreneurs do, i.e., entrepreneurs' perceptions of how important people in their lives like family and friends influence their attitudes towards start-up intention. These authors argue that support received from the social network is influential not only from a practical point of view (as sources of finance or practical assistance), but also in terms of emotional support (giving confidence, or reassurance that what the entrepreneur is doing is valuable and worthwhile). Krueger's findings

suggest that social norms have at least a moderate effect on entrepreneurial intention, with the influence of social support in entrepreneurs' lives acting as a mediator to their attitudes or decision on start-up intentions. Low and MacMillan (1988) also argued that meaningful research should adopt a more contextual and process-oriented focus, i.e., seeking to understand how people behave throughout the entrepreneurial process and how relationships with external forces affect their decision to start a business. Overall, these factors drawn from the literature suggest that other than person-related factors, external factors in the person's surroundings (physical and emotional support) may contribute to start-up intention.

2. Method

The survey was undertaken via online questionnaire (Google Forms). The samples were conveniently approached, in which the linking address was shared to all final year students in three faculties, via student leaders and lecturers. This sampling technique allows the researcher to gather respondents based on special features the respondents hold (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). For the purpose of quality of sample, the researcher has set some criteria as bases for the sample selection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The students whom participated in the survey are among the final year students of three faculties, i.e., Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy (consist of entrepreneurship and non-entrepreneurship program), Faculty of Food Science and Nutrition and Faculty of Computing and Informatics (non-business program). These students have had taken the entrepreneurship courses prepared by the University Curricula either as core university or core faculty. The questions included dichotomous and attitudinal of 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Attitudinal questions were used to ask respondents to indicate their agreeableness towards their entrepreneurial attitude (achievement, innovation, personal control and self-esteem) and intention to start a business. Data were analysed using both the descriptive and ANOVA analysis to test the significant impact between the variables. The One-way ANOVA analysis revealed interesting significant differences between the business non-business undergraduates, in terms of their entrepreneurial attitude and start-up intention. In addition, the study also provides qualitative insights from students' perspectives about the challenges that they think could hinder the students from starting a business in the university. Weber's views (in Bryman, 2004) imply that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a study is good for the knowledge gathering process. Both approaches may complement each other in terms of providing relevant data and knowledge derived from both theories and observations of the real world.

3. Results

3.1 Respondents' Profile

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of respondents' profile. This study involves a total number of 168 students, with more than three-quarter are female students (77.4 percent), vast majority are within the age bracket of 20 to 24 (91.7 percent), and mainly are Chinese (25 percent), followed by Malay (23.8 percent) and Dusun (11.9 percent). Almost half of the students involved in this study are among the non-entrepreneurship degree program (49.4 percent), followed by 31 percent of entrepreneurship program students and 19.4 percent are non-business students. The result also indicates that more than half (58.9 percent) of the respondents whom family does not own a business, and less than half of them have had attended training on business or entrepreneurship outside the campus.

Table 1. Respondent's Profile (n=168)

Personal Background		N = 168	Percentage (%)
Age	20 and less	30	17.9
	21 to 24	124	73.8
	25 and above	14	8.3
Gender	Male	38	22.6
	Female	130	77.4
Race	Malay	40	23.8
	Chinese	42	25
	Kadazan	9	5.4
	Bajau	14	8.3
	Dusun	20	11.9
	Indian	4	2.4
	Other Sabah Ethnic	29	23.2
Course in UMS	Entrepreneurship	52	31
	Non-Entrepreneurship	83	49.4
	Non-Business	33	19.4
Family Own a Business	No	99	58.9
	Yes	69	41.1
Attended any Business/ Entrepreneurship Training	No	96	57.1
	Yes	72	42.9

3.2 Entrepreneurial Attitudes and Start-up Intention among Undergraduates

The study aims to investigate to what extent undergraduate students in UMS are different in terms of entrepreneurial attitudes, external support and start-up intention after they attended basic entrepreneurship courses in the university or faculty level. Figure 1 shows the results of One-Way ANOVA analysis, which confirms that students of three types of programs are different in terms of entrepreneurial attitude (achievement, innovation) and start-up intention. Interestingly, students of non-business programs, i.e., the science field students, have a higher level of achievement, though they are not very keen to choose entrepreneurship as their future career. This is logic as they may perceive themselves as 'high achievers' in their professional field, for example to become a future food scientist, engineer, computer programmer, or food technologist, rather than in business field. It is found that start-up intention is more apparent among the students of entrepreneurship program, who also meant to have higher level of innovation, in which mainly of them agreed to the statement 'I feel very energetic working with innovative friends in a dynamic culture background.' This result is parallel with past study from Robinson, et al. (1991) who found that innovation in business, perceived personal control of business outcomes and perceived self-esteem are all significant predictors to start-up intention though only need for achievement is not significant. In addition, Frank, et al. (2007) and Robinson, et al. (1991) in their studies on the significance of personality traits in entrepreneurial orientation suggest that potential entrepreneurs who perceive high need for achievement, internal locus of control and self-esteem influence their start-up intention.

