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Entrepreneurship Behaviour amongst Malaysian University Students

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship today is recognized as a crucial catalyst to innovation and increased productivity, essential not only to the growth of the national economy but also to ensure that competitive edge in the global market. Set to become a full industrial nation and be a main global player, Malaysia gives serious attention to the development and training of this important human capital, namely, university students. Considering the fact that Malaysia is a young country with over 42.3% of the population in the 0-24 year age group, the need to inculcate entrepreneurial skills amongst young people is justifiable. Furthermore, entrepreneurship is a quality, and a skill that can be developed early in a cultural environment conducive to its development. To this end, numerous policies and programmes to encourage entrepreneurship at all levels have been initiated, including schools through the inclusion of entrepreneurship studies in the curriculum. However, the achievement of these programmes has fallen short of their target. This paper, based on the findings of a study on over 1524 university students in Malaysia, recommends that for an entrepreneurial programme to be effective, certain factors like cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of entrepreneurial behaviour that are considered important should therefore be included.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial behaviour, cognitive dimension, non-cognitive dimension, entrepreneurial acculturation, entrepreneurship education

INTRODUCTION

By the year 2020, Malaysia hopes to achieve its full industrial nation status. In achieving this aim, the country recognizes the importance of having a productive, knowledgeable and skilled workforce that can contribute towards national growth. Included in this workforce are the entrepreneurs, considered as a critical catalyst to increase productivity and ensure the competitive edge in the global market. Entrepreneurship is a quality, and a skill that can be inculcated early (Gallup, 1994). As Malaysia has a high percentage of its population in the 0-24 year age group (42.3%), a good planning and strategy to tap and develop the entrepreneurial potential of this young age group is particularly crucial. During the Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000, the thrust of youth development was on developing skills necessary for them to contribute towards effective nation-building (Malaysia, 1996). In the Eighth Malaysia Plan 2001-2005 and the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010, the emphasis was to prepare the youths with positive attitude, knowledge, and skills so as to enable them to face the challenges and adjust to the economic changes brought about by globalization (Malaysia, 2001: 2005).

In 2000, around 52.6% or 2.3 million of the 4.37 million youths are employed. The remaining youths (i.e. 47.4%) consisted of those

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who had completed their education or training, applying for work, and students who are still in the secondary schools, attending preparatory courses and in tertiary education. By 2005, the total youth population increased to 4.98 million. Data indicated that the prospects are bright and encouraging for the young to be in business in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. Nevertheless, to take advantage of these opportunities, these youth need to be educated and trained to have entrepreneurial skills.

ACCULTURATION OF ENTREPRENEUR AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is no single definition of an entrepreneur. Starting with Cantillon, a French economist, an entrepreneur is a person who bought factors of production for the production of goods to be sold. Meanwhile, Schumpeter (1934) regarded an entrepreneur as someone who is profit-motivated and always innovative in using new technologies or finding new resources in production of goods and services. On the other hand, an entrepreneur is brave in risk-taking, dynamic and enthusiastic, responsible, firm in decision-making, can forecast and possess organizational skills (McClelland, 1961). Furthermore, an entrepreneur always looks forward to, recognizes and seizes opportunities, discards obsolete ideas, and techniques for the new ones so as to meet future demands (Drucker, 1974). Ronstadt, 1991, cited in Kuratko and Hodgetts, 2004 stated that an entrepreneur is an innovator or developer who recognizes and seizes opportunities, converts those opportunities into workable/marketable ideas, adds value through time, effort, money, or skills, assumes the risks of the competitive marketplace to implement theses ideas, and realizes the rewards from these efforts.

Entrepreneurs have significant roles in the economic growth of a country. Through their entrepreneurial skills, they help to solve many problems and take steps to correct market deficiencies (Leibenstein, 1998). Entrepreneurs not only provide new goods and services, they also create more and newer jobs (Prang and Ophen, 1995). In this sense, job opportunities increase not only in number but also in diversity.

