

Relationship between Entrepreneurial Intentions and Entrepreneurial Career Choice Behavior among University Students

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial career choice behavior among Malaysian university students. The sample consists of 469 students in their final year at several Malaysian research universities. A questionnaire was administered to these students to assess their entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial career choice behavior. Finding showed that both entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial career choice behavior were at average levels among students. In addition, they indicated a positive significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial career choice behavior: higher intention to pursue an entrepreneurship career makes a person more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities. These findings suggest that the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and government agencies in Malaysia should assess and identify the strengths and abilities of graduates before they are accepted into entrepreneurial training and programs. This will ensure that a high percentage of graduates actually become entrepreneurs, and thus will increase the efficiency of entrepreneurial training.

Key words: entrepreneurial intentions entrepreneurial careers; research universities; university students; entrepreneurship

JEL codes: I2, Y9

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has been identified as a potential catalyst for expanding economic growth and for ensuring a nation's competitiveness in the face of the challenges of globalization (Venkatachalam & Waqif, 2005). The New Economic Model (NEM) unveiled by the Malaysian prime minister on March 30, 2010, emphasized the need for evolution in national capital markets from a primarily fundraising model to a model based on risk, liquidity and diversity, in order to encourage entrepreneurs and investors to be part of a bright future for the Malaysian economy. This is in line with the *Tenth Malaysia Plan* (10MP), covering the years 2011-2015, whereby the government is committed to ensuring the growth and innovation of Malaysian SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) and thus to enabling Malaysia to become a domestic, regional, and global champion (Government of Malaysia, 2010).

Therefore, various efforts and initiatives for the development of entrepreneurship education have been taken

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by the government in order to produce a skilled professional workforce with entrepreneurial ideas, attributes, and values. According to Ab. Aziz (2010), fostering entrepreneurship values among students should be the core action taken by educational institutions to ensure that students have a distinctive competitive advantage. As the result of insights like this, developing entrepreneurship education is one of the strategies implemented in Malaysia's third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP 3rd) with a view to increasing the number of skilled workers who are capable of developing and promoting technology innovation and business in order to achieve a commercial and industrial community by the year 2020 (Government of Malaysia, 2006).

However, there seems still to be a glut of unemployed students in Malaysia, based on a graduate tracking study conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education (2011). This issue is further compounded by the dumping of more graduates than the job market can absorb each year as a result of the increasing number of public and private universities in Malaysia. Many graduates are still looking for a suitable job with an income commensurate with their qualifications. At this point, few create their own careers (Norasmah et al., 2012); instead, they still rely on waged positions in the public and private sectors. This situation can lead to inflationary pressures and may erode Malaysia's competitiveness globally in the long run (Nanthakumar & Hamka, 2008).

This study tries to ascertain the status of students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship as a primary career choice and to identify the degree to which a paradigm shift is occurring. To achieve these goals, three objectives have been set:

- (1) To measure the level of *entrepreneurial intentions* among university students.
- (2) To identify the level of *entrepreneurial career choice behavior* among university students.
- (3) To test the relationship between entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial career choice behavior of university students.

2. Literature Review

Azjen's *planned behavior theory* (1991) is widely used to explain the different stages of human beings' intentions and behavior. Three events in Azjen's theory can be considered to affect entrepreneurial behavior. Two are linked with *behavioral intentions*, which illustrate the desire to implement some behavior—they are the *individual's own attitude* toward the results of his behavior and *social norms*. The third factor is *perceived behavioral control*, which is very tightly linked to self-efficacy. Studies have helped off in predicting any behavior that is designed specifically through a certain attitude (Ajzen, 1991). According to Hisrich et al. (2008), the desire to stage a firm behavior will increase especially if individual attitudes and subjective norms correspond to the shape of that behavior. This will result in an increase in perceived behavioral control.

Krueger et al. (2000) have identified certain factors that influence individuals to enter the field of entrepreneurship, which has great positive impact on the growth and economic development of a country. The catalyst for the choice of an entrepreneurial career may undergo positive and negative shifts (Norita et al., 2007). Optimistic perception can convert commercial ideas to commercial opportunities. Entrepreneurs require skills, sources, and financial and family support to launch businesses.

Mohd Salleh et al. (2005) set out four major steps toward the development of an entrepreneurial career. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play an important role in each of these steps, which are as follows: (1) development of an entrepreneurship culture, (2) development of commercial ideas into commercial opportunities, (3) positive and negative factors which lead to career shifts, and (4) development of skills, support, and resources.

