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Advancing the Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory: Developing the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework

Ravi Nagarathanam1, * Gengeswari Krishnapillai2, Dinesh Kumar Saundra Rajan3

[1] Teh Hong Piow Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia (ravi@tarc.edu.my)

[2] Teh Hong Piow Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia (gengeswarik@utar.edu.my)

[3] Teh Hong Piow Faculty of Business and Finance, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia (dineshk@utar.edu.my)

*Corresponding Author

Abstract:

Entrepreneurial career development is a complex, nonlinear process shaped by cognitive, motivational, and contextual factors. While the Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (ESCT) provides foundational insights into entrepreneurial readiness, its original structure lacks the depth required to explain how individuals translate entrepreneurial potential into intentional and sustained entrepreneurial behaviour. This conceptual paper introduces the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework (AECSF), an expanded and modernised version of ESCT that incorporates key cognitive mediators, refined constructs, and expanded behavioural pathways. The AECSF integrates ten core components (opportunity recognition, market analysis, entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurship education, previous experience, resource recognition ability, entrepreneurial motivation, social support, entrepreneurial career intentions, and entrepreneurial career behaviour) which provide a holistic view of the entrepreneurial journey. Central to the model are two sequential mediators: opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial career intentions, which explain how foundational success factors evolve into entrepreneurial action. Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and opportunity recognition literature, the AECSF addresses conceptual gaps in the original ESCT and offers stronger explanatory power for entrepreneurial career choice, particularly in emerging economies such as Malaysia. The framework contributes theoretical clarity and practical implications for entrepreneurship education, policy design, and ecosystem development. Future research is recommended to empirically validate the AECSF through qualitative and quantitative methods.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Career Development, Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (ESCT), Opportunity Recognition, Entrepreneurial Career Intention, Entrepreneurship Education

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment creation across both developed and emerging economies (Landström, 2020; Pradhan et al., 2020). Beyond economic outcomes, entrepreneurial activity contributes to poverty reduction, social mobility, and sustainable development, making it a central policy instrument for national development agendas (Neumann, 2020; Aljuwaiber, 2020). As a result, governments worldwide have increasingly emphasised entrepreneurship as a strategic mechanism to enhance competitiveness, foster innovation, and address socio-economic challenges (Bruton et al., 2021; Opute et al., 2021).

In emerging economies such as Malaysia, entrepreneurship plays a particularly important role in supporting the transition toward a high-income economy. National development initiatives and higher education policies have consistently highlighted entrepreneurship as a solution to youth unemployment, graduate employability challenges, and income inequality (Xavier & Ahmad, 2012; Saifuddin et al., 2022). Despite these efforts, entrepreneurial outcomes among youths and tertiary students remain mixed. Although entrepreneurial interest and intention have increased over time, actual participation in entrepreneurship as a sustained career choice remains limited (Nagarathanam & Buang, 2016; Adam et al., 2021; Selamat et al., 2023). This persistent gap between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial behaviour suggests that existing approaches may not sufficiently explain how individuals translate entrepreneurial readiness into action.

Entrepreneurial career choice has been extensively examined through established theoretical perspectives such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), and the Entrepreneurial Event Model (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). These frameworks have significantly advanced understanding of the psychological and social determinants of entrepreneurial intentions. However, their primary focus on intention formation limits their ability to fully explain the dynamic and nonlinear progression from entrepreneurial potential to sustained entrepreneurial career behaviour (Liñán, 2008; Fitzsimmons & Douglas, 2010). Consequently, the mechanisms through which entrepreneurial readiness evolves into long-term entrepreneurial engagement remain insufficiently theorised.

The Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (ESCT), introduced by Gibb and Ritchie (1982), provides a broader and more integrative perspective by emphasising the interaction between entrepreneurial ideas, abilities, resources, motivation, and planning. ESCT has been widely applied to examine entrepreneurial preparedness and success in diverse contexts (Olugbola, 2017; Looi, 2020). Nevertheless, the original ESCT framework presents limitations when applied to contemporary entrepreneurial career research. In particular, it does not explicitly account for key cognitive processes, such as opportunity recognition, nor does it clearly differentiate between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial career behaviour. As a result, the theory offers limited explanatory power in addressing the widely observed intention–behaviour gap, especially in emerging economies where structural and contextual constraints are more pronounced (Roos & Botha, 2022).

Given the increasing complexity of entrepreneurial career pathways and the evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem, there is a need to extend ESCT to better capture how entrepreneurial success factors are cognitively processed and behaviourally enacted. Specifically, a more refined conceptual framework is required to explain how foundational entrepreneurial attributes are transformed into deliberate entrepreneurial career intentions and subsequently into entrepreneurial behaviour. Addressing this theoretical gap is particularly important in emerging economies such as Malaysia, where entrepreneurship is strongly promoted, yet sustained entrepreneurial career participation remains relatively low.

Explicit Research Gap and Aim

Although ESCT offers a valuable foundation for understanding entrepreneurial success, existing studies have largely treated its components as direct antecedents of entrepreneurial outcomes. Limited attention has been given to the mediating cognitive and behavioural mechanisms that explain how entrepreneurial success factors translate into entrepreneurial career behaviour. In particular, the roles of opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial career intentions as sequential mediators remain under-theorised within the ESCT framework. This omission constrains the theory's ability to explain the intention–behaviour gap that is frequently observed among youths and tertiary students in emerging economies.

