

**Entrepreneurial Inclination of University Students:
A Case Study of Students at UNITAR**

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ABSTRACT

Interest in entrepreneurship is intense in many parts of the world. For developed economies, entrepreneurial activity (new venture formation) is a means of revitalizing economy, a way of coping with unemployment problems, a potential catalyst and incubator for technological progress, product and market innovation. For economies of developing countries, entrepreneurship is seen as an engine of economic progress, job creation and social adjustment. Thus, small business growth/new business formation is widely encouraged by national economic policies to stimulate economic growth and wealth creation. As Malaysia entered the twenty first century, interest and concerns on the subject of entrepreneurship heightened among others by the government's enormous funding allocation towards the promotion of entrepreneurship especially for small and medium enterprises, the issue of graduate unemployment which has risen to approximately sixty thousand (60,000) according to a Bernama report and the attitude of current graduates who are seen to be too pampered and dependent on the government and private organizations for employment. It is time to further examine whether our existing university students are inclined towards entrepreneurship. This study investigates the degree to which UNITAR students are inclined towards entrepreneurship. 234 students from three faculties at both graduate and undergraduate levels were surveyed to examine their entrepreneurial inclination and also to examine the relationship between their demographic and social characteristics with entrepreneurial inclination. The study found strong entrepreneurial inclination among the graduates of Unitar. With regards to their inclination towards entrepreneurship, this study found significant differences between full time and part time students and the type of programs they are enrolled in. And, there was also significant association between family involvement in business and the students' entrepreneurial inclination. Further analysis is reported and recommendation for future research has been put forth in this paper.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Inclination, Entrepreneurship Education

INTRODUCTION

As Malaysia entered the twenty first century, interest and concerns on the subject of entrepreneurship have been heightened among others by the government's enormous funding allocation towards the promotion of entrepreneurship especially for small and medium enterprises, the issue of graduate unemployment which has risen to approximately sixty thousand (60,000) according to a Bernama report, and the attitude of current graduates who are seen to be too pampered and dependent on the government and private organizations for employment.

It is time for us to examine whether our existing university students are inclined towards entrepreneurship. To do this, there is a further need to investigate the perception of our undergraduates and examine the extent to which there exists entrepreneurial inclination in them. This will help in developing a clear cut policy to promote entrepreneurship at the national level so that our future generations in general and new graduates in particular are able to move to a new level by becoming entrepreneurs.

Objectives

The purpose of this research was to examine the degree to which young generation is inclined towards entrepreneurship. Specifically, this research intends:

1. to examine the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and their entrepreneurial inclination.
2. to identify if there exist any significant differences in the entrepreneurial inclination between full time and part time students.
3. to identify if there exist any significant difference in the entrepreneurial inclination between undergraduate and postgraduate students.
4. to identify if there exist any significant difference between type of program enrolled and students' entrepreneurial inclination.

About Unitar

University Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) is the nation's first e-learning, MSC-status and ISO 9001:2000-certified private university in Malaysia. UNITAR offers the best combination in its teaching and e-learning methods by combining face-to-face classes with the effective use of web-based courseware and online tutorials. UNITAR currently offers 28 academic programs, 11 of which are accredited by the National Accreditation Council (LAN). All UNITAR programmes are approved by the Private Education Department. The programs range from foundation and diploma up to doctorate degrees in fields such as information technology, business administration, humanities and social sciences, and hospitality & tourism management. (www.unitar.edu.my)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interest in entrepreneurship is intense in many parts of the world. This prolonged and heightened interest in entrepreneurship is prompted by several factors. First, for developed economies, entrepreneurial activity (new venture formation) is a means of revitalizing economy and a way of coping with unemployment problems. Moreover, it is accepted as a potential catalyst and incubator for technological progress, product and market innovation (Mueller and Thomas, 2000; Jack and Anderson, 1999). However, it has a more critical role for economies of developing countries since entrepreneurship is seen as an engine of economic progress, job creation and social adjustment. Thus, small business growth/new business formation is widely encouraged by national economic policies to stimulate economic growth and wealth creation.