Based on the various definitions of entrepreneurs, it is thus indicated that entrepreneurs have much to offer in the economic development of any country. In order to ensure that entrepreneurship programmes take off successfully amongst the young people, two aspects, namely entrepreneurship knowledge and culture, should therefore be given serious attention. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Corporative Development (MECD) are among the ministries which are responsible in developing entrepreneurial culture and behaviour among Malaysian youths. Entrepreneurship acculturation is one of the major programmes offered by the ministry, especially MECD. The main objective of the entrepreneurship acculturation programmes is to inculcate and strengthen the value of entrepreneurship amongst the youths. Programmes implemented under entrepreneurship acculturation include:

- Young Entrepreneur Programme: This programme is one of the many acculturation programmes implemented by the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development, at the secondary school levels throughout Malaysia, as a means to create awareness on various entrepreneurship activities amongst the students.
- Undergraduate Entrepreneur Development Programme (PPUS): This programme has been extended to students of public institutions of higher learning. The objectives are to provide undergraduates with insights into entrepreneurship activities.
- Undergraduate Entrepreneurship Training: The objectives of this training are to expose undergraduates on the entrepreneurship acculturation from an early stage and provide continuity on the entrepreneurship development programme at the tertiary level for students who have joined Young Entrepreneurs Programme, as well as produce more potential entrepreneurs

among undergraduate with necessary knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship.

- Basic Course for Undergraduates: This course, targeted at final year students, aims to encourage and prepare graduating students to become entrepreneurs, enhance entrepreneurship programmes implemented at all public universities, and lower the unemployment rates among graduates.

Besides the above programmes on acculturation, MECD also offers Graduate Entrepreneur Scheme. This scheme can only be attended by those who have already attended the six-day course of Basic Entrepreneur Training.

ABSENCE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE

The present socio-economic conditions in modern Malaysia are largely the outcome of historical factors. Although much has been done to redress the situation since the days of independence and the 1969 May racial incident, entrepreneurship and economic power has been dominantly in the hands of the non-Bumiputra. The New Economic Policy which was introduced in 1970 has somewhat failed to achieve the 30% equity in businesses by Bumiputras, in spite of numerous policies, strategies, and 'headstarts'. There has been some research on the effectiveness of such entrepreneurship programmes (Norasmah and Halimah, 2003; Norasmah, 2002) of which the results indicated that while the participants were high on items like interest and motivation, they were nonetheless low on many relevant skills such as planning and management skills, formulating goals and objectives, finance and budgeting, and problem-solving skills. Perhaps one of the main reasons why success in entrepreneurship seems to elude the Bumiputras is the particular absence of an entrepreneurial culture for the inculcation of appropriate attitude, thinking, and behaviour.

In Malaysia, there has been effort done to develop and inculcate an entrepreneurial culture and entrepreneurs through various training programmes and models, such as by MEDEC (1992) and Norasmah (2002). All these models show that in order to successfully inculcate the entrepreneurial culture amongst the young people, it has to be started from an early age. The model developed by the National Centre for Research in Vocation Education (NCRVE) in 1987 explained the stages for an individual to become an entrepreneur; beginning from exposure and attempts in business from an early age. Core to the entrepreneurial culture is the natural behaviour which is associated with being an entrepreneur. In their study, Zaidatol Akmaliah and Habibah (1997) identified 42 characteristics of a successful entrepreneur; according to these researchers, however, it is not necessary that a successful entrepreneur to possess all these characteristics. Among the important ones, however, is the fact that an entrepreneur requires appropriate thinking, beliefs, and practices which are internalized. Fortunately, as shown by research, these aspects can be developed in individuals with potential through entrepreneurship education in schools, institutions or training programmes (Zaidatol Akmaliah *et al.*, 1998; Nor Aishah, 2002; Norasmah, 2002). The fact remains, however, is that there must be a conducive entrepreneurial culture to nurture the appropriate qualities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Another way to inculcate entrepreneurship culture amongst youths is through entrepreneurship education. Faioite *et al*. (2003) and Norasmah *et al*. (2006) stated that entrepreneurship education and training are important for economic development, particularly in improving the quality and quantity of future entrepreneurs. There has been great interest in entrepreneurship education and training in the recent years (Galloway and Brown, 2000). This is based on the findings of the growth in the number and types of programmes offered at universities. Realizing the importance of entrepreneurship education, many universities all over the world have been offering entrepreneurship education.