In response to this gap, this conceptual paper aims to advance the Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory by developing the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework (AECSF). The proposed framework refines the original ESCT constructs and introduces opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial career intentions as sequential mediating mechanisms that explain how entrepreneurial success factors are transformed into entrepreneurial career behaviour. By integrating insights from behavioural and career development theories, the AECSF provides a more comprehensive and contextually relevant explanation of entrepreneurial career development, with particular relevance to emerging economies such as Malaysia.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS COMPONENTS THEORY (ESCT)

The Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (ESCT), introduced by Gibb and Ritchie (1982), conceptualises entrepreneurship as a dynamic process influenced by the interaction of individual capabilities, environmental conditions, and organisational factors. The theory emphasises that entrepreneurial success does not emerge from a single attribute but rather from the alignment of multiple components, including entrepreneurial ideas, abilities, resources, motivation, and planning. This integrative perspective has made ESCT a valuable framework for understanding entrepreneurial preparedness and success across diverse contexts.

Central to ESCT is the notion that entrepreneurship begins with the identification of a viable idea or market opportunity, followed by the mobilisation of relevant skills, resources, and motivation to transform that idea into a functioning venture. Planning and organisation serve as the mechanisms through which entrepreneurial intentions are operationalised into action. As such, ESCT provides a foundational structure for examining how entrepreneurial readiness is formed and how individuals progress toward entrepreneurial engagement. Figure 1 illustrates the original ESCT, noting the key factors that characteristically contribute to entrepreneurial effectiveness.

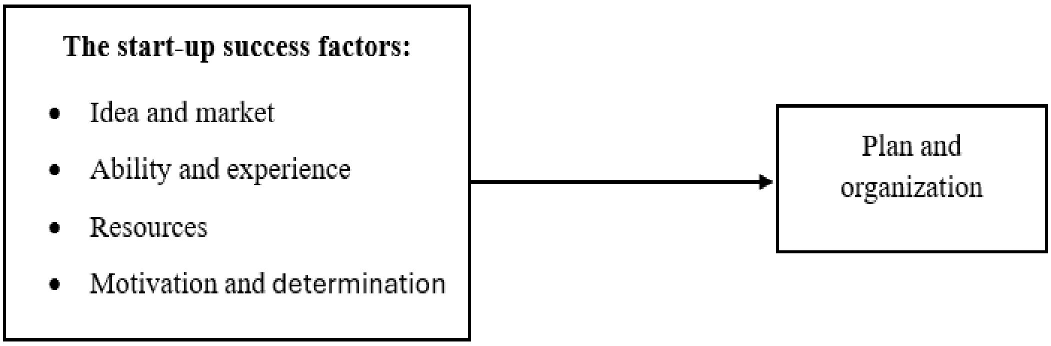

Figure 1: The Model of Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (Gibb and Ritchie, 1982)

The idea and market elements highlight the capability of the entrepreneur to create ideas for business that are dynamic and competitive (Wulandari et al., 2021). Successful founders recognise opportunities in the market where there is inefficiency or unsafe need and develop solutions that deliver distinctive value proposition (Ahmad et al., 2022). Innovation guarantees differentiation from rival films, while the analysis of the market allows for the identification of customer needs, an understanding of consumer behaviour, and an estimation of the strength and weakness of competitors (Fahlefi & Indriani, 2020). Integrally, these factors define the feasibility and attractiveness of entrepreneurial opportunities, premises of a successful enterprise. Without a feasible idea and proper market knowledge, it is hard for ventures to make headway (Wulandari et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurs' ability and experience mean knowledge, technical competencies, and managerial abilities that entrepreneurs gain from education and prior work experience (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982). Technical competencies mean knowledge of the industry, for example, design, development of engineering products, or product development, whereas managerial abilities mean the ability to make decisions, leadership, and management of resources (Salun et al., 2021; Jardim, 2021). Previous experiences give practical knowledge of industry trends and problems, and it allows the entrepreneur to handle uncertainty and to perform business activities efficiently. Those who have large abilities and experience also show large resilience and problem-solving skills, and it is a key motivator of successful entrepreneurship (Emrizal, 2021; Xing et al., 2022). If such competencies would not exist, inefficiency would appear, and it would harm the successful functioning of the enterprise (Nuryanti & Hanifah, 2022; Tittel & Terzidis, 2020).

Resources needed and available factor emphasises the need for mobilising financial capital, human, and physical assets (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982). Financial capital, for example, startup and working funds, is necessary for starting and continuing a venture. Humans, consisting of qualified employees and experts, give knowledge and administration assistance, while physical, for example, infrastructure and inputs, make it possible for a venture to operate it successfully (Alvarez-Salazar, 2020; Chammassian & Sabatier, 2020). Successful funding and contribution of these resources define the scalability and performance of ventures based on entrepreneurship (Lukovszki et al., 2020). On the contrary, inefficiency in terms of resource management mostly ends in financial pressures and failures in operations, highlighting the value of the factor in the entrepreneurship process (Weniger & Jarchow, 2022).

The motivation and determination element captures the internal and external drivers that push entrepreneurs forward and have them push through obstacles. Intrinsic motivation results from personal desires, such as the need for autonomy, financial independence, or self-actualisation. Extrinsic motivation results from outside drivers such as family encouragement, peer encouragement, or external recognition (Agarwal et al., 2020). Orientation and drive, power the resilience of the entrepreneur, who is then better able to withstand setbacks such as financial strain or failure in the market. Without these qualities, potentially great ideas for businesses and plentiful resources may fail to turn into viable businesses (Wulandari et al., 2021).