The entrepreneurial process begins with entrepreneurial intentions, followed by the *identification and assessment of opportunity*, followed by the *decision to venture into entrepreneurship* (Bryant, 2006; Hisrich et al., 2008). According to Bird (1989), four key variables influence the choice of an entrepreneurial career: (1) awareness of the skills and abilities one has, (2) awareness of an alternative career, (3) understanding of the prerequisites to start an entrepreneurial career, and (4) career selection decision (made either during childhood or later). These four variables may influence a person's perception of and likelihood to venture into an entrepreneurial career. This in turn implies that each individual has the opportunity to become an entrepreneur or develop entrepreneurial traits because entrepreneurial characteristics can form and develop in anyone (Mohd. Salleh et al., 2005).

Abu Bakar and Muhammad Shukri (2008) and Norasmah and Faridah (2010) found that university graduates' potential in entrepreneurship can be polished and shaped through *entrepreneurship education* in the formal curriculum at the post-secondary level. Entrepreneurship education can provide entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to face the stress, challenges, and uncertainties of the field (Hytti & O'Gorman, 2004). This implies that entrepreneurship education is not only an important factor in business education, but a contributing factor towards the development of skilled workers, specifically of the ability to apply new skills and explore new technologies. Therefore, entrepreneurship education does not necessarily need to be related to business; it can also involve fostering individuals who can accommodate new ideas and are creative, innovative, and visionary in any situation.

According to Peterman et al. (2003), greater awareness among students engaged in entrepreneurial activities of the practical requirements of entrepreneurship education will affect their perceptions of their entrepreneurship intentions and capacity. Introductions to entrepreneurship education must therefore take into account the skills needed, and not theory alone. In fact, entrepreneurship education is acknowledged to change behavior and to increase performance in joint ventures (Politis, 2005). Therefore, entrepreneurship education can raise awareness and open the minds of students to help them work on their own, not just expect to wage-based careers.

Zaidatol Akmaliah (2007) stated that a "real entrepreneur" has a combination of behaviors including (1) the effort to form new businesses; (2) innovation in the creation of new products, processes, markets, materials, and organizations; (3) ability to cope with risk of loss or failure; and (4) ability to set a high performance level. Miltenberger (2001) notes that overt or covert behavior can systematically influence and be influenced by events in an individual's surroundings, and can often change depending on such changes.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Research Design

This study uses a quantitative questionnaire survey as an instrument to explain the attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, and characteristics of a population (Creswell, 2008).

3.2 Population and Sample

The study population consisted of undergraduate students at several research universities in Malaysia: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The researchers used the table provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) to determine the size of the sample. Based on the table, the overall population of 87,572 for all these universities put together suggests that the appropriate sample size for this study is 384. However, in this study, 500 surveys were distributed. According to Sekaran (2003), it is appropriate to conduct a

study with a sample size that exceeds 30 and is less than 500 to overcome the statistical difficulties for ensuring meaningful data that may arise from the use of a small number of samples. Here, the number of questionnaires obtained and used in the analysis was 469 (93.8%)—above the threshold of 70% to 80% set for adequacy by Cohen et al. (2007).

3.3 Instrument

Questionnaire items were answered on a five-point Likert-type scale, used because it is easy to manage, quick to use, and can be analyzed effectively (Mohd. Najib, 2003). The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Part A, which gathers information about entrepreneurship intentions, and Part B, about entrepreneurial career choice behavior. The items were adapted from several sources: Nor Aishah et al. (2010), Zaidatol Akmaliah (2009), Norita et al. (2007) and Salmah (2009). Mean score interpretation methods were adapted from Norasmah (2002) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Scoring Rubric

Mean Score	Level
1.00–2.00	Low
2.01–3.00	Moderately Low
3.01–4.00	Moderately High
4.01–5.00	High

Source: Norasmah (2002)

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the extent to which data can be generalized to the population that a sample represents, while *reliability* can be defined as a measure of stability or consistency of measurements used (Cresswell, 2008). A pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the instruments used in this study. The pilot data were analyzed using SPSS v. 18. According to Chua (2006) if the corrected item-total correlation of an item exceeds 0.3, then the item has high reliability and can be used to measure the construct it purports to measure.

Sekaran (2003) stated that Cronbach’s alpha must be at least 0.60 to ensure reliability. Cronbach’s alpha for the construct of entrepreneurial intention in this study was 0.931, and for the construct of entrepreneurial career choice behavior, 0.909. The correlation between the constructs exceeded 0.30. This shows that the questionnaire had good reliability and validity and can be used with confidence in this study.

