



A Pilot Study on Hospitality Students' Entrepreneurial Intention in Malaysia

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Abstract:

This study outlines the procedures and findings of a pilot test aimed at validating a self-administered questionnaire measuring entrepreneurial intention among hospitality students in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). A pilot test was conducted with 52 undergraduate students from private and public universities to assess the reliability and validity of the survey instruments. The questionnaire comprised constructs including perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, propensity to act, subjective norms, psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention. The online survey format was chosen for its practicality, especially in reaching geographically dispersed institutions. Cronbach's alpha values across constructs ranged from 0.75 to 0.89, indicating strong internal consistency. Notably, issues were identified regarding participants' interpretation of key terms, specifically the misinterpretation of "final year" as "final semester," highlighting a need for improved clarity in instructions. These results affirm the reliability and feasibility of the instrument, with minor refinements required before administering the full-scale survey.

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship's emergence as a driver of economic resilience and innovation has piqued university students' interest in developing entrepreneurial intentions. Particularly within the hospitality sector, which is highly dynamic and sensitive to market changes, fostering entrepreneurship is seen as crucial for sustainable development. Conducting a pilot test is essential to ensure the clarity, reliability, and contextual appropriateness of the instrument before proceeding to full-scale implementation. Studies have revealed a positive correlation between entrepreneurial businesses and a country's revenue and employment (Li et al., 2020). According to Apostu and Gigauri (2023) and Taşkıran and İyigün (2019), entrepreneurship is a potential solution to unemployment, which continues to challenge many developing economies. This is because entrepreneurial activities significantly impact a country's economy, societal growth, and wealth (Nungsari et al., 2023). These contributions underscore that entrepreneurship begins with an individual's entrepreneurial intention, as intention is the foundation upon which entrepreneurial behaviour and subsequent economic impact are built. The activities provide new opportunities by transforming markets and boosting economic growth and employment, all of which lead to an increase in a country's per capita income (Iuliana et al., 2016; Rusu et al.,

2022; Sharma et al., 2024; Vuorio et al., 2018). As a result, people have become increasingly interested in entrepreneurial opportunities to take advantage of the opportunities to be self-employed without being tied to any organisation (Ravenelle, 2017; Muskat et al., 2019). In this context, entrepreneurial intention reflects students' willingness to explore self-employment opportunities and leverage the dynamic environment of the hospitality sector. They can also benefit from the extremely dynamic environment that provides limitless new opportunities and pays for innovative new businesses and new ventures. The uncertainties and instabilities associated with the labour-market conditions have made student career direction increasingly challenging, especially for hospitality students (Petruzziello et al., 2020). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the hospitality sector are a good indicator of this (Mustafa et al., 2023; Peters et al., 2019). Given these challenges, entrepreneurial intention becomes a vital career determinant, particularly for hospitality students navigating fragile labour markets. Accordingly, Fu et al. (2019) emphasised how crucial it is to comprehend the entrepreneurial demands in the hospitality industry. For instance, to succeed in the hospitality industry, SMEs need to remain entrepreneurial while adopting managerial behaviour (Abdullah et al., 2018; Yusi, 2022). According to Muskat et al. (2019), attitudes, aptitudes, strategies, and personality are important to emerge successfully in this industry.

Additionally, individuals pursue university degrees in order to obtain employment. According to Otache et al. (2021), previously, a university degree was a ticket to get paid employment for graduates. However, a university degree no longer guarantees graduates a paid job or a salary commensurate with their qualifications because the labor market is extremely competitive, congested, and fragile. Thus, the cultivation of entrepreneurial intention among students is increasingly essential, as it drives them to view entrepreneurship as a realistic and attractive career path. Being an entrepreneur is the only feasible alternative career choice. Therefore, students who want to be admitted to universities are encouraged to pursue courses that lead to entrepreneurial education (Otache, 2020; Otache et al., 2021) either as a main programme or a value-added course to another programme. Due to the potential of entrepreneurship for unemployment and underemployment, education can be identified as a solution (Fabeil et al., 2022; Otache et al., 2021; Vuorio et al., 2018). Ultimately, entrepreneurship education is expected not only to enhance students' competencies but also to strengthen their entrepreneurial intention, which serves as the most immediate predictor of future entrepreneurial action. Entrepreneurship education should improve business ability and student characteristics by incorporating entrepreneurial elements into the prevailing curriculum, thereby making entrepreneurship more appealing to foster entrepreneurial intelligence among graduates to become entrepreneurs (Anjum et al., 2024; Fatimah & Purdianto, 2020; Listyaningsih et al., 2024).