Finally, the plan and organisational element is about converting entrepreneurial concepts into feasible strategies. Creating a well-designed business plan is imperative in terms of steering decision making, defining schemes of markets, and drawing in investors (Nagarathanam et al., 2017). Successful organization implies creating infrastructure, system of workflow, and operating systems that make for efficiency and scalability. Networking with investors, partners, and with the supplier base is also important for penetrating the market as well as for achieving successful operation (Dana et al., 2020). This element is an indicator of the readiness of the entrepreneur to move from planning to action. Inefficiency or disorganisation in planning typically results in inefficiency and financial losses, thus becoming important of entrepreneurial competence.

Both of these constituents illustrate that entrepreneurial success is a complex process that needs a combination of innovation, skills, resources, drive, and planning of strategy. The constituents all interact with one another, supporting the necessity of an integrative strategy for entrepreneurship. Additionally, the present framework provides an integrated conceptualisation of the factors for entrepreneurial success, for which it is of particular value when used for the explanation of entrepreneurship career decisions in heterogeneous environments (Ajzen, 1991; Ardichvili et al., 2002).

REVAMPED VERSION OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS COMPONENTS THEORY (ESCT)

To enhance the explanatory power of ESCT in contemporary entrepreneurial contexts, the original components are refined into more specific and analytically distinct constructs. This revamping reflects the increasing complexity of entrepreneurial career development, where cognitive, educational, and contextual factors interact in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and behaviours. By disaggregating broad components into more precise variables, the revised framework provides clearer theoretical pathways through which entrepreneurial success factors influence entrepreneurial career outcomes.

Revamped Variables and Definitions

Idea and market can be rebranded as opportunity recognition and market analysis. Opportunity recognition is the mind power of entrepreneurs in rating and assessment of new opportunities for their businesses. Entrepreneurially proficient in opportunity recognition can indicate gaps in the market and match their ideas with customer unserved needs (Ardichvili et al., 2002; Baron, 2004; Baron, 2023). Opportunity recognition is critical in generating feasible businesses. Market analysis is the analytical review of market directions, customer tastes, and competitor agendas. Market analysis enables the creation of competitors' products or service offerings by familiarising the environment of the market and by assuring that offering of their products or services meet customer demands (Dana et al., 2020; Qi-ming & Gao, 2019).

Entrepreneur's ability and experience can be rebranded as entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurship education, and prior working experiences. Entrepreneurial ability is the skill to meet internal and external business circumstances, capitalise on opportunities, and turn them into moneymaking activities. Decision making, leadership, and risk management comprise it (Khan et al., 2021; Olugbola, 2017). Entrepreneurship education is important for developing these skills, as it is formal education or academic programmes that confer knowledge necessary to accomplish in business. Besides education, prior working experiences are also important, as they give practical knowledge and experience acquired from earlier functions, helping in entrepreneurial success by training individuals in real-life business circumstances (Fitzsimmons & Douglas, 2010; Ardichvili et al., 2002).

In the meanwhile, resources needed and available can be framed as a resources' recognition abilities, or as a skill to recognize, access, and allocate intangible and tangible resources that are required for conducting a business. Entrepreneurs with such capabilities can access financial capital, physical assets, and human capital, thereby obtaining appropriate support for starting and continuing their ventures. Successful mobilisation of resources is also important for resolving problems and scaling up a business, for which resources recognition is an important element of entrepreneurial success (Dana et al., 2020; Qi-ming & Gao, 2019).

Motivation and determination can be revamped as entrepreneurial motivation and social support. Entrepreneurial motivation is the internal and external catalysts that drive individuals to undertake entrepreneurial endeavours. This motivation can stem from the need for independence, financial gain, or personal satisfaction, and it compels entrepreneurs to take risks and exert efforts in starting and developing a venture (Agarwal et al., 2020; Ardichvili et al., 2002). Besides motivation, social support also facilitates the entrepreneurial process. Social support is emotional, financial, and practical help from family, friends, coaches, and professional networks that assist entrepreneurs in facing obstacles and continuing their businesses (Ghazali et al., 2021; Leaper & Starr, 2018). Good support system could contribute much to the resilience and performance of an entrepreneur.

Meanwhile, plan and organisation can be indicated as entrepreneurial career intention and entrepreneurial career behaviour. Plan constitutes a person's planned commitment and intention behind adopting entrepreneurship as a career option. It is an evident choice of becoming an entrepreneur based on personal aspirations, values, and independent aspirations. Career intentions serve as a basic motivator of entrepreneurial bahviour, as they push individuals into adopting concrete actions for the establishment and development of their businesses (Ajzen, 1991; Fitzsimmons & Douglas, 2005). Those with higher career intentions as entrepreneurs make investments, develop their competencies, and take risk elements related to starting a business more readily. Organization, in turn, constitutes such entrepreneurial behaviours as networking, mobilisation of resources, and management of operations. Entrepreneurial behaviour is fundamentally important in achieving entrepreneurial intentions in practical terms, as it constitutes New Year's resolution type of making decisions, implementing plans, and overcoming the impediments that take a stand in the development of a business (Liñán, 2008; Ardichvili et al., 2002). Skillful use of entrepreneurial behaviour ensures the long-term development and survivability of a business.

ISSUES ENCOUNTERED ON THE REVAMPED VARIABLES

Opportunity Recognition

Opportunity recognition refers to the cognitive process through which individuals identify unmet market needs or emerging business possibilities. It plays a critical role in entrepreneurship by enabling individuals to transform information, experience, and creativity into viable business opportunities (Baron, 2004; Baron, 2023). Entrepreneurs with strong opportunity recognition capabilities are more likely to detect patterns, anticipate market shifts, and align their ideas with real-world demands.