According to Long (1983), the definition of entrepreneurship can be traced back more than 800 years ago to the French word 'entreprendre' which means 'to do something'. Then in 1730, Cantillon used entrepreneur to relate it to a self employed person who has 'risk taking tolerance' which is believed to be vital in providing one's own well being (Outcalt, 2000). Entrepreneurship "consists in doing things that are not generally done in the ordinary course of business routine" (Schumpeter, 1951, pp. 255), is a "dynamic process of creating incremental wealth" (Ronstadt, 1984, pp. 28), is concerned with doing different things, not doing things better and typically involves such activity as upgrading "the yield from resources",

creating “a new market” or additional “purchasing power” (Drucker, 1985, pp. 19 & 27). It is not enough to have new ideas, they must lead to “the successful production, assimilation and exploitation of novelty in society” through innovation (European Union, 1996, pp. 9). Many authors consider that entrepreneurship and innovation are closely linked (Drucker, 1985; Fulop, 1991; Kanter, 1989; Schumpeter, 1951). It is a multifaceted activity that has been defined by Timmons (1989, pp. 1), as “the ability to create something from practically nothing. According to Cromie (2000), “Entrepreneurship is initiating ... and building an enterprise rather than ... watching one. It is the knack of sensing opportunities where others see chaos, contradiction and confusion. It is the ability to build a ‘founding team’ to complement your own skills and talents. It is the knowledge to find, marshal and control resources ... Finally it is a willingness to take risks.”

In studies on entrepreneurship it is possible to discriminate factors that influence entrepreneurial behavior. It is accepted that entrepreneurial behavior is the product of many influences including employment history (Collins & Moore, 1970; Nicholson & West, 1988), family background (Stanworth, Blythe, Granger, & Stanworth, 1989; Ward, 1987), organizational experiences (Miner, Smith, & Bracker, 1992; Morky, 1988), personal values (Fagenson, 1993), cultural beliefs and values (McGrath, MacMillan, & Scheinberg, 1992), and individual disposition (Brockhaus, 1982; Chell *et al.*, 1991).

Some social and environmental factors are also associated with entrepreneurial behavior. The Social Factors model examines the personal background, family background, stage of career (Robinson *et al.*, 1991; Alstete, 2002; Green *et al.*, 1996), early life experiences and growth environment (Gibb, 1993), while the environmental factors model looks at the contextual factors such as value of wealth, tax reduction and indirect benefits, timing of opportunities in the career process, the impact of market conditions (Alstete, 2002), social upheaval, supportive social and economic culture (Green *et al.*, 1996).

There is not much research available in Malaysia in the area of entrepreneurship. This may be due to the fact that this field only began to be emphasized by the government in the mid 90s when a special ministry for entrepreneurs, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development was created in 1995. Most of the existing research on entrepreneurship in Malaysia tends to focus more on the field of entrepreneurship in general; the success factors of actual entrepreneurs and to a certain extent characteristics of entrepreneurs (Nor, Ezlika and Ong, 2000; Nor Aishah and Yufiza, 2004; Ariff and Syarisa Yanti, 2002; Noor and Ali, 2004; Radzali, 1991). The empirical research on student’s perception or inclination towards entrepreneurship is also limited and focuses more on factors influencing entrepreneurship inclination rather than examining the demographic and personal factors (Kamariah, Yaacob and Wan Jamaliah, 2004).

One research conducted in Universiti Tenaga National found that there existed high degree (86% of 279 respondents) of entrepreneurial intention among the students (Kamariah, Yaacob and Wan Jamaliah, 2004). High degree of entrepreneurial intention was also found among students across programs and not confined to business students only. However, student’s exposure to entrepreneurial courses was found to have significant relationship with entrepreneurial intention. Similar results were found by Nor Aishah and Yufiza (2004) in their study of contractors in Malaysia. (95.8% of their respondents were found to have taken some kind of entrepreneurial course). This supported a study conducted by Hatten and Ruhland (1995) in the United States. Another study by Jumaat, Ishak and Salehuddin (2001) conducted at Institute Kemahiran Belia Negara also found strong relationship between types of courses respondents took and entrepreneurial orientation.

Quite a number of studies also found significant relationship between family background and inclination towards entrepreneurship (Yusop, 2002; Crant, 1996; Matthews and Moser, 1996). Hisrich (2000) argues that family involvement in business tend to influence their children to be involved in business too. However, there are some studies that refute such findings. One study among contractors conducted in Malaysia found that 73.2% of the respondents became entrepreneurs because of their own interest and 66.2% of the respondents were not from business background families (Nor Aishah and Yufiza, 2004).

With regards to gender, majority of past studies found that more male are inclined towards entrepreneurship as compared to females (Buttner and Rosen, 1989; Crant, 1996; Nor, Ezlika, and Ong,

2004). However, most of these findings tend to cover sectors dominated by male and as such may not be representative of both groups.