Problem Statement

According to Ojiaku et al. (2018), entrepreneurship can be seen as a workable solution to unemployment and a low standard of living. Additionally, employment is positively related to entrepreneurial businesses because they create job opportunities and reduce unemployment (Otache, 2020). However, despite the growing emphasis on entrepreneurial education, many students still demonstrate weak entrepreneurial intention, limiting their likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurial careers. Peters et al. (2018) and Ibidunni et al. (2020) argued that one reason for this gap is the overemphasis on theoretical content rather than practical experience. While curriculum reforms are being proposed to strengthen entrepreneurial mindsets (Misni et al., 2020), intention remains inconsistent, with some studies reporting positive entrepreneurial intention among students (Vuorio et al., 2018), while others reveal declining or insufficient interest in entrepreneurship despite educational exposure (Muskat et al., 2019).

In Malaysia, this issue is particularly significant for hospitality students, who face a highly competitive and unstable labour market. Although hospitality graduates acquire industry-specific skills, many remain hesitant to pursue entrepreneurship, preferring traditional employment that is increasingly scarce, unstable, and misaligned with their qualifications. This situation points to a critical gap between exposure to entrepreneurship and the actual formation of entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, previous research has largely examined general student populations, with limited focus on hospitality students, despite the industry's reliance on entrepreneurial ventures such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate the factors influencing entrepreneurial intention among hospitality students in Malaysian higher education institutions. Understanding these factors, such as perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, propensity to act, subjective norms, and psychological capital will help address the inconsistency in prior findings and provide insights into how students can be encouraged to transform entrepreneurial opportunities into sustainable ventures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Intention

The word "intention" refers to a state of mind that motivates an individual to reach a particular goal or objective (Bird & West, 1998). Furthermore, a mindset that focusses one's attention, experience, and actions on creating a business plan is known as entrepreneurial intention (Bird, 1988). Additionally, the entrepreneurial intention is defined as a person's willingness to conduct a specified behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Besides, several researchers defined entrepreneurial intention as the beginning of entrepreneurship (Alzyoud et al., 2024; Bao & Dou, 2021; Chevalier et al., 2022; Fadzil et al. 2022) and as an individual's state of mindfulness that inspires action and directs attention towards starting a new business (Fayolle et al., 2014). In particular, numerous factors influence entrepreneurship, including attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms factors, demographic factors consisting of gender, education levels, family socio-economic and the form of parents' work (Hasan et al., 2020). The intention to carry out a specific action is linked to the person's attitude toward that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to Toufaily and Bou Zakhem (2024), more positive attitudes will encourage more viable intentions to carry out a specific behaviour and vice versa. In this regard, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has become one of the most widely used theoretical models in EI research. Additionally, Krueger and Brazeal (1994) and Alzyoud et al. (2024) stated EI is a person's adherence to future behaviour, estimated as the intention to start a new business or organisation.

Perceived Desirability

Perceived desirability is the degree to which a behaviour is personally appealing, which motivates someone to perform it (Krueger et al., 2000; Shapero and Sokol, 1982). It is an intrinsic motivator, transforming individual attitudes into desired entrepreneurial intentions (Sun et al., 2023). Previous research shows that people who highly value innovation and entrepreneurship find starting their own businesses more appealing than others do (Shahzad et al., 2021). In addition, Ramawati et al. (2020) and Romero-Galisteo et al. (2022) also confirmed positive relations between perceived desirability and entrepreneurial intention. Similarly, Rehman et al. (2023) carried out empirical research on entrepreneurial intentions and found that the perceived desirability is positive and significantly connected to entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, perceived desirability is linked to Ajzen's variables of attitude and subjective norms.

Propensity to Act

Propensity to act is defined by Krueger et al. (2000) define propensity to act as individuals' willingness to follow through on their decisions, showing their eagerness and willingness to engage in specific behaviors to start a business (Maheshwari et al., 2023). Later on, propensity to act, which refers to the desire to become an entrepreneur, is a personality trait that stimulates interest in entrepreneurship (Bui et al., 2020). Many people believe that individuals with an entrepreneurial mindset possess particular personality traits that cannot be taught (Ali et al., 2023). However, the choice to embark on a new business is influenced by how individuals perceive the desirability and feasibility of the venture, together with their propensity to act on opportunities (Ugwueze et al., 2022). This inclination also drives individuals to innovate, leading to the creation of new products, services, or methods of production (Schlaegel et al., 2021).

