

BUILDING ENTREPRENEURS IN ACADEMIA: HOW EDUCATION, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-EFFICACY SHAPE INTENTIONS AMONG MALAYSIAN STUDENTS?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intentions among students in Malaysian government universities. The study focuses on understanding the role of educational initiatives in fostering student-led start-ups and their potential for contributing to Malaysia's entrepreneurial ecosystem. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed, with data collected via self-administered questionnaires from 219 students enrolled in entrepreneurship programs at a Malaysian government university. The analysis was conducted using SPSS version 20. The results revealed that entrepreneurship education and self-efficacy significantly influence students' entrepreneurial intentions. However, social support, while positively associated, did not show a statistically significant impact. These findings suggest that enhancing students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and exposure to entrepreneurship education can play a critical role in fostering entrepreneurial intentions. The findings offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers looking to improve entrepreneurship education programs. By focusing on enhancing self-efficacy and providing practical entrepreneurial training, universities can better equip students to meet the challenges of starting new ventures, aligning with national objectives to foster innovation and economic growth. This study adds to the growing body of knowledge on entrepreneurship education within Malaysian higher education.

It highlights the crucial role of educational interventions in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and underscores the importance of focusing on self-efficacy development.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship plays a critical role in driving economic development, innovation, and job creation globally (Rahhal & Qaraqe, 2022). In recent years, entrepreneurship education has garnered significant attention, as it equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to start and manage businesses, fostering entrepreneurial intentions among students. Universities worldwide have incorporated entrepreneurship education into their curricula as a means to prepare the next generation of entrepreneurs (Aparicio et al., 2019). This is particularly true in Malaysia, where the government has prioritized entrepreneurship education to achieve its vision of becoming an entrepreneurial nation by 2030 (Khairuddin et al., 2023). Entrepreneurship education is often defined as a formal and structured process that imparts students with the ability to recognize business opportunities, develop creative solutions, and take calculated risks (Othman, Othman & Juhdi, 2022). It serves as a mechanism for fostering entrepreneurial intention, which is essential for translating entrepreneurial ideas into actionable ventures (Wraae, B., Brush, C., & Nikou, S., 2020). The significance of entrepreneurship education lies in its ability to enhance students' entrepreneurial attitudes, self-efficacy, and intentions, especially in higher education settings where formal learning experiences can be complemented with practical training (Neneh, 2020).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the benefits of entrepreneurship education, research indicates that many university graduates in Malaysia show limited entrepreneurial intention, preferring traditional employment over starting their own businesses (Aziz et al., 2021). This trend

raises concerns about the effectiveness of current entrepreneurship education programs in fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and behaviors. Previous studies have highlighted several key factors that influence entrepreneurial intention, including entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy (Nabi et al., 2017; Wardana et al., 2020). This study seeks to explore the role of these factors in fostering entrepreneurial intentions among students in Malaysian government universities. Specifically, it aims to evaluate the impact of entrepreneurship education, the influence of social support from family and peers, and the role of self-efficacy in shaping students' decisions to pursue entrepreneurial careers. By doing so, the research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on how higher education institutions can better prepare students for the entrepreneurial landscape and align their programs with national economic goals.

While previous studies have examined the role of entrepreneurship education in various contexts, there remains a gap in understanding how such education, combined with social support and self-efficacy, specifically influences entrepreneurial intentions in Malaysian universities. As Malaysia aims to foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, it is crucial to investigate how these factors interact to drive students' entrepreneurial ambitions (Hoang, 2020). Moreover, given the evolving dynamics of the global economy, it is imperative that educational systems continuously adapt to provide students with the tools necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing entrepreneurial landscape (Mei et al., 2020).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This paper aims to address this gap by investigating the relationships between entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy, and their impact on entrepreneurial intentions in the context of Malaysian government universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is widely recognized as a key driver of entrepreneurial intention, providing students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and mindset to start, and run a business (Aparicio et al., 2019). It goes beyond theoretical knowledge, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset through experiential learning, workshops, and practical business planning exercises (Ghasemi et al., 2022). Studies have shown that exposure to entrepreneurship education increases students' likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurial ventures, as it boosts their confidence and capacity to identify opportunities and manage risks (Hoang, 2020; Abdullahi et al., 2021).

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education has taken proactive steps by incorporating entrepreneurship education into tertiary institutions, aligning with the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030, which seeks to cultivate an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Khairuddin et al., 2023). Research suggests that entrepreneurship education significantly influences entrepreneurial intentions by equipping students with skills that enhance their entrepreneurial self-efficacy, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Bazkiaei et al., 2020). Furthermore, educational interventions that include hands-on experience and direct engagement with the entrepreneurial process have been found to be more effective in fostering entrepreneurial intention than traditional lecture-based methods (Mei et al., 2020).