Despite its importance, opportunity recognition is not uniformly distributed among individuals. Factors such as limited industry exposure, information asymmetry, and cognitive biases can restrict an individual's ability to accurately evaluate opportunities (Ardichvili et al., 2002). These constraints are particularly evident in emerging economies, where access to diverse markets and networks may be limited.

Market Analysis

Market analysis involves the systematic evaluation of customer needs, competitor behaviour, and broader market trends to assess the feasibility of entrepreneurial opportunities. Effective market analysis reduces uncertainty and enhances decision-making by aligning business ideas with market realities (Fahlefi & Indriani, 2020; Ghazali et al., 2021).

However, market analysis is often resource-intensive, requiring access to reliable data, analytical tools, and domain expertise. Entrepreneurs operating in resource-constrained environments may face challenges in conducting comprehensive market assessments, which can increase the risk of misjudging market potential.

Entrepreneurial Ability

Entrepreneurial ability encompasses the skills and competencies required to identify, evaluate, and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. These abilities include problem-solving, strategic thinking, leadership, and risk management, all of which are critical for navigating uncertainty in entrepreneurial settings (Khan et al., 2021).

While entrepreneurial abilities can be developed through education and experience, individuals with limited exposure to entrepreneurial environments may face disadvantages. This highlights the importance of targeted capability development initiatives to enhance entrepreneurial competence.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education provides structured learning experiences that equip individuals with knowledge and skills relevant to entrepreneurial activity. Such education enhances critical thinking, creativity, and confidence, thereby strengthening entrepreneurial intentions (Fayolle & Gailly, 2020; Yueh et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education varies across contexts. In some cases, programmes remain overly theoretical and lack practical components, limiting their impact on entrepreneurial behaviour.

Previous Working Experience

Previous working experience contributes to entrepreneurial success by providing practical knowledge of industry practices, organisational processes, and market dynamics. Individuals with relevant experience are better positioned to manage uncertainty and make informed decisions (Amara et al., 2020).

Conversely, individuals with limited or unrelated experience may encounter steeper learning curves when transitioning into entrepreneurship, reinforcing the need for experiential learning opportunities such as internships and mentorships.

Resources Recognition Ability

Resources recognition ability refers to an entrepreneur’s capacity to identify, acquire, and mobilise financial, human, and physical resources necessary for venture creation and growth (Dana et al., 2020). This ability enables entrepreneurs to overcome constraints and leverage available assets strategically.

Despite its importance, access to resources remains uneven. Structural barriers such as limited financing options and weak institutional support can restrict effective resource mobilisation, particularly in emerging economies.

Entrepreneurial Motivation

Entrepreneurial motivation reflects the internal and external drivers that encourage individuals to pursue entrepreneurial activities. Intrinsic motives such as autonomy and self-fulfilment often sustain entrepreneurial persistence, while extrinsic factors may initiate engagement (Fayolle et al., 2006).

However, motivation alone is insufficient in the absence of supportive environments and resources. Overreliance on extrinsic rewards may also undermine long-term entrepreneurial commitment.

Social Support

Social support encompasses emotional, financial, and informational assistance provided by family, peers, and professional networks. Such support can enhance entrepreneurial resilience and facilitate opportunity exploitation (Badri & Hachicha, 2019).

In collectivist societies, excessive reliance on social support may constrain independent decision-making. Additionally, unequal access to networks can exacerbate disparities in entrepreneurial opportunities.

Entrepreneurial Career Intention

Entrepreneurial career intention refers to an individual's deliberate commitment to pursue entrepreneurship as a professional career path. It represents the cognitive decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities and is shaped by attitudes toward entrepreneurship, perceived social support, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals with strong entrepreneurial career intentions are more likely to invest time, effort, and resources in preparing for venture creation. Empirical research continues to confirm that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and favourable attitudes significantly strengthen entrepreneurial career intentions (Neneh, 2020; Wiramihardja et al., 2022).

However, the presence of entrepreneurial intention does not guarantee entrepreneurial behaviour. External barriers such as limited access to funding and regulatory constraints may hinder action despite strong intention (Roos & Botha, 2022). Additionally, internal challenges including fear of failure and uncertainty may weaken the transition from intention to implementation. This highlights the importance of reinforcing both psychological readiness and ecosystem support to strengthen the intention–behaviour linkage.

Entrepreneurial Career Behavior

Entrepreneurial career behaviour refers to the actual actions undertaken to initiate, manage, and sustain a business venture. These behaviours include opportunity exploitation, resource mobilisation, networking, and business development activities (Delanoë-Gueguen & Liñán, 2018). Entrepreneurial behaviour represents the practical execution of prior cognitive processes, particularly opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial career intention.

Despite strong entrepreneurial intentions, behavioural enactment is often influenced by contextual and structural factors. Limited access to capital, market competition, and bureaucratic procedures may delay or prevent entrepreneurial engagement (Yusriani et al., 2024). Furthermore, psychological factors such as low confidence or risk aversion may restrict individuals from translating plans into action (Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024). These constraints demonstrate that entrepreneurial career behaviour is shaped by both internal capability and external environmental conditions.

OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS FACTORS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER INTENTIONS

Opportunity recognition represents a critical cognitive mechanism that connects entrepreneurial success factors to the development of entrepreneurial career intentions. It refers to an individual's ability to identify, evaluate, and interpret potential business opportunities within a given environment (Baron, 2004; Baron, 2023). Rather than functioning as a direct outcome of entrepreneurial skills or resources, opportunity recognition serves as an interpretative process through which individuals transform knowledge, motivation, and support into meaningful entrepreneurial possibilities.