Perceived Feasibility

Perceived feasibility refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to successfully initiate a new business venture. It motivates individuals to execute new entrepreneurial ideas and plans (Shapero & Sokol, 1982; Maziriri et al., 2024). Krueger (1993) argued that perceived feasibility strongly predicts entrepreneurial intention. Sharahiley (2020) demonstrated that perceived feasibility is positively and significantly related to individual entrepreneurial intention. Additionally, Romero-Galisteo et al. (2022) also confirmed that perceived feasibility exerts a positive influence on university students' entrepreneurial intentions. Previous research studies also highlight the important role of perceived feasibility, which involves individuals' attitudes towards the practicality of behaviours needed to become an entrepreneur (Khuyen et al., 2023). It indicates their belief in their competence to carry out business activities effectively (Krueger, 1993), aligning with Ajzen's theory.

Subjective Norms

According to the previous study of TPB literature, Perceived Social Norms (PSN) are typically identified as "Subjective Norms" (Ephrem et al., 2019; Iakovleva et al., 2011; Robledo et al., 2015). A subjective norm is a person's perception of whether or not friends, family, and society will accept a certain behaviour he seeks to engage in (Ajzen, 1991; Mensah et al., 2021). Furthermore, individuals tend to mimic the behaviours of those closest to them, like role models, family members, and friends, which significantly influenced their behavioural patterns (Bandura, 1977; Acheampong & Tweneboah-koduah, 2017). Hence, in the case of entrepreneurship, studies have indicated a significant positive relationship between subjective norms and entrepreneurial intention (Ahmed et al., 2020; Gieure et al., 2020; Mensah et al., 2021).

Psychological Capital's Mediating Role in Entrepreneurial Intention

Psychological Capital (PsyCap), which is rooted in Positive Psychology, (PsyCap in short), is concerned with the processes that enhance the functioning and development of an individual, group, or company through positive approaches, feedback, and criticism (Çavuş & Gökçen, 2015). As stated by Mahfud et al. (2020), a previous researcher mentioned that Components of PsyCap are a state of positive psychological development in an individual distinguished by four psychological attributes. According to Luthans (2002), Psychological Capital (PsyCap) refers to an individual's positive psychological state of development that assesses how much students show a positive mindset, which includes hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Baluku et al., 2020; Luthans, 2002; Maslakçı et al., 2022; Vuori, 2025). By acquiring such knowledge, students gain awareness of various career prospects and develop the capacity to create and carry out effective action plans toward their goals (Fadzil et al., 2022; Muskat et al., 2019). In the context of higher education, positive psychology is crucial for fostering students' well-being (Barrera-Verdugo, 2023), resilience, and motivation to achieve academic and career success

(Luo et al., 2019). Psychological capital does not function as a factor of production or directly shape entrepreneurial results; instead, it facilitates the acquisition of financial and social capital by entrepreneurs (Zhao et al., 2020). Evidence from previous studies suggests that there is a positive relationship between university students' psychological capital and entrepreneurial intention (Maslakçı et al., 2022). This is supported by previous researchers, Baluku et al. (2020), mentioned that psychological capital, along with its underlying dimensions, has been found to strongly influence the development of entrepreneurial intention. These results strengthened the findings by Jin (2017), which demonstrates that hope, resilience, and self-efficacy have a positive effect on the intention to start a business.

Research Framework

The research framework illustrates the interrelationships among the independent variables, the mediating variable, and the dependent outcome of the study.

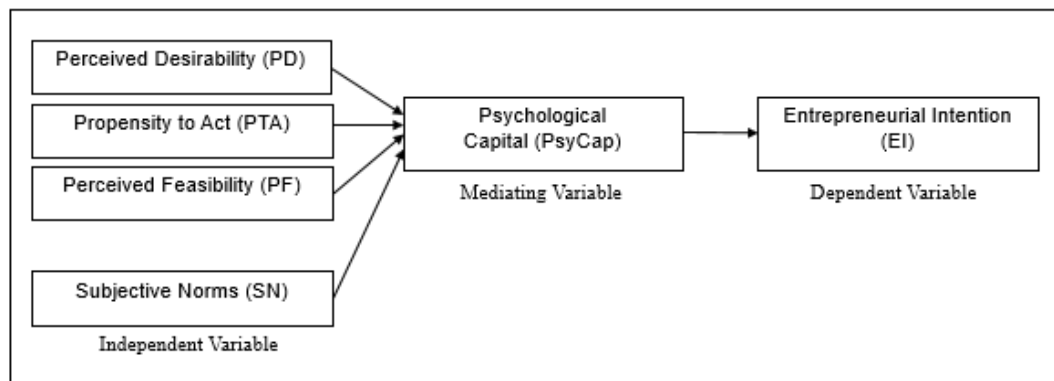


Figure 1.0 The Research Framework

Source: Own illustration. The research framework was adapted from several studies in the field of hospitality and entrepreneurship

