

Investigating the Role of Entrepreneurial Skills in Fostering Desire Among University Undergraduates: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is often seen as an attractive career path for university students; however, the extent of their desire to pursue it remains a topic of inquiry. Although numerous studies have explored this subject, the findings have been inconsistent. This study will assess the level of entrepreneurial desire among university students, with a specific focus on the role of entrepreneurial skills. A quantitative approach will be adopted, with data to be collected through questionnaire surveys administered to 376 undergraduate students enrolled in Bachelor of Education programs at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), covering semesters one through eight. The data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential methods, including Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers, universities, and the Ministry of Education, highlighting the need to implement effective strategies and programs to nurture entrepreneurship among university students. Ultimately, this study will be important because it will provide a foundational understanding of how entrepreneurial skills influence students' desire to pursue entrepreneurship, which will be crucial for addressing graduate unemployment. By informing universities and policymakers, it will help shape more effective educational strategies that empower students to become future job creators.

Keywords:

Entrepreneurial, Entrepreneurial Desire, Entrepreneurial Skills, Undergraduates Student, University

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many Malaysians have ventured into entrepreneurship and made it their career choice. This is evident as Malaysia is categorized among the countries that are currently and continuously developing economically. According to Fadilla and Norasmah (2020), Malaysia has transitioned from a low-income country to a middle-income country. Wan Mohd Zaifurin and Ibrahim (2019) explained that if the country's per capita income increases every year, the poverty rate will also decrease. The rapid changes in the national economy can produce individuals who possess knowledge about the economy in line with current trends (Fadilla & Norasmah, 2020). Knowledge of entrepreneurship is important to learn from an early stage, especially among students. This can help individuals understand how the economy works, including financial management, investments, and market dynamics. These are important skills

for making wise economic decisions in everyday life. This matter needs to be integrated into the education system to provide early exposure to all categories of students, whether in primary, secondary, or higher education. Education is a resource that contributes to the country's economic development by producing knowledgeable individuals (Ab Wahid et al, 2023; Nursyafiqah, Mohd Fahridzakki, & Abu Yazid, 2018).

Despite these positive economic developments, undergraduate students remain a demographic increasingly vulnerable to unemployment after graduation. In many developing countries, including Malaysia, the number of unemployed graduates continues to rise, raising critical questions about the relevance and effectiveness of current university education in preparing students for the job market (The Star, 2025). Addressing this challenge by encouraging entrepreneurial involvement among undergraduates as an alternative and empowering career option is imperative.

The education systems both locally and abroad over the past three centuries have emphasized an entrepreneurial culture (Rao, Rahman, & Othman, 2022). According to Boldureanu et al. (2020), basic entrepreneurial skills need to be included in the curriculum at all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In this way, students will become more knowledgeable in this field. This implementation aims to instill entrepreneurial skills among both male and female students. Furthermore, by studying entrepreneurship, undergraduate students will be exposed to entrepreneurial characteristics such as creativity and innovation, self-confidence, risk-taking, accountability, quick decision-making, problem-solving, and teamwork (Nur Asmaliza et al., 2020).

With entrepreneurial skills, students can start small businesses, whether in the form of e-commerce, services, or innovative products. This allows them to become independent young entrepreneurs, as encouraged through programs such as the Global Entrepreneurship Movement (GEM) in Malaysia (SME Corp Malaysia, 2022). Based on previous research, most HEI students still show little interest in venturing into entrepreneurship, even though various programs related to entrepreneurship have been conducted at the university level, either through the curriculum or co-curricular activities. This shows that HEI students still prefer salaried employment after graduation. They believe entrepreneurship does not guarantee a stable income and is also a high-risk field (Norain, Mhd Suhaimi, & Md Daud, 2019). Therefore, this study needs to be conducted to identify the extent to which entrepreneurial skills influence entrepreneurial desire among HEI students.

The unemployment rate in Malaysia was recorded at 584,600 people, or 3.9 percent. The number of unemployed people showed a decrease in May 2023. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2023) also reported that the overall performance in May 2023 indicated stable growth momentum in the labor market. Although the unemployment rate in 2023 showed a decrease, the fact remains that many people are still unemployed. The official report categorized youth unemployment into two age groups: 15 to 24 years and 15 to 30 years. Based on this age classification, Higher Education Institution (HEI) students are also considered part of the youth category, as both age levels match those reported by DOSM (2023). The unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 24 decreased by 0.1 percentage point to 11 percent, with a total of 313,000 unemployed youth, while the unemployment rate among youth aged 15 to 30 increased by 0.3 percentage point to 7.0 percent, totaling 448,600 people. DOSM (2023) also stated that the Malaysian economy is expected to face significant challenges due to the uncertain global economic situation, as indicated by the Malaysian Journalist Index in April 2023. As a result, the labor market is also expected to face problems that may threaten individuals. The unemployment rate may change over time, either increasing negatively or decreasing positively.