In Malaysia, entrepreneurship education at higher learning institutes is also expanding in the forms of academic and practical aspects (Malaysia, 1996; Za'faran, 2003; Armanurah *et al*., 2005). There is a growing number of academic courses offered, either as the core course or elective (Mohd. Khairuddin and Syed Azizi, 2002). Most of the public universities in Malaysia are offering entrepreneurship course as a core subject at the first degree level. Apart from academic programmes, entrepreneurship education is also offered to students at higher learning institutions in the forms of co-curriculum activities and programmes which are financed by the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Corporation Development such as Graduate Entrepreneurship Training, Graduate Basic Entrepreneurship Course, and Graduate Entrepreneur Development Programme.

Although many efforts have been carried out to create entrepreneurs among graduates, their number is still relatively low. The question arises is that if the students are ready to enter the business world upon graduation, the issue of unemployment among these graduates should not arise since they have the alternative to start their own businesses rather than working for others.

Notwithstanding that entrepreneurship education is offered in public institutes of higher learning, few graduates are interested in becoming entrepreneurs after graduation. This is shown by the study conducted by Morshidi *et al*. (2004) which indicated only 30 out of 2275 (1.3%) graduate respondents are involved in business activities. The results of a graduate trace study in 2004 showed that out of 19,000 undergraduate respondents, only 74 persons are working as employers whereas 147 graduates are working on their own (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2005). Another graduate trace study, conducted among the first undergraduates of Business Administration Programme, showed only 6 out of 1469 (0.4%) graduates were involved in business. These studies indicated that graduates from public institutes of higher learning have the tendency to work for other people than becoming entrepreneurs (Zolkafli *et al*., 2004). Why is this so? Why do graduates prefer to be employees, receiving pay/wages, rather than be self-employed? What attributes are lacking in our graduates that they appear to be reluctant and unmotivated to become entrepreneurs?

RESEARCH AIM

The purpose of this research is to determine the level of entrepreneurial behaviour among Malaysians university students.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling

The population of this study involved students from all the 18 public universities in Malaysia. Samples were drawn from ten universities selected using a stratified sampling method with geographical zones as a basis. These universities were categorized as follows:

- North Zone – Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM).
- Middle Zone – Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Malaya (UM).
- South Zone – Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Kolej Universiti Institut Teknologi Tun Hussein Onn (KUiTTHO).
- East Zone – Universiti Institut Teknologi Mara (UiTM).
- East Malaysia – Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UMS).

A total of 2000 students were targeted for this study, with 200 students representing each of the ten selected universities. All the students involved were in their final year of studies and were chosen using purposive sampling. Out of the 2000 questionnaires sent out, only 1524 were fully answered. For this reason, the sample was counted as 1524 students.

Research Instrument

This study used the Entrepreneurial Index of Students in Malaysia (EISM) which was developed by Norasmah *et al*. (2006). EISM is an instrument to measure the entrepreneurial behaviour among students aged between 16-24 years. The instrument measures two aspects of entrepreneurial behaviour, namely cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour and non-cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour. The cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour consists of four dimensions, i.e. the individual's knowledge on career function (KCF), goal development (GD), planning (PN), and problem solving (PS). Meanwhile, the non-cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour comprises of five dimensions, namely external control factor (ECF), controlled by something (CS), internal self control (ISC), tolerance toward ambiguity (TTA), and self evaluation (SE).

The instrument consists of 211 items in total. All the items were measured on a 5-point scale from "not at all agreeable" (1) to "totally agreeable" (5). The Cronbach Alpha values for the cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour and the non-cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour were found to be very satisfactory at 0.969 (107 items) and 0.963 (104 items), respectively. Table 1 summarizes the dimensions of entrepreneurial behaviour for Malaysian youths.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using the SPSS 14.0 software. The index was measured using descriptive statistics. Based on Norasmah *et al*. (2006), the guidelines used in the interpretation of the results are as presented in Table 2.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Demographic Profiles