However, some studies argue that while entrepreneurship education plays an essential role, it is not a universal solution. Its effectiveness depends on other mediating factors such as the quality of the curriculum, the educator's expertise, and the student's personal attributes (Wardana et al., 2020). Furthermore, entrepreneurship education is more impactful when aligned with the

students' cultural and socio-economic contexts (Al-Qadasi et al., 2023). As Malaysia continues its drive to foster entrepreneurship among students, it becomes imperative to refine the entrepreneurship education curriculum to ensure it addresses the needs of diverse student populations.

Social Support

Social support is another critical factor influencing entrepreneurial intentions, often categorized into emotional, instrumental, and informational support (Neneh, 2020). Emotional support, such as encouragement from family and friends, plays a significant role in boosting an individual's confidence to pursue entrepreneurship (Santoso, 2021). Instrumental support, including financial assistance and mentorship, can also lower the perceived risks associated with starting a business, thereby increasing entrepreneurial intention (Lu et al., 2021).

Research highlights that family members, particularly parents, are crucial in shaping young people's entrepreneurial aspirations (Baluku et al., 2020). Positive reinforcement and financial backing from family can provide students with the security and motivation to pursue start-ups. However, studies have found that excessive familial involvement may sometimes inhibit entrepreneurial independence, as parents' expectations can create pressure, leading to decision-making conflicts (Sieger & Minola, 2017). Additionally, cultural norms and societal expectations can also influence entrepreneurial intentions, as collectivist societies like Malaysia may prioritize secure, salaried employment over entrepreneurial risk-taking (Nguyen et al., 2020).

While social support is generally considered beneficial, its impact is nuanced. For instance, social support seen to be more effective when complemented by formal entrepreneurship education, as it allows students to translate their social networks into tangible business

outcomes (Neneh, 2022). Without formal education or training, social support alone may not be sufficient to inspire entrepreneurial action. This emphasizes the need for a well-rounded approach that combines education with a strong support network to foster entrepreneurship effectively.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to perform a specific task, has been shown to be a strong predictor of entrepreneurial intentions (Wu et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy refers to the confidence an individual has in their ability to successfully start and run a business, encompassing skills such as opportunity recognition, resource management, and leadership (Saptono et al., 2021). Individuals with high entrepreneurial self-efficacy are more likely to take entrepreneurial action because they believe they can overcome the challenges inherent in starting a business (Mei et al., 2020).

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy posits that individuals are more inclined to pursue tasks they feel competent at, and this extends to entrepreneurship, where high self-efficacy has been linked to greater entrepreneurial persistence and resilience (Bandura, 1997). In the context of higher education, entrepreneurship programs that emphasize skill-building, practical application, and feedback can significantly boost students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Wardana et al., 2020). When students feel competent in business-related tasks, they are more likely to form strong entrepreneurial intentions and follow through with start-up ventures (Krueger & Brazeal, 2021).

Recent studies have underscored the importance of self-efficacy in determining entrepreneurial success. A study by Purwati et al. (2020) found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is not only a predictor of entrepreneurial intention but also a significant

factor in ensuring business sustainability. Entrepreneurs with high self-efficacy are better able to navigate business challenges and maintain a positive outlook, which is crucial for long-term success.

Self-efficacy is often shaped by both personal experiences and educational exposure. Students who actively engage in entrepreneurship courses, participate in entrepreneurial competitions, or receive mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs tend to report higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Bryant, 2006). This highlights the need for educational institutions to offer experiential learning opportunities that foster the development of self-efficacy, ultimately contributing to the students' entrepreneurial success (Setiawan et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

This study draws on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985) to examine how entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy influence entrepreneurial intention. Entrepreneurship education equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, positively shaping their attitudes toward entrepreneurship (Hoang, 2020). By enhancing students' ability to identify opportunities and solve problems, it is hypothesized that entrepreneurship education will positively influence entrepreneurial intention (Aparicio et al., 2019). Social support, including emotional and financial backing from family and peers, impacts subjective norms by providing a supportive environment for entrepreneurial actions (Neneh, 2020). It is expected that social support will moderately influence entrepreneurial intention, though its impact may vary depending on the nature of the support (Santoso, 2021). Self-efficacy, reflecting perceived behavioral control, is a crucial factor in determining entrepreneurial intention. Individuals with higher confidence

in their ability to start and manage a business are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship (Wu et al., 2022). Therefore, self-efficacy is expected to have a strong positive influence on entrepreneurial intention. The conceptual framework proposes that entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy collectively influence students' entrepreneurial intentions, with self-efficacy playing a particularly strong role.