Based on the stated unemployment rate, this issue can be addressed by encouraging people to venture into entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is an important career field today because it helps and contributes to the economic development of the country from time to time. This field also helps many groups by providing wide employment opportunities to the community (Deveci & Sekkula-Leino, 2018). This can be proven when small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have contributed more than 7.3 million jobs in 2021 (SME Corp Malaysia, 2022). Entrepreneurship is categorized as one of the career choices that every individual needs to think about (Norfadhilah & Halimah, 2010). Choosing a career is a continuous process that starts with children's perception of the world of work and continues to a more mature stage that can support their own lives and that of their families. In fact, the government also encourages the community to pursue entrepreneurship to become successful entrepreneurs. The presence of successful entrepreneurs in the business sector can increase job opportunities for the local community, and indirectly, the culture of "work for pay" can be reduced (Norfadhilah & Halimah, 2010).

In response, this research aims to encourage entrepreneurial involvement among undergraduates as a viable and empowering career path, rather than having them rely solely on traditional employment opportunities. However, public skepticism presents a significant barrier. Universities are often perceived as relying heavily on a theory-based curriculum and being staffed by lecturers who lack practical entrepreneurial experience, thereby limiting their effectiveness in cultivating genuine entrepreneurial competencies (Cheng, Chan, & Mahmood, 2009; The Star, 2022). There is a widespread belief that universities tend to follow policy mandates without adequately adapting programs to real-world entrepreneurial needs, resulting in initiatives that look good on paper but fail to produce job creators. This study addresses that skepticism by shifting the focus toward identifying the actual factors within the university environment that effectively develop entrepreneurial skills. Instead of focusing solely on entrepreneurial desire, this study examines how universities can effectively equip students with the necessary tools to succeed as entrepreneurs through curriculum development, exposure to real entrepreneurs, practical training, and institutional support (Lim, Soon, & Duan, 2021).

By doing so, this research not only advances academic understanding but also serves a critical social purpose: empowering students to become self-reliant, innovative, and economically productive individuals in a challenging job market. If universities align their efforts with real-world entrepreneurial demands, they can play a key role in reducing graduate unemployment and fostering a generation of job creators rather than job seekers (World Economic Forum, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Entrepreneurial Desire

Entrepreneurial desire is an important first step in starting a business. It reflects a person's interest and willingness to become an entrepreneur. Over the years, many researchers have explored what influences this intention, such as personal motivation, skills, and education (Ediagbonya et al., 2023). Desire is defined as an activity that involves care, attention, and curiosity toward something that attracts an individual's interest (Hornby, 2000). This means entrepreneurial desire is a person's tendency to show interest in the field of entrepreneurship or an entrepreneurial career. According to Dohse and Walter (2010), entrepreneurial desire refers to an individual's tendency to perform entrepreneurial behaviors and actions by working independently or starting a business. Entrepreneurial desire can be developed by acquiring

knowledge in the field of business. In order to venture into entrepreneurship, individuals need to receive proper education, such as gaining knowledge of business management, to ensure that their direction is well-planned (Aiman Hazim & Nor Aishah, 2021).

According to Parnell, Crandall, and Menefee (1995), there are also individuals who have potential in entrepreneurship but are reluctant to take the opportunity to become entrepreneurs. This is considered detrimental to the individual. However, according to them, this issue can be resolved if an individual has the intention, as intention can lead to desire. Therefore, individuals who intend to pursue entrepreneurship are more likely to exhibit a positive attitude toward risk and can be independent (Douglas & Shepherd, 2002). Furthermore, entrepreneurial desire can be linked to several factors that encourage individuals to enter this field (Hisrich, Peters, & Shepherd, 2010). In order to produce individuals with strong entrepreneurial desire, various encouraging factors must be present, including family, skills, attitudes, and experience.