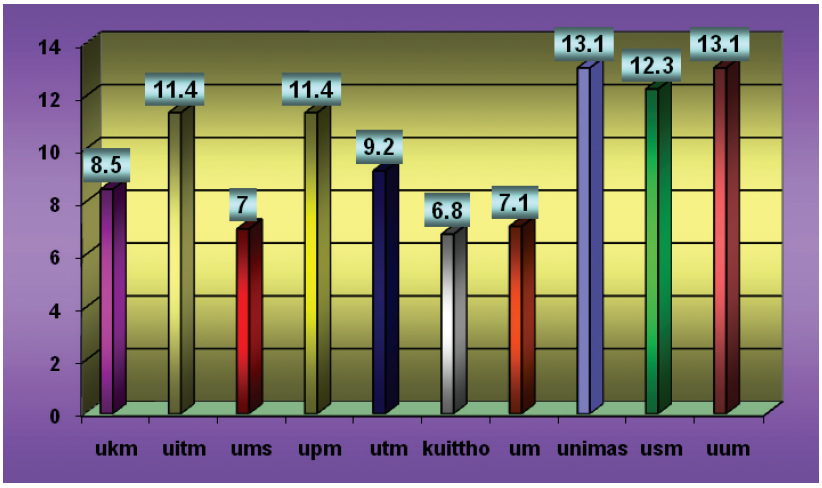
As indicated earlier, only 1524 out of 2000 questionnaires sent out were returned, recording a return rate of 76.2%. *Fig. 1* shows the respondents' composition based on the universities they represented. The highest percentages were from UNIMAS and UUM (13.1% each) while the lowest was from KUiTTHO at 6.8%.

TABLE 1
Dimensions of entrepreneurial index of students in Malaysia (EISM)

Sub-dimension	Number of items
Cognitive	
Knowledge on career function (KCF)	26
Goal development (GD)	11
Planning (PN)	46
Problem solving (PS)	24
Total items	107
Non-Cognitive	
External control factor (ECF)	14
Controlled by something (CS)	11
Inner self control (ISC)	29
Tolerance toward ambiguity (TTA)	23
Self evaluation (SE)	27
Total items	104
Number of Items	211

TABLE 2
Interpretation of index – Percentage of score

Percentage of score	Level
100	Excellent
91-99	Very Good
72-90	Good
40-71	Moderate
Under 40	Not Satisfactory



n = 1524 students

Fig. 1: Respondents' composition based on universities (%)

Table 3 summarizes the respondents' profile. Majority of the respondents were Malays (63.7%), followed by Chinese (21.9%) and Indians (6.3%). In terms of gender, 33.7% of the respondents were males and 66.3% were females. Majority of the respondents (47.6%) were in the age bracket of 22 to 23, followed by 37.9% in the age range of 20 to 21 years old. More than half (57.9%) of the respondents indicated that they did not have any experience in business, whereas 61.9% of the respondents expressed their interest in becoming entrepreneurs in the future.

Table 4 shows the results for both the cognitive and non-cognitive entrepreneurial behavioural level of Malaysian university students. The data gathered indicate that Malaysian students achieve good entrepreneurial level (i.e. score between 72 to 90). Detailed results of the findings are given in Table 4.

Furthermore, an interesting outcome of the research study occurred at the planning and pilot stages, where some items for the cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour and the non-cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour dimensions were eliminated after being subjected to factor analysis, as their values were less than 0.3. Interestingly, these eliminated items indicated the lack of in-depth understanding of young people, namely the students, of the reality in the business world. In other words, there is a gap between theoretical knowledge and reality. In the dimension of cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour, the items eliminated were on knowledge on career functions (2 items), goal

TABLE 3
Respondents' profile

Profiles	Percentages (%)
Ethnicity:	
Malay	63.8
Chinese	21.9
India	6.3
Iban	2.0
Kadazan	2.0
Others	4.2
Gender:	
Male	33.7
Female	66.3
Age:	
18-19	2.3
20-21	37.9
22-23	47.6
24-25	8.9
26-27	1.4
28-29	0.7
30-31	1.2
Experience in business:	
Yes	42.1
No	57.9
Interest in entrepreneurship:	
Yes	61.9
No	38.1

TABLE 4
Score for each cognitive and non-cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour

Dimension	Score	Interpretation
Cognitive		
Knowledge on career function (KCF)	86.15	Good
Goal development (GD)	76.32	Good
Planning (PN)	82.48	Good
Problem solving (PS)	79.12	Good
Non-Cognitive		
External control factors (ECF)	81.62	Good
Controlled by something (CS)	77.28	Good
Internal self control (ISC)	84.12	Good
Tolerance towards ambiguity (TTA)	79.05	Good
Self evaluation (SE)	82.33	Good

development (5 items), planning (2 items), and problem solving (8 items). For example, in relation to knowledge on career functions, the items were on the functions of manager as well as financial management and development activities of a corporation. The elimination of these items reflects the lack of experience and exposure among university students to the reality of the organizational set-up, which is similar to items on problem solving, planning and risk-taking and goal development.