4. Results and Discussion

Objective 1: To Measure the Level of Entrepreneurial Intentions among University Students

Table 2 shows the average level of entrepreneurial intentions (intention to choose an entrepreneurial career) among Malaysian university students; it is at a moderate level ($M = 3.70$). The two items that score high mean values are items 9 and 10; the other eight items show moderately high mean scores. The highest mean value is that of item 10, “I want to be the boss/leader in my own organization” at 4.14, and the lowest is 3.41 for items 6 and 7, “I’ve been thinking seriously of opening a business after graduation” and “I will start my own business within the next five years”.

Based on these results, it seems that the respondents generally want to be their own boss or the leader of an organization, but that they are not ready to start a business upon graduation.

Table 2 Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Entrepreneurship Intention Items

No	Entrepreneurship Intentions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
1	I will choose “entrepreneur” as a career option	3.71	0.790	Moderately High
2	I would rather be an entrepreneur than a wage earner in a company	3.66	0.831	Moderately High
3	I am willing to do whatever it takes to be an entrepreneur	3.54	0.822	Moderately High
4	I will strive to do whatever it takes to start my own business	3.68	0.747	Moderately High
5	I have a strong desire to start a business someday	3.58	0.845	Moderately High
6	I've been thinking seriously about starting a business after graduation	3.41	0.818	Moderately High
7	I will start business in the next five years	3.41	0.842	Moderately High
8	I will start business in the next 10 years	3.85	0.794	Moderately High
9	I am determined to have a business in the future	4.02	0.770	High
10	I want to be the boss/leader in my own organization	4.14	0.794	High
	Overall Level of Entrepreneurial Intention	3.70	0.562	Moderately High

In general, the results of this data show that students lack confidence in their ability to become entrepreneurs right away and do not dare to become entrepreneurs for at least five years after graduation. This finding is in line with previous studies of entrepreneurship intention in university students, such as Kamariah et al. (2004), who found that students’ intentions to become entrepreneurs upon graduation is low.

In contrast, Collins et al. (2004) found that graduates in Western countries are more interested in continuing to work on their own upon graduation, and stated that there are several factors that encourage their graduates to continue to become entrepreneurs. Among these factors are elements of the current national and international scenario, such as decline in traditional job opportunities, changes in government policy, the rise of the knowledge economy, and similar changes in society. This shows that graduates in Western countries need to find alternative means of income generation, and entrepreneurship is the best career alternative. Therefore, most of these graduates end up having a lot of confidence for entrepreneurship and do not depend on wage-based jobs.

Objective 2: To Identify the Level of Entrepreneurial Career Choice Behavior among Malaysian University Students

The results showed that the overall level of entrepreneurship as a career choice behavior among Malaysian university students is moderately high, with a mean score of 3.17. Through the detailed analysis presented in Table 3, it was determined that the highest mean score (3.42) was on item 6, “I regularly visit trade exhibitions because it allows me to get ideas or identify business opportunities”. In contrast, the lowest mean score was 2.96 for item 13, “I have reviewed some strategic premises to start a business”.

These results further showed that students who tend to choose entrepreneurship as a career often participate in or attend activities related to entrepreneurship and look for such opportunities. Gartner (1988) in Peterman and Kennedy (2003) found that early exposure to entrepreneurship is believed to induce the desire to choose and attitude and personality fostering the choice of a self-employed career.

These results clearly show that Malaysian university students engage in only a moderately high level of behavior or activity aimed at entrepreneurship as a career choice. Ab. Aziz and Zakaria (2004) state that entrepreneurial success depends on the extent to which an individual’s behavior can influence their actions. This is in line with Brown and Hanlon (2004), who found that the success of a business venture will depend on the entrepreneur’s level of responsibility, which is one aspect of their own behavior. According to Ajzen (1991), the form of behavior that will be presented depends on the individual’s past experience. This factor is said to be linked to self-efficacy, which involves perception of the efficiency of the situation (Hisrich et al., 2008).