A high desire for entrepreneurship will motivate a person to venture into this field. Nowadays, there is intense competition in the job market, especially in the salaried employment sector. To reduce this competition, individuals can venture into entrepreneurship. The competition can be reduced when more members of the public enter this field. Empirical evidence suggests that achieving gender balance within entrepreneurship education environments enhances students' propensity to engage in entrepreneurial activities upon graduation (Hägg, Politis, & Alsos, 2023).

Definition of Entrepreneurial Skills

Entrepreneurial skills are one of the essential elements in developing entrepreneurial talent. Exposure to theoretical knowledge of entrepreneurship alone is insufficient without practical application (Rao, Rahman, & Othman, 2022). Therefore, entrepreneurial skills need to be cultivated and developed from an early stage. These are skills possessed by students that must be enhanced so they can be used effectively to develop entrepreneurial determination (Esmalaily & Norasmah, 2019). In this study, entrepreneurial skills are assessed in terms of a person's ability to identify viable ideas, seize opportunities wisely, interact effectively with the community, apply knowledge from various fields, and understand the importance of business planning to manage a business effectively.

The Relationship Between Entrepreneurial Skills and Entrepreneurial Desire

An entrepreneur or aspiring entrepreneur must possess entrepreneurial skills before deciding to enter this field. Akmal et al. (2022) explained that the involvement of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) students, both male and female, in entrepreneurship to improve their entrepreneurial skills is still very low, with the study showing a significantly negative result. This is because the students feel less confident in the entrepreneurial skills programs organized by the university, particularly in terms of delivery and idea-sharing. Additionally, a study by Gusniar et al. (2014) found that creative and innovative skills were at a moderate level and positively significant. However, Nishanti and Radin Siti Aishah (2022) stated that these skills can be improved by learning about entrepreneurship and frequently seeking related information.

Entrepreneurial skills, such as management skills, are essential for every individual (Nishanti & Radin Siti Aishah, 2022). Within entrepreneurial skills are more specific

competencies, including decision-making skills, time management skills, and technical skills. Based on a study conducted by Suraiya et al. (2018), undergraduate students' entrepreneurial skills were found to be at a low level. Another study by Nishanti, Radin Siti Aishah, and Norasmah (2022), involving 380 students from a public university (Universiti Awam), showed results at a moderately high level and were significantly positive. However, students still faced certain limitations in pursuing entrepreneurship due to factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The contradiction in findings suggests a potential variation in skill development across institutions or differences in measurement frameworks.

In conclusion, while entrepreneurial skills are crucial in shaping entrepreneurial desire, their development must be approached holistically. Universities must not only provide knowledge-based content but also foster an environment that encourages practice, reflection, mentorship, and real-world engagement (Hashim & Ab Wahid, 2024). Without addressing these pedagogical and institutional gaps, entrepreneurial skills may remain underutilized, thereby undermining efforts to stimulate meaningful entrepreneurial desire among students. This study posits that a significant relationship between entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial desire is likely to emerge, but its strength and relevance will depend largely on how these skills are cultivated, contextualized, and aligned with students' personal aspirations and external realities.

Based on this discussion, the researcher expects a significant relationship between the independent variable (entrepreneurial skills) and the dependent variable (entrepreneurial desire) among undergraduate students.

H1: Entrepreneurial skills have a significant relationship with entrepreneurial desire among university students.

HOLLAND'S THEORY OF CAREER CHOICE (RIASEC)

Holland's theory of career choice is essentially related to a person's career decision based on interests. According to this theory, Holland explains that a person's approach to a preferred career depends on how closely they align with the categories stated by Holland, which are Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C), collectively known as RIASEC (Ramtia & Syska, 2018). Vocational psychologists also explain that this theory is comprehensive because it represents the nature and characteristics of individuals, as well as the six RIASEC categories. The focus of Holland's Typology Theory is to explain vocational behavior. This theory also provides practical ideas to assist individuals in career selection, job changes, and job satisfaction (Holland, 1973).

Furthermore, this theory discusses the development of personality types, personal changes, career behavior, attitudes, and skills (Sampson et al., 2017). It is evident that this theory is highly relevant for use in this study, as it aligns with the influence of entrepreneurial attitudes and skills on entrepreneurial desire. The theory can assist in addressing career-related issues, particularly for HEI students and secondary school students who will continue their studies at a higher level. This theory is considered one of the best because it presents assumptions, suggestions, and ideas clearly and understandably (Nishanti & Radin Siti Aishah, 2022). Therefore, it can serve as a guide for selecting an entrepreneurial career and can also be utilized by institutions to further promote entrepreneurial career choices among HEI students.