Recent research increasingly positions opportunity recognition as a mediating variable in entrepreneurship models. Empirical evidence demonstrates that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intentions primarily by strengthening opportunity recognition capabilities (Hou et al., 2022). Similarly, entrepreneurial self efficacy and prior experience influence intention formation through improved opportunity identification and evaluation processes (Otache et al., 2024; Tian et al., 2022). These findings suggest that foundational success factors do not directly generate entrepreneurial intentions. Instead, they first enhance an individual's capacity to recognise viable opportunities.

Within the revised ESCT framework, entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurship education, and prior working experience contribute to cognitive preparedness. However, without the capacity to recognise and assess opportunities, these capabilities may remain underutilised. Resources recognition ability and social support further enhance perceived feasibility by providing the structural means to act upon identified opportunities (Murad et al., 2024). In this way, opportunity recognition integrates internal competencies and external enablers into a coherent evaluation of entrepreneurial potential.

The mediating role of opportunity recognition is further supported by established behavioural theories. The Entrepreneurial Event Model posits that perceived feasibility and desirability influence entrepreneurial intention (Shapero & Sokol, 1982). Opportunity recognition strengthens both perceptions by allowing individuals to identify actionable and realistic opportunities. Likewise, the Theory of Planned Behaviour emphasises perceived behavioural control as a determinant of intention (Ajzen, 1991). Individuals who are confident in their ability to detect and evaluate opportunities are more likely to perceive entrepreneurship as attainable, thereby strengthening their career intentions.

Despite its importance, opportunity recognition is influenced by contextual and cognitive constraints. Information asymmetry, limited market exposure, and cognitive biases may restrict accurate opportunity evaluation, particularly in emerging economies (Roos & Botha, 2022). These constraints may weaken the translation of entrepreneurial success factors into entrepreneurial intentions. Therefore, strengthening opportunity recognition through education, experiential learning, and ecosystem support is essential for enhancing the intention formation process.

By positioning opportunity recognition as a mediator, the revised ESCT conceptualised as the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework provides a clearer explanation of how entrepreneurial success factors are cognitively processed before evolving into entrepreneurial career intentions. This mediating pathway enhances the explanatory power of the framework and directly addresses the intention behaviour gap identified in contemporary entrepreneurship research.

ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER INTENTIONS AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN OPPORTUNITY RECOGNITION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER CHOICE BEHAVIOR

Entrepreneurial career intentions represent the deliberate commitment to pursue entrepreneurship as a long term professional path. They reflect an individual's conscious decision to transform recognised opportunities into concrete entrepreneurial engagement. While opportunity recognition enables individuals to identify viable business possibilities, entrepreneurial career intentions determine whether those opportunities are pursued as a sustained career choice.

The mediating role of entrepreneurial career intentions is strongly grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). According to this theory, behaviour is preceded by intention, which is shaped by attitudes toward the behaviour, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the entrepreneurial context, recognising a promising opportunity enhances positive attitudes and strengthens perceived feasibility. These psychological shifts increase the likelihood that individuals form strong entrepreneurial career intentions. Empirical studies continue to confirm that individuals with stronger entrepreneurial intentions are significantly more likely to engage in entrepreneurial action (Fitzsimmons & Douglas, 2010; Delanoë Gueguen & Liñán, 2018).

Recent research further supports the mediating function of entrepreneurial career intentions in bridging cognitive processes and behavioural outcomes. Neneh and Dzomonda (2024) demonstrate that commitment and perceived control strengthen the transition from intention to entrepreneurial behaviour. Similarly, Roos and Botha (2022) highlight that contextual readiness influences whether entrepreneurial intentions materialise into action. These findings indicate that opportunity recognition alone is insufficient. A deliberate commitment to entrepreneurship as a career is required before behavioural execution can occur.

Within the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework, entrepreneurial career intentions serve as the second mediator that connects cognitive evaluation to observable behaviour. After individuals recognise viable opportunities, they must internalise these opportunities as meaningful career options. This internalisation process transforms cognitive awareness into motivational commitment. Without this stage, recognised opportunities may remain unexploited.

However, the progression from intention to behaviour is not automatic. Structural barriers such as limited access to financing, regulatory complexity, and competitive pressures may inhibit entrepreneurial engagement (Yusriani et al., 2024). Psychological factors including fear of failure and low confidence may further weaken behavioural enactment (Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024). These constraints demonstrate that entrepreneurial career intentions, although necessary, require supportive ecosystems and individual readiness to translate into sustained entrepreneurial behaviour.

By positioning entrepreneurial career intentions as a mediator between opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial career choice behavior, the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework offers a structured explanation of how cognitive processes evolve into entrepreneurial action. This sequential mediation clarifies the pathway from opportunity identification to career commitment and ultimately to entrepreneurial behaviour, thereby strengthening the theoretical coherence and explanatory power of the revised framework.