The relationship between education and entrepreneurship found contradictory results. Logically, education should influence entrepreneurial inclination since it prepares and provides the much needed confidence to venture into business. Nor, Ezlika, and Ong, (2004) in a study of urban Malaysian entrepreneurs found that majority of the male Malay entrepreneurs did not have tertiary education as compared to the Chinese. Nor Aishah and Yufiza (2004) in their study of contractors also found only 11.3% of the respondents had tertiary education. However, other researchers found that education does play significant influence on entrepreneurial inclination (Crant, 1996; Storey, 1982). This again can be argued since this relationship may depend on the nature of the business where some may require the need to have theoretical knowledge where university degree is important. On the other hand some business may emphasis more on the practical skills and as such practical experience may be more relevant as opposed to university qualification. According to a GEM Report (2003), those with post secondary or graduate education are twice as likely to be involved in an entrepreneurial firm as compared to those with less education.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Survey based methodology was used in this research to obtain data from the respondents namely undergraduate and postgraduate students from UNITAR. Data collection for this study began in March 2006 and ended in early June 2006. The data for this study was collected through a self-administered questionnaire by the researchers. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, section A and B. Section A comprised questions eliciting demographic and other personal characteristics. Section B comprised of 12 questions designed to gather the information from the respondents regarding their inclination towards entrepreneurship. A five point Likert scale was used in this section and the respondents were required to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements in the questionnaire. Due to time limitation, the sampling was based on convenience and 234 questionnaires were successfully collected and were found to be complete and usable for data analysis.

Reliability Analysis

A Cronbach coefficient alpha test was conducted on the 12 items in Section B to determine internal consistency of the scale used. According to Sekaran (2000), Cronbach alpha is a reliability coefficient that indicates how well the items are positively correlated to one another. The closer the Cronbach alpha is to 1, the higher the internal consistency. Item 9, 10 and 11 in the questionnaire was negatively worded and was recoded prior to the analysis. Based on the guidelines by Sekaran (2000), a scale of 0.6 is considered to be poor, 0.7 is acceptable and those over 0.8 are good. The values of Cronbach alpha coefficient are depicted below in Table 1. Item wise alpha was also calculated and it was discovered that if item 6 from Section B was deleted, and then the value of the alpha tend to increase slightly.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| .724 | .737 | 12 |

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic and personal characteristics of the sample

Based on the demographic characteristics provided in Table 2 below, we can say that the majority of the respondents are female (67.5%) and are between 21-25 years of age (71.4%). In terms of race, majority were Malay (51.3%) followed by Indians (25.2), Chinese (15.2%) and others (8.5%). 83.8% of the respondents were undergraduates with the remaining 13.3% being postgraduate students. 67.5% of the respondents were studying on a full time basis as compared to 32.5% who were studying on a part time basis. This was not surprising since UNITAR attracts a large number of part timers due to the flexible teaching mode that caters for part timers.

Table 2: Frequency Distributions of Sample (n = 234)

| Demographic | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Male | 76 | 32.5 |
| Female | 158 | 67.5 |
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| < 20 | 8 | 3.4 |
| 21 – 25 | 167 | 71.4 |
| 26 – 30 | 32 | 13.7 |
| > 30 | 27 | 11.5 |
| <i>Race</i> | | |
| Malay | 120 | 51.3 |
| Chinese | 35 | 15.0 |
| Indian | 59 | 25.2 |
| Others | 20 | 8.5 |
| <i>Student Status</i> | | |
| Full Time | 158 | 67.5 |
| Part time | 76 | 32.5 |
| <i>Student education level</i> | | |
| Undergraduate | 202 | 83.8 |
| Postgraduate | 32 | 13.3 |
| <i>Occupation Status</i> | | |
| Full time | 87 | 37.18 |
| Part Time | 44 | 18.8 |
| Not working | 103 | 44.0 |
| <i>Program enrolled</i> | | |
| Bachelor of IT | 13 | 5.4 |
| Bachelor of Business Admin. | 94 | 39 |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----|------|
| Bachelor of Information System | 13 | 5.4 |
| Bachelor of Management | 30 | 12.4 |
| Bachelor of Education | 30 | 12.4 |
| Bachelor of English | 1 | 0.4 |
| Bachelor of Hosp. & Tourism | 21 | 8.7 |
| Master in Information Tech. | 2 | 0.8 |
| Master in Tech. Management | 2 | 0.8 |
| Master in Business Admin. | 28 | 11.6 |

Means and Frequency Distribution of responses to the Construct on Entrepreneurial Inclination