This study employs Holland's Theory of Career Choice (RIASEC) solely as a foundational framework to examine entrepreneurial desire among university students.

However, the purpose of this research is not to critique, expand, or modify Holland's model. Instead, it aims to apply the existing theory as a well-established guide to interpret the data and frame the analysis within this specific context. By doing so, the study ensures that the focus remains on exploring the practical relevance of the theory to entrepreneurial intentions, without contributing to theoretical development or model refinement.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the discussion of previous studies and the developed hypothesis, the researcher has constructed a conceptual framework for the study, as shown in Figure 1. The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial desire among university students. In this framework, entrepreneurial skills are conceptualized as the independent variable, representing the various competencies, attitudes, and abilities that equip students to engage in entrepreneurial activities. These may include opportunity recognition, problem-solving, risk-taking, innovation, leadership, and business planning, which are essential for navigating the dynamic demands of entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, entrepreneurial desire is positioned as the dependent variable, reflecting the level of motivation, interest, and intention among students to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Entrepreneurial desire is influenced by both internal factors such as confidence and self-efficacy, and external factors, including educational exposure, mentorship, and perceived opportunities.

The framework posits that the development of entrepreneurial skills can significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial desire. As students acquire relevant entrepreneurial competencies, they are more likely to develop a stronger inclination and readiness to initiate and sustain entrepreneurial endeavors. This relationship underscores the importance of entrepreneurship education and training programs in higher education institutions, which aim to foster a supportive environment for nurturing future entrepreneurs. By understanding this linkage, the study provides insights into how entrepreneurial education can be strategically designed to stimulate entrepreneurial aspiration and engagement among university students.

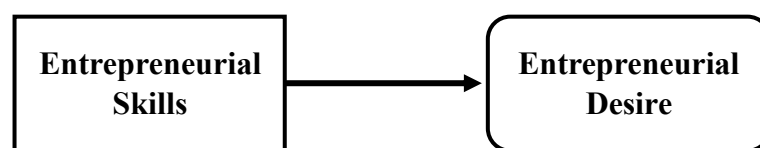


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Research design is an important aspect to ensure that the desired objectives can be achieved. The research design used in this study is a quantitative approach. The quantitative approach aligns with studies conducted by Nishanti and Radin Siti Aishah (2022), Fadilla and Norasmah (2020), and Ling, Sheerad, and Norasmah (2022). According to Akowuah (2019), the quantitative method is appropriate because it examines the relationship between various

variables and helps in testing hypotheses related to those variables, whether they are accepted or rejected. In this study, the researcher uses a cross-sectional survey method with an online questionnaire to obtain and collect data related to the variables. This method has its own advantage, data collection is conducted only once over a specific period (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). It is also used to identify situations, problems, issues, or attitudes among a population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). In addition, Setia (2016) explained that the cross-sectional survey method is used to measure outcomes and exposures in a study at a single point in time. This method is frequently used by researchers because the data obtained is simple random sampling, which makes it easier to draw conclusions about the population as a whole. Setia (2016) also emphasized that this method has the advantage of being easy and quick to conduct. Therefore, the researcher selected a cross-sectional study method to obtain the required data.

Sample Size

Sample size refers to the total number of participants representing the population in the study. According to Kean Hua (2016), sample size is very important in research methodology because it facilitates and speeds up the data collection process. Moreover, it is impossible for a researcher to collect data from an entire population. Based on 2023 data, the population of UPSI students from semester one to semester eight is 17,151. To determine the appropriate sample size, the researcher referred to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Based on the table, the minimum sample size required for this study is 376 respondents. Therefore, 376 UPSI students will be selected as the sample for this study.