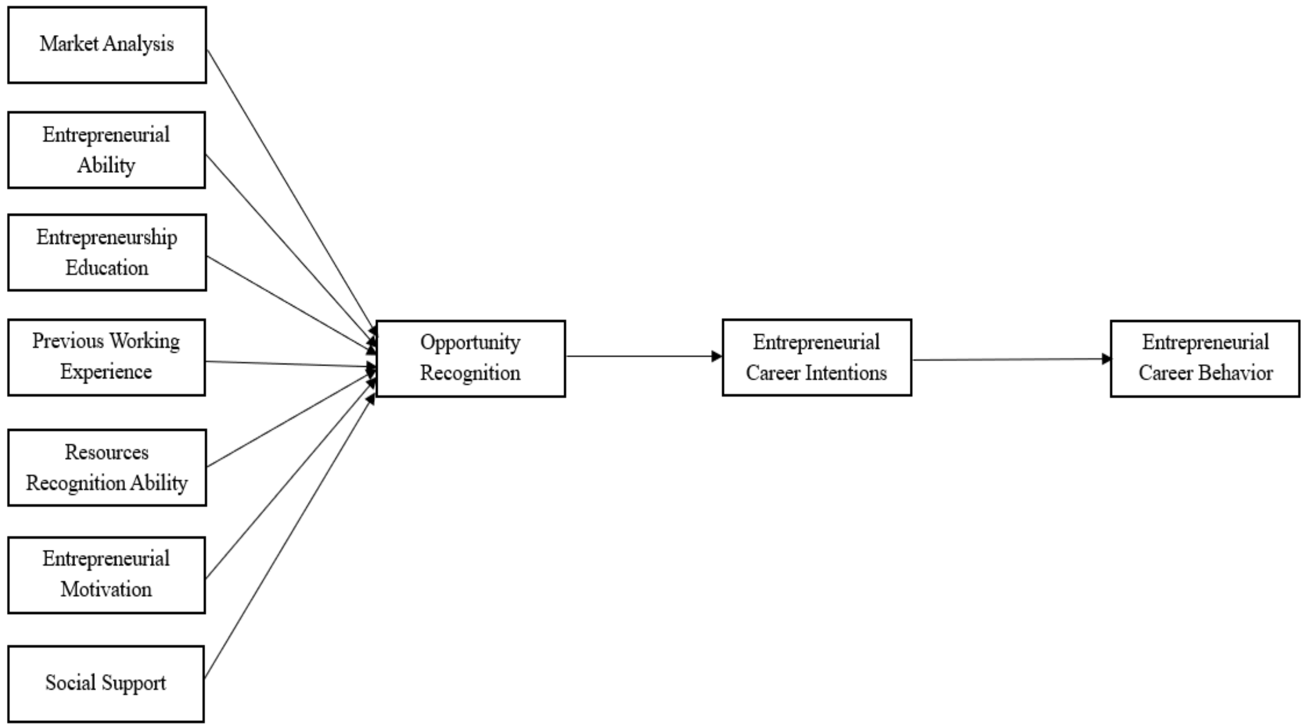

Figure 2: Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework (AECSF) (Authors' Own Work)

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF VARIABLES IN THE ADVANCED ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER SUCCESS FRAMEWORK (AECSF)

In the Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework (AECSF), each variable plays a crucial role in understanding the factors that influence entrepreneurial career choice and behavior. Below are the operational definitions for each of the framework's variables, clarifying how these variables can be measured in the context of entrepreneurship research.

These operational definitions provide concrete methods for measuring variables in the AECSF model, making it applicable for empirical research and practical application in the study of entrepreneurial career choices.

Table 1: Variables, Definitions, and Operational Definitions in the AECSF

Variable	Definition	Operational Definition
Opportunity Recognition	The ability to identify and evaluate new business opportunities or gaps in the market that can be addressed.	Assessed by an individual's ability to recognize market needs, trends, and evaluate the viability of business ideas.
Market Analysis	The systematic assessment of customer needs, competitor activities, and market conditions to validate business ideas.	Measured by the individual's ability to collect, analyse, and use market data to inform business decisions.
Entrepreneurial Ability	The competencies, skills, and attributes that enable effective identification, management, and exploitation of opportunities.	Measured by self-assessment and external evaluations of skills like problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership.
Entrepreneurship Education	Formal and informal educational experiences that provide knowledge and skills required for entrepreneurship.	Evaluated by the individual's participation in formal courses, training workshops, or practical entrepreneurship programs.
Previous Working Experience	Knowledge and skills acquired from prior employment relevant to entrepreneurial tasks and challenges.	Measured by the type, duration, and relevance of past work experiences to entrepreneurship.

Resources Recognition Ability	The ability to identify, acquire, and manage the resources (financial, human, and physical) necessary for entrepreneurship.	Evaluated by assessing the individual's capacity to mobilize and utilize resources effectively for business operations.
Entrepreneurial Motivation	The intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive individuals to pursue entrepreneurial activities.	Measured by assessing the intensity and type (intrinsic/extrinsic) of motivations influencing entrepreneurial decisions.
Social Support	Emotional, financial, and practical support provided by family, friends, mentors, or networks.	Evaluated by the perceived and actual availability of support in the entrepreneurial process.
Entrepreneurial Career Intentions	The deliberate intention and commitment to pursue entrepreneurship as a career path.	Measured by the strength of commitment and planning towards entrepreneurial career decisions.
Entrepreneurial Career Behavior	The actions and steps taken to start, sustain, and grow a business.	Measured by observing entrepreneurial activities such as business registration, resource mobilization, or market entry.