Table 3 depicts a tabulation of the means and frequency distribution of responses to the 12 items in Section B of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Mean & Frequency Distribution of Responses (n = 234)

| Items | Mean | Strongly Disagree and Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Strongly Agree and Agree (%) |
|---|------|------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| 1. I have strong plans to venture into business once I complete my studies | 3.73 | 8.5 | 31.1 | 57.6 |
| 2. I am interested in starting my own business | 3.92 | 8.3 | 17.4 | 71.4 |
| 3. I am always inclined towards entrepreneurship | 3.56 | 7.0 | 41.5 | 48.6 |
| 4. I see myself becoming some type of entrepreneur one day | 3.77 | 7.5 | 24.9 | 64.7 |
| 5. I have strong desire to be the owner of my business | 4.01 | 4.5 | 17.4 | 85.1 |
| 6. I will not mind dropping out of my studies if some good business opportunity comes my way. | 2.58 | 51.5 | 22.4 | 23.2 |
| 7. Malaysian social and economic environment is highly supportive of entrepreneurship. | 3.45 | 7.0 | 44.8 | 45.2 |
| 8. Entrepreneurs are highly respected in our society. | 3.69 | 2.5 | 37.3 | 57.3 |
| 9. Present economic conditions, in the wake of globalization, are not favorable for entrepreneurs. | 3.00 | 26.1 | 45.2 | 25.7 |
| 10. There are not many business/entrepreneurial opportunities in Malaysian society. | 3.09 | 26.1 | 36.9 | 34.0 |
| 11. Five to seven years from now I see myself doing a job in some company. | 2.75 | 42.8 | 33.6 | 20.7 |
| 12. Planning for some kind of business has been, is, or will be an important part of my college career. | 3.66 | 6.8 | 36.3 | 56.8 |

It can be seen from Table 3 that the mean score (except for two items) is more than 3 which shows high entrepreneurial inclination of graduates. A low mean score for item 11 ('five to seven years from now I see myself doing a job in some company') actually indicates low preference for going for a job which again is an indication of high entrepreneurial intensity. For item 6 ('I will not mind dropping out of my studies if

some good business opportunity comes my way'), a low score could mean that even though respondents have entrepreneurial inclination, education is still important for them. The responses in the above table have also been categorized into three columns, one for strongly disagree and disagree, another one for neutral, and the last one for strongly agree and agree. It can be observed that proportion of responses to strongly agree and agree to strongly disagree and disagree is very high indicating a strong entrepreneurial inclination. However, the response rate in the category of 'neutral' is also very high which indicates the state of indecisiveness of the respondents.

T-test for gender, student status, occupation status and degree status

T-Test was conducted to determine if there exist any significant differences between male and female students with regards to their perception towards entrepreneurship. Levene's tests showed p-value of greater than 0.05 and hence homogeneity of variances exists (one of the assumptions for independent group t-test). The t-value and corresponding p-value were found to be not significant at the 5% level of significance. Thus, we conclude that there exist no significant differences between the means of male and female in regard to their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The results are depicted in Table 4. T-Test was conducted to determine if there existed any significant differences between full time and part time students with regards to their perception towards entrepreneurship. Levene's tests showed p-value of greater than 0.05 and hence homogeneity of variances exists (one of the assumptions for independent group t-test). The t-value and corresponding p-value were found to be significant at the 10% level of significance. Thus, we conclude that there exist significant differences between full time and part time students with regards to their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The results are depicted in Table 4.

T-Test was also conducted to determine if there exist any significant differences between those working full time and part time with regards to their perception towards entrepreneurship. Levene's tests showed p-value of greater than 0.05 and hence homogeneity of variances exists (one of the assumptions for independent group t-test). The t-value and corresponding p-value were found to be not significant at the 5% level of significance. Thus, we conclude that there exist no significant differences between those working part time and full time with regards to their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The results are depicted in Table 4. T-test was conducted to determine if there exist any significant differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students with regards to their perception towards entrepreneurship. Levene's tests showed p-value of less than 0.05 and hence homogeneity of variances does not exist. The t-value and corresponding p-value were found to be not significant at the 5% level of significance. Thus, we conclude that there exist no significant differences between undergraduate and postgraduate students with regards to their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The results are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: T-test for gender, student status, occupation status and degree status

| Variable | Levene's test for equality of variance | | t-test for equality of means | | |
|-------------------|--|-------|------------------------------|--------|--------------|
| | F | Sig | t | df | Sig (2 tail) |
| Gender | 3.766 | 0.054 | 0.583 | 232 | 0.560 |
| Student Status | 3.496 | 0.063 | -1.749 | 232 | 0.082* |
| Occupation Status | 8.107 | 0.051 | -0.339 | 129 | 0.735 |
| Degree status | 6.054 | 0.015 | -0.669 | 36.680 | 0.508 |