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation for Entrepreneurship Career Selection Behaviors

No.	Entrepreneurship Career Selection Behavior	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
1	I often hang out with entrepreneurs	3.36	0.829	Moderately High
2	I often read books/magazines related to business	3.25	0.806	Moderately High
3	I often surf the internet looking for business opportunities	3.44	0.778	Moderately High
4	I often engage in business online	3.13	0.877	Moderately High
5	I regularly attend social functions because I can meet lots of people, particularly in relation to business	3.05	0.861	Moderately High
6	I frequently visit trade exhibitions because it allows me to get ideas or identify business opportunities	3.42	0.822	Moderately High
7	I regularly participate in entrepreneurship workshops organized by the university	3.25	0.857	Moderately High
8	I regularly participate in seminars/entrepreneurship courses organized by the university	3.20	0.865	Moderately High
9	I regularly run a part-time business at the university	3.02	0.921	Moderately Low
10	I often review the strategic premises location to start a business	2.93	0.833	Moderately Low
11	I have often been involved in sales in various activities organized by the university	3.11	0.864	Moderately High
12	I often seek advice about prospective business ventures from my lecturers	2.97	0.830	Moderately Low
13	I often seek advice from government/private agencies about entrepreneurial opportunities	2.96	0.911	Moderately Low
14	I often seek advice from family and friends in the same field as my prospective business	3.24	0.843	Moderately High
Overall level for Entrepreneurial Career Selection Behaviors		3.17	0.601	Moderately High

Objective 3: To Test the Relationship between Entrepreneurial Intention and Entrepreneurial Career Choice Behavior of University Students

Table 4 shows the findings of a correlation analysis between the entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial career choice behavior of the respondents, which was moderately high, with a correlation coefficient (*r*) of 0.586, *p* < 0.05. This finding indicates that Malaysian university students' intentions to choose entrepreneurship as a career translate into a moderately high level of actual entrepreneurial career choice behavior. This is in line with the *theory of planned behavior* of Ajzen (1991), which explains that intention is a determinant of behavior. Krueger et al. (2000) similarly maintain that intention is an important element contributing to the formation of a new organization.

According to Summers (1998), when one has a certain intention, he will direct his behavior to achieve it. This is construed by Hisrich et al. (2008), according to whom human behavior is determined by the level of desire to execute a particular action on a particular object (the target) depending on the specific situation at a given time. Thus, the findings of the present study empirically support the assertions of previous studies regarding human intentions and behavior by showing that the intention or desire to become an entrepreneur can motivate and shape a person's behavior, and, conversely, that the behavior exhibited (for instance, choosing entrepreneurship as a career choice) can reflect a person's level of entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 4 Relationship between Entrepreneurial Intentions and Entrepreneurial Career Choice Behaviors

Variables	Entrepreneurial Career Selection Behaviors			
	<i>n</i>	<i>r</i>	Strength of the relationship	<i>p</i>
Intention	469	0.586**	Moderate	0.000

Note: *p* < 0.05.

5. Conclusions and Implications

Entrepreneurs are widely seen as an important part of their communities who contribute to the development of those communities and also as agents of change in the world economy (Ab. Aziz, 2010; Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004). Hisrich et al. (2008) found that the stronger the desire for an entrepreneurial career, the greater the chances of venturing into entrepreneurship as a career.

Brown and Hanlon (2004) found that the success of a business venture will depend on the effectiveness of an entrepreneur's responsibility, as the result of their own behavior. Thus, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education and other government agencies involved in the development of entrepreneurial programs are urged to evaluate and identify the capabilities and abilities of graduates before selecting them for entrepreneurship education and training programs. This will increase the number of people emerging from these programs as successful entrepreneurs, increasing the efficiency of these programs and thus indirectly reducing costs.

Lecturers also play an important role in shaping a culture of entrepreneurship among students. This has been demonstrated by Norasmah (2002), who was able to positively identify only one factor that contributes to the creation of an entrepreneurial culture among students, namely effective teaching and learning methods adopted and applied by the teacher. With the advent of globalization, students need entrepreneurship education that is more efficient than traditional teaching methods such as lectures, exams, and essay-writing. Among more effective methods, particularly in higher education institutions, is learning through experience (Zaidatol Akmaliah, 2007).

However, students themselves must also take the initiative to pursue entrepreneurial programs offered by universities, government, and other bodies in the public and private sectors. Students should take the opportunity to enhance their entrepreneurial and vocational skills and knowledge to create useful and appealing new products or improve existing ones, especially in this era in which students are expected to be more creative, innovative, daring, and competitive than previously. This would be in line with the objectives of the Malaysian Entrepreneurship Development Policy for HEI graduates to produce more entrepreneurs who will act as catalysts for economic transformation into a high-income economy based on innovation and achievement of developed nation status by 2020.

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