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Size and Justification

In research, the sample size represents a portion of the population that is adequate to generate reliable and meaningful conclusions (Memon et al., 2020; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Meanwhile, sampling is a process that, in the end, provides the population with the necessary requirements. Because it represents the entire population, it is critical to identify and use the appropriate sampling method. In a study done by a previous researcher, selecting an appropriate sample size is essential for ensuring that research findings lead to valid and reasonable conclusions (Memon et al., 2020).

This paper is designed as a pilot study, conducted prior to the full-scale research. The purpose of a pilot study is to evaluate the feasibility of the research design, test the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire, and identify any potential challenges in data collection. Pilot studies are commonly recommended to refine measurement items, ensure respondents' understanding, and minimize methodological issues before committing resources to a large-scale investigation (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Accordingly, the sample for this pilot study comprised full-time final-year hospitality students enrolled in both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. The probability sampling technique was employed to ensure each student had an equal chance of selection, thereby enhancing representativeness and reducing bias. A smaller sample size was deemed sufficient for this stage, as the focus is on testing the instrument and procedures rather than achieving statistical generalizability.

Measures of the Constructs

The data for this study were collected through the use of structured questionnaires. A research instrument refers to a tool employed by researchers to facilitate the collection of data. The researcher developed a research instrument and divided it into four (4) sections for the study. Section A discussed student demographic profiles. Demographic profiles were created using nominal scales based on age and gender. Section B covered perceived desirability (PD), propensity to act (PTA), perceived feasibility (PF), and subjective norms (SN). Section C covered psychological capital (PsyCap), while the last section of Section D covered entrepreneurial intention (EI).

The questionnaires were administered in both English and Malay to accommodate the language preferences of the respondents. In addition, this study employed a five-point Likert scale to measure each construct, with responses ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). A five-point Likert scale was selected because it offers an appropriate level of precision in measuring constructs, reduces respondent fatigue, and is commonly employed in behavioural and educational research. The demographic-profile section was designed to reflect the specific setting of the study. For each question in Sections B, C, and D of the questionnaire, participants were asked to respond using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5).

Data Analysis

The collected data were entered and processed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 30.0. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the internal consistency reliability of each construct was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha. All questionnaires were coded prior to data entry into SPSS. Before conducting the analysis, the data were screened to identify any unanswered or missing items in the dataset (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Additionally, the questionnaires were numbered to allow the researcher to trace any missing data more efficiently. Outliers, which are unusual data points that could distort the results of the analysis, were examined. Multicollinearity, a condition where independent variables in a regression model are highly correlated with each other, was also assessed, as it may obscure the individual effects of predictors on the dependent variable. During the data examination process, both issues were mitigated to guarantee accurate and valid analytical results (Shrestha, 2020). The initial analysis was performed on the respondents’ demographic profiles to tabulating the frequency of each category (Kaur et al., 2018). Subsequently, descriptive analysis was conducted on each set of variables based on means (*M*) and standard deviation (*S.D.*) values. The process then continued with the assessment of the internal consistency of the variables using reliability analysis, measured by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

A pilot A pilot test of the questionnaire was carried out to assess its clarity, reliability, and validity, as several scholars emphasize the importance of conducting a pilot study at the early stage of the design and development of the research instrument (Fraser et al., 2018; In, 2017; Wadood et al., 2021). Pilot testing ensures that the questions were reliable in terms of word usage, clarity of meaning, and the relevance of each item (Babbie, 2001; Fraser et al., 2018; Hassan et al., 2006; In, 2017). This small-scale preliminary evaluation aimed to refine the instrument and assess its consistency and suitability prior to the full-scale data collection. The purpose of the pilot test was to confirm that the questionnaire was clear, relevant, and understandable for the target population of final-year hospitality students in Malaysian HEIs. According to Wadood et al. (2021), pilot study findings are crucial as they can either confirm or challenge the construct validity of the instrument. Therefore, any issues detected during the pilot test were addressed