Figure 1. Results of One-Way ANOVA Test of Students' Entrepreneurial Attitudes and Start-up Intention (n=168)

Variables Tested	Overall Mean	Significance Value	Group Mean (Types of Course Attended in UMS)		
			Entrepreneurship Program (n=52)	Non-Entrepreneurship Program (n=83)	Non-Business Program (n=33)
Achievement	3.841	0.000***	3.55	3.96	4.00
Innovation	3.598	0.012*	3.78	3.55	3.42
Personal Control	3.786	0.136	3.81	3.84	3.59
Self-esteem	3.942	0.086	3.85	4.03	3.97
Start-up Intention	3.830	0.000***	4.14	3.79	3.43

Convention is * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

3.3 Students' Perception on Challenges for Graduates to Start a Business

In relating to students' opinions on the challenges that they think may hinder them from starting a business, Table 2 summarizes the result. Four main challenges appeared to be mainly mentioned by the respondents, relating to finance, skill, personality and external support. In relating to financial-related issues, some respondents mentioned lack of financial to start a business and no savings as challenges for start-up. Tariq, et al (2015) in their study s found that lack of funds causes problems to young graduates in becoming entrepreneurs. Lack of business and management skills was also mentioned by some respondents, especially on the planning, financial management and networking. This implies that students do not acquire the relevant skills that can influence them to choose entrepreneurship as their profession in the future. Some respondents also mentioned certain personality traits like creative, passion, self-confidence, perseverance, and risk-taking as the challenges for them to choose their career as an entrepreneur. These challenges have been widely mentioned in the literature as factors that delay entrepreneurial behaviour or start-up intention of an individual (Tariq, et al., 2015; Rahim, et al., 2015). In addition, some respondents also mentioned about the lack of external supports especially from the family and friends as to hinder them to involve in entrepreneurship. Tushabomwe-Kazooba (2006) in his study on the issues for graduate entrepreneurs concluded that families did not support graduates to become entrepreneurs because they think that is not a secure job.

Table 2. Summarize of Perceived Challenges of Graduates to Start a Business

Challenges (after coding)	Some of the transcripts from the respondents
Financial-related	Lack of capital, not enough money to start a business, lack of financial, financing, do not have stable finance, monetary problem, raising capital, no source of funding, don't have money, budget....
Business and Management Skill (Planning, Financing, Networking)	No planning, lack of networking, lack of business knowledge, lack of experience in business, don't know marketing, don't know where/how to get initial fund/assistance, poor time management ...
Personality based	Their own attitude, lack of entrepreneurial interest, no passion, lack of creative idea, shy, not confidence, low determination, lack of communication skill, not creative, not able to take risk, fear of failure, like to be employed, lazy, afraid to do something new, ...
External Supports	Lack of support from family members, too much government aids, loneliness in making decision, lack of trust from people, ...

4. Conclusion

This paper summarises findings from those studies in two main areas: (i) the outcome of entrepreneurship education on student's entrepreneurial attitudes and start-up intention, and (ii) student's perception on challenges to start entrepreneurial activities in the university. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship education in the university, i.e. the embeddedness approach has able to develop student's mind-set and personality to become an entrepreneurial person which subsequently pursues them to become entrepreneur once graduated. For the purpose of this study, entrepreneurship embeddedness refers to teaching entrepreneurship skills in creative and innovative manner not merely to produce an entrepreneur, but more to inculcate entrepreneurial personality and mind-set among students, and hopefully with these spirit and characteristics the students are well equipped with suitable ability to choose entrepreneurs as their profession. In other words, entrepreneurship education is introduced as a platform to develop more entrepreneurs. The study reveals that three out of four entrepreneurial attitude variables, i.e., innovation, self-control, and self-esteem have significant influence on start-up intention, and in fact, some of them mentioned several personality-based factors that if absence, may hinder a person to become entrepreneur. This shows that they aware the importance of having suitable attitude to become entrepreneurs. Logically, the study also finds significant differences between three types of students in terms of their start-up intention, i.e., students of entrepreneurship programs are more likely to become entrepreneurs compared to students of non-entrepreneurship and non-business program. In addition, it is interestingly to find that most students agreed that 'innovation' is a significant attitude to become an entrepreneur, though 'risk taker' has also dominated their perception towards an entrepreneurial person. The main factors that perceived by respondents as challenges to become entrepreneur involves the financial-based, the skill-based, the personality-based, and external support. These challenges have been also found in many previous researches on entrepreneurial intention, not only focus on the undergraduates or young entrepreneur. Overall, it can be concluded that the undergraduates surveyed in this study view person-related factors, i.e., the entrepreneurial attitude and skill as the significant influence towards entrepreneurship, though financial and external support play modest influence. It is hoped that this study provides solution to reduce the perceived challenges or barriers especially on the development of appropriate skills that empower students to plan, start and run a small business in the university. The university curricula should be emphasised on teaching and learning activities that stimulate an environment that is conducive to develop entrepreneurial attitudes. In addition, adequate business and technical facilities in terms of source of funding, business registration, incubator, and business space are important to students especially to the non-entrepreneurship program students who perceived external support as the most significant to them. Finally, the analysis of the influence of entrepreneurial attitude and start-up intention in this study is limited in that it focuses primarily in one university only, i.e. among the undergraduates in Universiti Malaysia Sabah. Nevertheless, this study has contributed to the literature in relating to the willingness of students from different courses in university to become entrepreneur, as well as the barriers perceived by most undergraduates in becoming an entrepreneur. In future analyses, we hope to explain further on the teaching and learning approaches that preferable among undergraduates to stimulate their entrepreneurial intention.

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