Sampling Method

This study employs a stratified random sampling method based on faculty subcategories to ensure a representative distribution of respondents across various academic disciplines. The target population consists of undergraduate students enrolled in Bachelor's Degree and Bachelor of Education programs at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. To account for potential variation in entrepreneurial exposure and training across faculties, the population is first divided into distinct strata according to faculty affiliation. Respondents will be selected from each faculty based on the total student population. This method provides a balanced representation of students from various faculties. Idris (2010) explained that stratified sampling has strata that represent students' faculties in UPSI. Stratified sampling is suggested in this study because it enhances the homogeneity of the sample (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Moreover, the stratified sampling technique is applicable in studies where the population is not homogeneous, as students are from different academic programs (Kothari, 2004). This method reduces sampling bias and increases the generalizability of the findings to the large student population at the university. Chua (2006) clarified that once the strata are identified, simple random sampling is used to select respondents from each faculty. This ensures that every student has an equal chance of being chosen, which further supports the objectivity and accuracy of the data collected. By using this method, the study seeks to obtain reliable insights into the entrepreneurial aspirations of undergraduates from diverse academic backgrounds.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics. Through this method, the researcher will use mean values, percentages, frequency values, and standard deviations to analyze respondents' demographic information in Part A. Descriptive analysis (mean, frequency, and standard deviation) will also be used to address the first research objective. Descriptive statistics help describe, organize, summarize, and present data in an easy-to-understand format. According to Agresti and Finlay (2009), this method enables the researcher to describe frequency distributions, percentages, and data arrangements in tables to make information more comprehensible.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis will be used to test the second objective. According to Kothari (2004), correlation analysis is a statistical method used to determine the degree of relationship between two or more variables. The correlation coefficient is used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables (Ghazali & Sufean, 2016). Kothari (2004) also stated that if the dependent variable increases in response to the independent variable, the correlation is perfectly positive. On the other hand, a negative correlation occurs when an increase in one variable leads to a decrease in another. A negative value in the correlation coefficient indicates a negative relationship (Ghazali & Sufean, 2016). This means that the higher the value of variable X, the lower the value of variable Y. Conversely, a positive correlation means that as variable X increases, variable Y also increases.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis will be used to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Additionally, this analysis will assess the impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The researcher will use multiple regression analysis to answer the first objective which refers to the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and the level of entrepreneurial desire among UPSI students. Multiple regression is appropriate for understanding complex and realistic relationships. In this study, multiple regression analysis helps predict the extent to which entrepreneurial skills influence entrepreneurial desire among UPSI students.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study is expected to provide benefits and improvements, particularly from two important perspectives: academic and managerial. The implications from both academic and managerial perspectives involve research contributions from various parties such as universities, policymakers, and the government, as they have the interest and authority to further increase the level of entrepreneurial desire. For example, a study by Tan and Zakaria (2020) shows that research can involve collaboration with local industry and the business community. This provides opportunities for students to gain real-world experience, as well as strengthening two-way relationships between universities and the corporate sector.

Overall, this study explores undergraduate students' responses to entrepreneurship, based on variables such as the level of entrepreneurial desire and entrepreneurial skills. This thesis strengthens the knowledge base in the field of entrepreneurship education by adding new perspectives through empirical research. For instance, Nor Shafira and Sheerad (2022) assert

that self-efficacy among students plays an important role in shaping their intention to engage in entrepreneurship. This opens the door to the development of new models and theories that are more contextualized for local students.

Hence, this study offers valuable perceptions, especially for the Ministry of Human Resources, which is in charge of areas like skills development, employment, worker safety and health, and labor market trends. The ministry could use this information to collaborate with universities in creating entrepreneurship programs. These programs can help students better understand the advantages of choosing an entrepreneurial path. Similarly, the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education will be able to utilize these insights to improve curriculum design by incorporating entrepreneurial values from an early stage, particularly for students at the primary or kindergarten levels. This early exposure aims to nurture entrepreneurial desire among students from a young age. Universities will also be encouraged to create and expand entrepreneurship-related programs and motivate student organizations to promote entrepreneurship among all students (Akmal et al., 2022). This suggestion is parallel to Mahajar et al. (2012), who insisted that to attract more students involve in entrepreneurship, universities should design entrepreneurial curriculum and content, provide training programs for faculty members, establish the club of entrepreneurship in the university and establish student one-stop business advice and guidance centers

As this is a concept paper rather than an empirical study, it recognizes the necessity for future empirical research to test and expand upon these ideas. Subsequent studies will be recommended to focus on quantitative approaches to provide concrete evidence on factors influencing entrepreneurial desire and skills. Moreover, while this paper centers on conceptualizing entrepreneurial desire and entrepreneurial skills, future empirical research will consider additional variables and broader samples across multiple universities and educational levels in Malaysia to enhance generalisability. In conclusion, this concept paper provides a foundation for upcoming empirical investigations. It will be strongly recommended that research continues in this field to generate deeper, evidence-based insights that can guide more effective policy-making and educational program development aimed at fostering entrepreneurship among students.

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