In the non-cognitive entrepreneurial behaviour dimensions, the items eliminated were external control factors (12 items), can be controlled by something (14 items), internal self control (8 items), tolerance towards ambiguity (12 items), and self evaluation (20 items). Based on the students' perspective, there are many factors which can be considered as not important if someone wants to venture into business. Among the factors are:

- role of the local authorities in business
- self-confidence; to be far-sighted
- astute in finding opportunities
- deferred gratification (sacrifice now for the future)
- confident and capable of looking for capital
- knowledge on e-business
- self-determination

DISCUSSION

The results gathered in this study showed that there were both positive and negative gaps between the cognitive dimensions and norms. The positive gaps were found in knowledge on career function and problem solving, while the negative ones were indicated for planning and goal development. The positive gap found in knowledge on career functions is an indicative that the university students possess higher knowledge compared to the norm of Malaysian students in general. This finding is consistent with the finding by Zolkafli *et al*. (2004) who reported that the higher the level of education, the more knowledgeable the person is in applying that knowledge in his or her daily life. In fact, their commitment in the field is much greater than those who are not widely exposed to the body of knowledge in that particular field. These can be seen in the non-cognitive dimension where all the dimensions recorded positive gaps.

Both cognitive and non-cognitive indexes were found to have influenced the students' entrepreneurship behaviour. However, the cognitive component exerted a more powerful influence than its non-cognitive counterpart. This finding indicated that dimensions related to knowledge on career functions, goal development, planning, and problem solving were among the primary contributors which influenced ones' entrepreneurship behaviour. This finding is supported by Ab. Aziz and Zakaria (2004), Mohd Salleh (2002), Shapero (1985), Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004) who have reported that entrepreneurs can be nurtured through education. Thus, more serious attention should be given to the development of entrepreneurship curriculum and training.

In among the university students was higher. This finding, however seems to contradict with the finding by Mohd Salleh (1992: 2002) relation to cognitive factors, the planning dimension was found to be the most important factor in explaining the variance between entrepreneurship behaviour and norm. This finding indicated that university students tend to face problems in planning which would further lead to difficulties in goal development, and subsequently to solve the problem in hand. This finding is supported by Norasmah *et al*. (2006) who reported that university students have lower planning index compared to the norm.

As for the cognitive factor, all the five dimensions of the non-cognitive factor also significantly contributed to the gap. The dimension of tolerance towards ambiguity appeared to be the most important in creating the gap. This explained the tolerance towards ambiguity, who found that most university students were highly dependent on the external

assistance and were incapable of practicing the knowledge and skills acquired at the universities. Nevertheless, these students believe that fate and external powers play important roles in their lives. This outlook could explain the reason for the failure of the New Economic Policy and National Development Policy in achieving the 30% Bumiputera equity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

This study has shown that the difference between the theoretical knowledge and reality of the business world does exist, as perceived by young people. In our efforts to create a conducive entrepreneurial culture to transmit appropriate values, thinking and practices of successful entrepreneurs, it is imperative that policymakers be aware of this difference between 'what should' to 'what is'. Listed below are some suggestions as to how entrepreneurship education can be useful in opening up the minds and interests of potential entrepreneurs.

- The reality and hands-on approach: the business world is complex and challenging. Students need to be exposed early to this real situation for better understanding and to build up their self-confidence in business. This form of socialization will widen their life-space experiences and reinforce learning from textbooks.
- Smart partnership between institutions and the business sector. Staff/personnel from the business sector can be mobilized to offer insights into the business world through case studies and projects and as mentors to students during this period. Students can also spend some time in firms as part of the training or practicum programme so as to introduce them into the business culture.
- Interaction with local authorities and enforcement agencies to create awareness, understanding, and respect for the laws and regulations.

CONCLUSIONS

Further efforts to inculcate entrepreneurial skills among young people will be futile unless development of entrepreneurial culture are included in educational institutions. Practices like setting up business operations run by students on campuses will give them the necessary hands-on experience and entrepreneurial culture in the inculcation of entrepreneurship.

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