*Significant at 10% Sig. level

Analysis of Variances (ANOVA)

For more than two groups in the case of race and programs enrolled, ANOVA test was conducted to determine if there exist differences between their means and their inclination towards entrepreneurship. There was no significant difference found between the various races and their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The F-value and the corresponding p-value were found to be not significant ($p > 0.05$). However, significant differences were found between students from the various programs and their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The F-value and the corresponding p-value were found to be significant ($p > 0.05$). The results are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA for race and programs enrolled

| Variable | ANOVA for equality of means | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-------------|-------|---------------|
| | Sum of squares | df. | Mean Square | F | Sig. (2 tail) |
| Race | 74.848 | 3 | 24.949 | 0.844 | 0.471 |
| Program Enrolled | 586.500 | 9 | 65.167 | 2.322 | 0.016* |

*Significant at 5% Sig. level

Due to small sample size in some programs, it was decided that the programs be regrouped into faculties. This resulted in three faculties namely Information Technology (IT), Business (BUS) and Humanities (HUM). ANOVA was again conducted to find out if there exist significant differences in the entrepreneurial inclination among various faculties. Significant difference was found between the respondents from IT and Business faculty. Significant difference was also found between the respondents from the Business and Humanities faculty. However, no significant difference was found between the respondents from the IT and Humanities faculty. This indicates that when Business students are included in the analysis they tend to influence the level of significance between the means. Table 6 depicts the ANOVA results conducted between the various faculties.

Table 6: ANOVA for faculty

| Variable | | Mean Difference of squares | Standard Error | Significance Level |
|----------|-----|----------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| IT | BUS | -2.83770 | 1.08774 | 0.026* |
| | HUM | -0.91707 | 1.13889 | 0.700 |
| BUS | IT | 2.8377 | 1.08774 | 0.026* |
| | HUM | 1.92063 | 0.76220 | 0.033* |
| HUM | IT | 0.91707 | 1.13889 | 0.7 |
| | BUS | -.192063 | 0.76220 | 0.033* |

Chi-square test of Association

Chi-square test was conducted to examine if there was any association between some of the demographic and personal characteristics with entrepreneurial inclination. No association was found between student's age and entrepreneurial inclination. No association was also found between student's gender and entrepreneurial inclination. However, significant association was found (10% significance level) between family involvement in business and their entrepreneurial inclination. No association was also found between students that took entrepreneurship course and entrepreneurial inclination. The results are depicted in Table 7.

Table 7: Chi-square test for Age, gender, family involvement in business and involvement in entrepreneurship course

| Variable | Pearson Chi-Sq | df | Sig.Level (2 sided) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|----|---------------------|
| Age | 67.322 | 78 | 0.8 |
| Gender | 20.232 | 26 | 0.78 |
| Family involvement in business | 36.427 | 26 | 0.084* |
| Taken entrepreneurship course | 33.210 | 26 | 0.156 |

*Significant at 10% Sig. level

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to examine whether our young generation, specifically UNITAR students in this case, is inclined towards entrepreneurship. In examining the relationship between students' demographic characteristics and their entrepreneurial inclination, we found no significant difference for gender, occupation status and degree status. These findings support previous studies done on demographic characteristics and entrepreneurial inclination. However, there exist significant differences between full

time and part time students. Student status may have not been considered as a variable in previous studies. In UNITAR's case, however, student status is a salient feature given the nature of its delivery system. Future studies in similar context should consider student status as an important variable.

The study did not find any significant difference between undergraduates and post graduate students and their inclination towards entrepreneurship. However, there exist significant difference between the type of program students enrolled in and entrepreneurial inclination. Further analysis demonstrated that between the three faculties, there are significant differences between the faculties of Business and IT, and, faculties of Business and Humanities, but not for faculties of IT and Humanities. This indicated that when Business students are included in the analysis, they tend to influence the level of significance between the means. Further studies can be conducted on this aspect by increasing the sample size especially from the IT faculty and examine to what extent program content or syllabus could influence inclination towards entrepreneurship.

The study also found a strong association between family background and entrepreneurial inclination, which therefore supported previous studies. In addition, it can be concluded from the study that there is high inclination towards entrepreneurship among the students surveyed and there is a strong desire on the part of the graduates (85 percent) to be business owners. Further research may be necessary to identify ways and means to convert this desire into actual business activity. We find that the respondents, in general, are not willing to drop their studies when there is some good business opportunity coming their way which means that education is deemed to be very important. From this finding, it can be inferred that the next generation of entrepreneurs would come from the educated professional group of people.

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