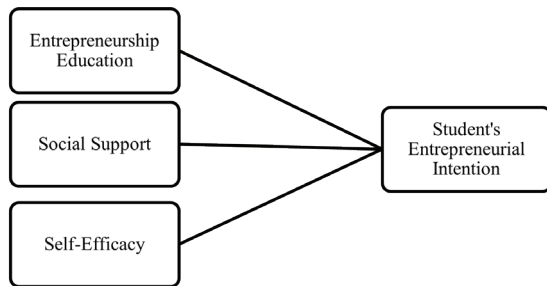


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Hypotheses Development

A prior literature review highlighted the significant role of entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy in shaping entrepreneurial intention, though the relationship between these variables has produced mixed findings. Research on entrepreneurship education consistently shows a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention, equipping students with essential skills and fostering a favorable attitude toward entrepreneurship (Aparicio et al., 2019; Ghasemi et al., 2022). However, the influence of social support presents varied outcomes; while emotional and financial support from family and peers generally encourages entrepreneurial endeavors, its overall effect can be moderated by factors such as cultural norms and the nature of the support provided (Neneh, 2020; Santoso, 2021). Meanwhile, self-efficacy has consistently emerged as a strong predictor of entrepreneurial intention, with higher self-confidence linked to a greater likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurial ventures (Wu et al., 2022; Bandura, 1997). Given these mixed but generally positive findings, this study seeks to further explore these relationships in the context of Malaysian

university students. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Entrepreneurship education has a significant positive influence on entrepreneurial intention.
- H2: Social support has a positive influence on entrepreneurial intention.
- H3: Self-efficacy has a significant positive influence on entrepreneurial intention.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistic

The descriptive statistics summarize the demographic profile and key variables of the respondents. The study surveyed 219 students from Malaysian government universities enrolled in entrepreneurship programs. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	69	31.5
Female	150	68.5
Age		
18-21 years	206	94.1
22-25 years	13	5.9
Ethnicity		
Malay	155	70.8
Chinese	42	19.2
Indian	18	8.2
Others	4	1.8

The mean scores for the key variables are presented in Table 2. Entrepreneurship education had the highest mean score (4.04), suggesting that students generally rated their entrepreneurship education positively. Social support had a moderate mean score (3.53), and self-efficacy, reflecting students' belief in their entrepreneurial abilities, was rated fairly high (3.57). Entrepreneurial intention had a mean score of 3.61, indicating that students exhibited moderately strong entrepreneurial intentions.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Key Variables

Variable	Mean
Entrepreneurship Education	4.04
Social Support	3.53
Self-Efficacy	3.57
Entrepreneurial Intention	3.61

Cronbach's Alpha Analysis

To assess the internal consistency of the survey items for each construct, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for entrepreneurship education, social support, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability, with values above 0.7 generally indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Table 3 presents the Cronbach's Alpha values for each variable.

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Values

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Entrepreneurship Education	0.812
Social Support	0.742
Self-Efficacy	0.773
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.798

The Cronbach's Alpha values for all variables were above the threshold of 0.7, indicating that the survey items for entrepreneurship education, social support, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention had good internal consistency. Specifically, entrepreneurship education had the highest reliability score (0.812), suggesting that the items used to measure this construct were highly consistent. Social support, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention also demonstrated acceptable reliability, with alpha values of 0.742, 0.773, and 0.798, respectively.

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationships between the independent variables (entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy) and the dependent variable (entrepreneurial intention). The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Coefficient	p-value
Entrepreneurship Education	0.312	0.0004
Social Support	0.089	0.0768
Self-Efficacy	0.425	0.0005

The results reveal that entrepreneurship education has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention, with a p-value of 0.0004. This supports the hypothesis that students who perceive their entrepreneurship education to be of higher quality tend to have stronger entrepreneurial intentions. Self-efficacy also shows a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial intention, with a p-value of 0.0005, indicating that students with higher confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial activities. Social support, while positively related to entrepreneurial intention, did not show a statistically significant effect, as indicated by the p-value of 0.0768. This suggests that while social support may have some influence, it is not a decisive factor in shaping entrepreneurial intention in this study.

The results of this study offer valuable insights into the factors that influence entrepreneurial intention among university students in Malaysia, focusing on entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy.

Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention

The positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention ($p = 0.0004$) confirms the importance of formal education in shaping entrepreneurial behaviors. The finding is consistent with prior research, which emphasizes that structured entrepreneurship education programs provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify business opportunities, manage risks, and make informed decisions (Aparicio et al., 2019; Hoang, 2020). Such programs, especially those

that include experiential learning components such as business simulations, internships, and case studies, significantly enhance students' practical entrepreneurial abilities, thereby increasing their entrepreneurial intentions (Bazkiaei et al., 2020).