to minimize potential errors in the final version of the research instrument used for the main study. Aligned with the recommendations of Bujang et al. (2024) and Memon et al. (2017), for the pilot study, a sample of thirty (30) respondents was deemed sufficient to evaluate the questionnaire. As recommended by Hertzog (2008) suggests that a sample size of 30 to 50 respondents is adequate for conducting a pilot study. For this study, 58 students were sampled, with five (5) final-year undergraduate hospitality students drawn from each of the eight (8) institutions involved, comprising both public and private HEIs. These institutions included UiTM, UMK, UMS, UPM, UUM, as well as Taylor's University, Sunway University, and Management and Science University (MSU), representing a mix of public and private HEIs across Malaysia. The, the pilot test was conducted over the second week of May 2025. Participants shared similar characteristics with the target population, allowing for refinement of the instrument based on feedback regarding clarity, item flow, and question formatting (Memon et al., 2020). 52 valid final-year students were included, whereas another 6 were excluded as they were not in their final year. The data collected were analysed to assess reliability and the underlying factor structure of the questionnaire. Following this, a standard reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha was performed, and the results are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1 Pilot Study: Reliability Analysis

Construct	Type of Variable	No. of itmes	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Perceived Desirability	Independent Variable	3	0.893
Propensity to Act		7	0.849
Perceived Feasibility		5	0.923
Subjective Norms		3	0.894
Psychological Capital	Mediating Variable	14	0.957
Entrepreneurial Intention	Dependent Variable	5	0.968

Note: All constructs exhibited acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha (α) values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7.

According to the data and the reliability analysis presented in Table 3, shows that all constructs attained Cronbach's alpha values above 0.60, ranging from 0.849 to 0.968. These values indicate high to excellent internal consistency across all measurement constructs. Cronbach's alpha was used following the pilot study to assess the internal reliability of the instrument. Since all values surpassed the widely accepted threshold of 0.70, the instrument can be considered reliable and valid for measuring the intended constructs (Sarstedt et al., 2022; Tay & Jebb 2017). Since all constructs met or exceeded this benchmark, no items required removal based on standard reliability guidelines. Furthermore, during the pilot test, most respondents demonstrated a clear understanding of the questionnaire items. The high reliability scores support the instrument's suitability for the target population. The pilot test was carried out as a procedural measure to ensure that the constructs demonstrated reliability consistent with the study context before full-scale data collection.

DISCUSSION

The pilot study findings demonstrate that the instrument is robust, as reflected by the high reliability scores across all constructs, confirming its suitability for use in a larger-scale study. This aligns with prior research underscoring the importance of adapting validated items to local educational contexts with adequate piloting. The misinterpretation of certain academic terms highlights the need for linguistic and contextual clarity,

particularly in Malaysia, where academic year structures vary, thus reinforcing the value of refining phrasing for precision. Methodologically, the use of systematic sampling, though limited in scope due to the small sample size, provided balanced representation across institutional types, minimized selection bias, and established a practical basis for scaling up, with stratified sampling recommended for deeper subgroup analysis in the main study. Finally, adjustments such as clearer wording of instructions, minor reordering of items to enhance cognitive flow, and the continued use of an online format validated by its feasibility in the pilot further strengthen the methodological readiness for the forthcoming large-scale data collection.

CONCLUSION

The pilot test successfully validated the survey instruments designed for the main study on entrepreneurial intention among hospitality students in Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). The reliability of the measures was confirmed by the high Cronbach's alpha values, which show strong internal consistency across the constructs. Construct validity was also supported by significant correlations between key variables, which ensured that each item accurately represented the construct it was designed to measure. Furthermore, the expert review confirmed the content validity of the questionnaire, highlighting its relevance and comprehensiveness in capturing the factors influencing entrepreneurial intention. A key insight from the pilot test is the identification of the mediating role of psychological capital (PsyCap).

The findings underscore the importance of developing students' PsyCap in ways that are practical, relevant, and capable of building their confidence and skills. These results offer a solid foundation for conducting the full-scale study, which will further explore the relationships between perceived desirability (PD), propensity to act (PTA), perceived feasibility (PF), subjective norms (SN), psychological capital (PsyCap), and entrepreneurial intention (EI). The insights obtained from this pilot test are valuable for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance entrepreneurship education initiatives in higher education institutions (HEIs). By enhancing the quality and relevance of these programs, these measures allow institutions to prepare students more effectively for entrepreneurial careers, ultimately supporting Malaysia's economic growth, job creation, and innovation. The pilot test ultimately confirms that the questionnaire is both reliable and feasible for full-scale deployment, while also emphasizing the importance of pilot testing in refining instruments, particularly those adapted for specific disciplinary and cultural contexts. With only minor adjustments, the questionnaire is well-positioned for use in the forthcoming study on students' entrepreneurial intention.

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