EVALUATING THE ADVANCED ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER SUCCESS FRAMEWORK (AECSF)

The Advanced Entrepreneurial Career Success Framework (AECSF) builds upon the original Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (ESCT) proposed by Gibb and Ritchie (1982). This refined framework more accurately reflects the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial career choice and behavior by integrating specific variables, detailed operational definitions, and mediators that link cognitive, motivational, and environmental factors to entrepreneurial actions. The AECSF integrates a comprehensive set of constructs including opportunity recognition, market analysis, entrepreneurial ability, resource recognition, entrepreneurial motivation, social support, entrepreneurial career intentions, and entrepreneurial career behaviour. This revamped framework offers a more holistic and dynamic view of the entrepreneurial process compared to the original ESCT. This section provides a critical analysis of the AECSF, examining its theoretical contributors and practical implications. Key advancements include the explicit incorporation of cognitive and behavioural mediators, a more refined understanding of resource accessibility, and a clear linkage between intention and action. By situating opportunity recognition and career intentions as sequential mediators, the AECSF enhances explanatory power regarding how success factors are operationalised into entrepreneurial outcomes. However, further refinement is needed to address contextual variability, the role of digital entrepreneurship, and potential feedback loops within the model.

Opportunity Recognition and Market Analysis: Theoretical Advancements

A key advancement of the AECSF lies in its explicit differentiation between opportunity and market analysis. In the original ESCT model, these elements were collectively embedded within the broader construct of "idea and market," resulting in a lack of conceptual clarity. By distinguishing opportunity recognition as a cognitive process which centered on the ability to identify viable business ideas and market analysis as a practical, skill-based activity focused on evaluating external conditions, the AECSF provides a more precise understanding of early-stage entrepreneurial decision-making (Ardichvili et al., 2002; Baron, 2006). This separation enhances the framework's analytical depth and strengthens its capacity to explain how entrepreneurs transition from idea generation to actionable strategy. Within the AECSF, opportunity recognition underscores the entrepreneur's cognitive and experiential capacity to detect unmet needs or emerging gaps in the market. This competency is especially vital in today's fast-evolving business landscape, where technological distrubtions and shifting consumer preferences continuously generate new entrepreneurial possibilities (Hou et al., 2022; Roos & Botha, 2022). Market analysis, as a complementary construct, focuses on systematically evaluating customer demands, competitive dynamics, and broader market trends. It serves as a critical validation step, enabling entrepreneurs to access the feasibility and potential impact of the opportunities they have identified (Dana et al., 2020; Camuffo et al., 2020). By integrating these two dimensions, the AECSF becomes not only more conceptually robust but also more practical for entrepreneurs and policymakers seeking to promote opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. Notwithstanding the conceptual advancement introduced in the AECSF, notable challenges persist. Effective market analysis often hinges on access to accurate, up-to-date data and sophisticated analytical tools whereby resources that are frequently scarce in under-resources or emerging market contexts (Jalil et al., 2023). Similarly, opportunity recognition is deeply rooted in individual creativity, intuition, and experiential insights where attributes that are inherently difficult to quantify and standardise (Hou et al., 2022). These limitations underscore the importance of developing targeted entrepreneurship education programmes and expanding access to user-friendly analytical tools. Such efforts are essential for equipping aspiring entrepreneurs with the capabilities needed to effectively recognise and assess entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly in constrained environments.

Entrepreneurial Ability, Education, and Previous Experience: A Stronger Focus on Skill Development

The AECSF advances the original ESCT by disaggregating the broad construct of entrepreneurial ability and experience into three more precise variables like entrepreneurial ability, entrepreneurship education, and prior work experience. These refined structures offer a more granular understanding of the distinct pathways through which individuals acquire entrepreneurial competence. Entrepreneurial ability reflects inherent and developed skills, such as opportunity evaluation and decision-making; entrepreneurship education captures the impact of structure, formal learning environments; while previous working experience represents informal, experiential learning gained through real world exposure (Amini Sedeh et al., 2022). By distinguishing these elements, the AECSF better captures their diverse sources of entrepreneurial preparedness and highlights their unique contributions to entrepreneurial success. Ability within the AECSF encompasses core competencies such as decision making, leadership, and risk management which are the skills that are vital for navigating uncertainty and complexity throughout the entrepreneurial journey (Hou et al., 2022). Complementing this, entrepreneurship education contributes theoretical foundations and structure problem-solving approaches that equip individuals with the cognitive tools necessary for innovation and effective business management (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982; Roos & Botha, 2022). Prior working experience adds another layer by offering hands-on insights into industry practices and operational challenges, thereby enabling entrepreneurs to anticipate risks, adapt to change, and capitalised on market opportunities (Camuffo et al., 2020; Jalil et al., 2023). While these distinctions strengthen the AECSF's explanatory capacity, the model falls short in addressing the needs of individuals with minimal or no work experience. Although formal education imparts essential knowledge, it often lacks the practical immersion required for real-world entrepreneurial success (Dana et al., 2020). To enhance inclusivity and applicability, the framework would benefit from integrating alternative experiential pathways like mentorship programs, internships, and apprenticeships which can serve as accessible entry points for aspiring entrepreneurs with limited experience (Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024; Zhang & Chen, 2023). Such integration would further strengthen the AECSF's relevance across diverse socio-economic and educational context.