Moreover, entrepreneurship education instills an entrepreneurial mindset that helps students overcome the fear of failure, a critical factor in entrepreneurial decision-making (Wardana et al., 2020). This aligns with Malaysia's ongoing efforts to promote entrepreneurship as part of its national development strategy, through initiatives such as the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (Khairuddin et al., 2023). The policy aims to foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem within higher education institutions, and this study confirms that such educational interventions are indeed effective in cultivating entrepreneurial intent.

Social Support and Entrepreneurial Intention

In contrast, social support showed a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with entrepreneurial intention ($p = 0.0768$). This result deviates from the findings of some previous studies, which often emphasize the role of family, friends, and mentors in providing the emotional and financial backing needed for entrepreneurial ventures (Neneh, 2020; Santoso, 2021). One possible explanation for this is the cultural context in Malaysia, where risk aversion and preference for stable, salaried jobs may still dominate societal attitudes toward career choices (Nguyen et al., 2020). Even though students may receive emotional encouragement or financial support from their social networks, the perceived risks of entrepreneurship in a culture that values job security might dilute the influence of this support on entrepreneurial intention.

Moreover, social support in this study may not have been as impactful due to the quality or type of support provided. Previous research has shown that instrumental support, such as financial backing or direct mentorship, tends

to have a stronger effect on entrepreneurial outcomes compared to emotional support alone (Lu et al., 2021). It is also possible that the students in this sample did not have access to robust networks of experienced entrepreneurs or mentors, which could explain the weaker influence of social support. This finding suggests that simply having a support system is not sufficient; the nature of the support and its practical implications for the student's entrepreneurial journey are crucial.

Self-Efficacy and Entrepreneurial Intention

Self-efficacy was found to have the strongest positive relationship with entrepreneurial intention ($p = 0.0005$), supporting the theory that belief in one's own entrepreneurial abilities is a key driver of entrepreneurial behavior. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which posits that individuals who believe in their capacity to succeed in a specific task are more likely to initiate and persist in that task, even when faced with obstacles. In the context of entrepreneurship, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial ventures because they feel confident in their ability to navigate the complexities of starting and managing a business (Wu et al., 2022).

This result also echoes the findings of earlier studies that highlight self-efficacy as a crucial factor in entrepreneurial persistence and resilience. Entrepreneurs with high self-efficacy are more likely to recover from failures and continue pursuing their business goals, which makes self-efficacy a critical component of long-term entrepreneurial success (Krueger & Brazeal, 2021; Purwati et al., 2020). The implication for educational institutions is that entrepreneurship programs should not only focus on providing technical skills but also emphasize confidence-building exercises, such as entrepreneurial simulations and competitions, which can significantly enhance students' self-efficacy.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship education, social support, and self-efficacy on entrepreneurial intention among students in Malaysian government universities. Using regression analysis, the results demonstrated that entrepreneurship education and self-efficacy were significant predictors of entrepreneurial intention, while social support, though positive, was not statistically significant.

First, the significant positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention highlights the critical role of formal education in shaping entrepreneurial mindsets. The findings indicate that students who undergo structured entrepreneurship programs are more likely to develop the skills, confidence, and attitudes needed to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This result aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of practical, experience-based learning in entrepreneurship education (Aparicio et al., 2019; Bazkiaei et al., 2020).

Second, self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial intention, underscoring the importance of an individual's confidence in their ability to succeed as an entrepreneur. Students with higher self-efficacy were more likely to express a desire to start their own businesses, which supports Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. This finding is consistent with other studies that link self-efficacy to entrepreneurial persistence and success (Wu et al., 2022; Krueger & Brazeal, 2021).

Finally, although social support had a positive relationship with entrepreneurial intention, it was not statistically significant in

this study. This suggests that while emotional and financial backing from family and peers is beneficial, it may not be a decisive factor in the Malaysian context, where cultural norms and societal expectations may prioritize stable, salaried employment over entrepreneurship (Nguyen et al., 2020).

These findings imply several important actions for policymakers and educators. Universities should continue to develop comprehensive entrepreneurship programs that blend theoretical knowledge with practical experiences such as internships and competitions. Furthermore, institutions must focus on building students' self-efficacy through mentorship and skill-building activities, as confidence is crucial for entrepreneurial success. Although social support did not emerge as a significant predictor, it remains important. Enhancing the quality of support systems such as formal mentorship programs can provide valuable resources for aspiring entrepreneurs. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on entrepreneurial intention by demonstrating the importance of entrepreneurship education and self-efficacy in the Malaysian context. The findings suggest that students who receive quality entrepreneurship education and possess high self-efficacy are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial careers. This reinforces the need for educational institutions to offer comprehensive, experience-based entrepreneurship programs that build both skills and confidence. While social support was not found to be a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention, it remains a valuable part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Future studies should explore the types and quality of social support that most effectively foster entrepreneurial behavior, particularly in cultural contexts like Malaysia, where risk aversion may be more prevalent.

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