Resources Recognition Ability: Addressing a Critical Barrier

The AECSF introduces "resource recognition ability" as a more nounced and targeted construct compared to the broader "resources" category presented in the original ESCT. These refinements highlight the entrepreneur's active role in identifying, acquiring, and managing the financial, human, physical, and intellectual assets necessary for venture success (Dana et al., 2020; Camuffo et al., 2020). Unlike static resource availability, resource recognition is framed as a dynamic skill which emphasising an entrepreneur's capacity to access resource gaps, navigate constraints, and strategically leverage available assets. Entrepreneurs who excel in this area are better equipped to overcome financial limitations, assemble high-performing teams, and optimise infrastructure, all of which are critical for scaling and sustaining adventures (Amini Sedeh et al., 2022). However, resource recognition alone is not sufficient. Structural barriers like restricted access to funding, limited social capital, or exclusion from key networks can inhabit even the most capable entrepreneurs, particularly in marginalised or under-resourced contexts (Jalil et al., 2023; Hou et al., 2022). Moreover, resource requirements are not static; they evolved throughout the business lifecycle, necessitating ongoing assessment and adaptation (Ardichvili et al., 2002). To further strengthen the AECSF, it would be beneficial to incorporate mechanisms that support dynamic resource planning and strategies tailored to varying stages of entrepreneurial growth.

Entrepreneurial Motivation and Social Support: Balancing Internal and External Influences

The AECSF enhances the original ESCT by disaggregating "entrepreneurial motivation" and "social support" into distinct constructs, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted drivers behind entrepreneurial behaviour. While the original model placed considerable emphasis on motivation, it paid limited attention to the influence of external support systems. The AECSG addresses this oversight by positioning social support such as encompassing family, peers, and professional networks as a critical enabler of entrepreneurial success (Jalil et al., 2023). Entrepreneurial motivation is conceptualised as a blend of intrinsic drivers, such as the desire for autonomy and personal achievement, and extrinsic incentives, including financial gains and societal recognition. Social support, on the other hand, offers emotional reassurance, material resources, and network access, all of which are instrumental in reducing barriers to entrepreneurial engagement (Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024; Zhang & Chen, 2023). Together, these variables highlight the dynamic interplay between internal drive and external facilitation in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and actions. However, the model must account for potential drawbacks particularly, the risk of over-reliance on social networks in collectivist societies like Malaysia, where strong familial and communal ties may inadvertently constrain individual autonomy and decision-making. Furthermore, access to social support is unevenly distributed, which may deepen existing disparities in entrepreneurial opportunities (Dana et al., 2020; Roos & Botha, 2022). To mitigate these challenges, the AECSF would benefit from the inclusion of structured interventions like formal mentorship schemes and entrepreneurial networking platforms which to complement informal support systems and broaden access for underrepresented groups (Roos & Botha, 2022; Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024).

Entrepreneurial Career Intentions and Career Behavior: A Critical Channel to Action

The incorporation of "entrepreneurial career intentions" and "entrepreneurial career behaviour" within the AECSF strengthens the framework's ability to connect cognitive processes with real-world outcomes. Career intentions act as a central mediator, linking the recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities with the execution of entrepreneurial actions (Tian et al., 2022). These alignments with Ajzen's Theory of Planned Bahaviour reinforce the importance of attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping the intention to pursue entrepreneurship. By explicity including career intentions, the AECSF clarifies how entrepreneurial preparedness is fuelled by education, motivation, and opportunity recognition which translates into tangible behaviours such as resource mobilisation, business formation, and market participation (Hou et al., 2022; Roos & Botha, 2022). This addition provides a structured explanation of how internal decision-making evolves into external entrepreneurial outcomes. Nevertheless, the pathway from intention to behaviour is often disrupted by both external constraints like limited financing, bureaucratic red tape, and institutional barriers. On the other hand, the internal inhibitors are like fear of failure or low self-efficacy (Dana et al., 2020; Neneh & Dzomonda, 2024). To enhance its practical relevance, the AECSF should incorporate strategic interventions aimed at mitigating these barriers. This could involve capacity-building programmes, policy reforms, and psychological support systems that ensure strong entrepreneurial intentions are not only formed but also sustained through to execution (Ardichvili et al., 2002).

CONCLUSION

The AECSF offers a more comprehensive and refined lens through which to examine the entrepreneurial process. By incorporating expanded constructs and mediators like opportunity recognition, market analysis, entrepreneurial career intentions, and entrepreneurial career behaviour, the framework deepens our understanding of how foundational success factors, including motivation, ability, and access to resources, ultimately translate into entrepreneurial career choices and actions. A particular notable advancement is the delineation of opportunity recognition and market analysis as distinct constructs. This separation enhances conceptual clarity and acknowledges the practical, skill-based dimensions of these processes. Entrepreneurs not only need to cognitively identify opportunities but also possess the analytical competence to evaluate market viability where the skills that can be cultivated through education and experiential learning. This structural improvement renders the AECSF more actionable for both practitioners and policymakers seeking to support opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. Equally important is the inclusion of entrepreneurial career intentions and behaviour as mediators. These additions reflect the psychological and behavioural progression from idea to execution, underscoring the importance of intention as a precursor to entrepreneurial action. This pathway aligns with the established behavioural theories and strengthens the model's capacity to explain how internal motivation and external support structures influence entrepreneurial outcomes.

Nonetheless, operational challenges remain particularly in under-resourced contexts where access to education, networks, and capital may be limited. While the AECSF is conceptually inclusive, its successful implementation depends on broader ecosystem support. Addressing these limitations requires policy-level initiatives, institutional engagement, and community-based support systems that can bridge gaps in opportunity and capability. In sum, the AECSF represents a significant theoretical and practical advancement in entrepreneurship research. It provides a holistic, dynamic view of the entrepreneurial journey like integrating cognitive, motivational, and behavioural elements while acknowledging the real-world constraints faced by aspiring entrepreneurs. Its implications are far-reaching, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurial support organisations aiming to cultivate more equitable and effective entrepreneurial ecosystems.

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