

## **Preliminary Findings from the Youth Entrepreneurs: Students Entrepreneurs' Characteristics and Motivation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Entrepreneurship contributes to the economic growth of a nation. However, the number of individuals engaged in entrepreneurial remains low, instead of the high unemployment rate. This inconsistency between youth attitudes and acts highlights the need for programs that foster the development of entrepreneurship in today's youths. Before an appropriate program can be designed for these youths, we have to understand their character and motivation. Data for this study was collected using qualitative method. The qualitative data come from semi-structured interviews. This initial interview was conducted by inviting three young entrepreneurs from the Masters in Applied Entrepreneurship in UiTM. The results show that youth's characteristics are influenced by self-efficacy, initiative and information seeking, while their motivation is driven by passion and family support are important for promoting entrepreneurial intent among young adults. Youths, have a creative way of thinking and is motivated to run their businesses with an appropriate exposure in the higher learning institution.

**Key Words:** Youth, Characteristic, Higher learning institution.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The research field of youth entrepreneurship has been considered to be the target of different countries such as Russia (Shaykhutdinova, Zhidkova, Minisheva, Nikonova, & Sharipova, 2015), United States of America (Geldhof et al., 2014), Latin America (Llisterri, Kantis, Angelelli, & Tejerina, 2006), South Africa (Fatoki & Chindoga, 2011; Steenekamp, Van der Merwe, & Athayde, 2011), United Kingdom (Chigunta, 2002), Malaysia (Ling, Selvadurai, & Hamid, 2017) and many other countries. One of the most significant current discussions on entrepreneurial activity is that entrepreneurship is proven as an important source

of income generation and employment (Acs, 2006; Carter, 2011; Sorgner, Fritsch, & Kritikos, 2017; Van Praag & Versloot, 2007) and, as such, is the focus of policies whose aim is to provide alternative employment opportunities to remedy the lack of sufficient jobs to absorb young people into the labour market. There are two categories of youth entrepreneurs; the first one is a person that gets hold of a business opportunity and starts to venture into it. Secondly, those that decides to be an entrepreneur by necessity, since they failed to find a permanent or formal job (Llisterri et al., 2006). Some youth chooses to become an entrepreneur as a backup option.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on entrepreneurship. However, the studies that examine youth entrepreneurship are limited (Damon & Lerner, 2008). According to these authors, youth entrepreneurship remains in its initial stages. The research on youth entrepreneurship can be considered uncommon in the literature of entrepreneurship studies (Baum, Frese, & Baron, 2007).

Youth entrepreneurs have their own practices and managing their enterprises. Identifying constraints and challenges facing youth-owned enterprise and understanding their characteristics and motivation toward these challenges are important to design appropriate training and education syllabus, as well as providing appropriate support to these youths. The study aims to evaluate the youth characteristics and motivation that focus on the students in the higher learning institution, in preparing them to be an entrepreneur. The feedback from these youth entrepreneurs, will determine the significance of the curricula, training program, exposure and education system in Malaysia to nurture entrepreneurs among students. The training and exposure programs that are being designed must match the characters and interest of these youth entrepreneurs.

The paper has been divided into five parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part deals with the reviewing of literature in youth entrepreneurship. The third section explains the methodology of the research. The fourth part presents the preliminary results and discussion from the outcome that has been drawn based on the qualitative data that highlight the individual and contextual factors that may nurture the development of entrepreneurial tendencies in youth. This is followed by conclusion of the current outcome to address some of these challenges in the last section.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Understanding Youth Entrepreneurship**

There are a variety of definitions for the term entrepreneurship have been suggested, this paper will elaborate upon the definition of entrepreneurship suggested by Schnurr and Newing (1997) that defines it as youth people utilizing their own abilities and initiatives, by being innovative, creative and taking risks in defining their own problems, finding solutions in

realizing their vision. For the purpose of this study, youth is defined as any person between the aged of 18 – 40 years old. This group of youth is categorised based on the age of the higher learning institution students in the level of undergraduate and post-graduate students.

Entrepreneurships have been identified as major contributing factors towards improving the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of one country and reduced unemployment among youth. However, the potential benefits of youth entrepreneurship have failed to recognize its importance. A report which set out to determine '*A Focus On Youth Entrepreneurship*' by British Columbia Report (2017) stated that parents and teachers have a tendency to spread the view that entrepreneurship is 'risky' and not viable for the long term. Therefore, parents and teachers tend to inspire youth to be employed by a highly reputable firm. Even though there were several efforts in promoting an entrepreneurial culture from an early age of 11 developed and developing countries, but the focus on career planning curricula is the main focus to secure stable jobs for the youth (OECD, 2001).

According to the Malaysian Youth Council in 2007 and Kasim, Zulkharnain, Hashim, Ibrahim, and Yusof (2014), youths consist of those aged between 15 to 40 years. In Malaysia, youths in the category of 15-40 years old consist of 13.3 million and it represent 46 percent of the population (Kasim et al., 2014).

The Malaysian government has progressively improved policies on entrepreneurship and have been providing support in terms of training, education and financial support to encourage youth and help them start up a business more conveniently. The Malaysian government is serious in emphasizing youths to be entrepreneurs by creating the 'Entrepreneurship & Public-Private Research Network Unit' under the Ministry of Higher Learning (MOHE). This unit takes the initiative to control unemployment rate among graduates. There are three main stages of youth entrepreneurs which consist the pre-entrepreneurs (age between fifteen to nineteen), the budding entrepreneurs (aged between twenty and twenty five) and the emerging entrepreneur (aged between twenty six and thirty five) (H. Nor Hidayah, J. Norchahaya, & M. Marinah, 2014). These three groups of entrepreneurs have different level of motivation, skills, characteristic and knowledge. Therefore, it is important to formulate the exact level of skills and knowledge according to these groups of entrepreneurs.

In spite of all the effort the government has created to reduce the employment rate, the quantity is still increasing. A report from the Labour Force Statistics Malaysia, shows that the amount of unemployment rate increasing since the year 2014 as much as 2.87% to 3.4% in January 2018 (Mahidin, 2018). Therefore, the Entrepreneurship & Public-Private Research Network Unit is in authority to ensure the enculturation and engagement process of entrepreneurship among the youth in the higher learning institutions are implemented. The government through several authorised agents such as TEKUN, MARA, PUNB, MaGIC and

several others have provided youths with all the necessary support such as grants, funding, provisions of training to upgrade their knowledge and advised in the latest technologies.

## 2.2 Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education can be defined as a process of providing knowledge and skills for individuals to identify and act towards potential opportunities surrounds beside improving self-esteem (Jones & English, 2004). Basically, entrepreneurship education is the program that stimulates entrepreneurship awareness for career purposes. According to the review of entrepreneurship education literature by Samwel Mwasalwiba (2010), there are several views that highlight towards individual characteristics that can be swayed by a formal entrepreneurship education program (e.g. Bechard & Toulouse, 1998; Kirby, 2004; Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998).

According to several studies, an entrepreneur that has been exposed and nurtured according to the appropriate education process has the potential to be a successful entrepreneur (Gorman, Hanlon, & King, 1997; Kirby, 2004; Taatila, 2010). Entrepreneurial passion is a persistent and long-lasting personal attribute that is different to a temporal feeling or emotion. Passion influence youth behaviour within blended entrepreneurial programs, as divergent to traditional entrepreneurship programs that remains and the chances to improve their success (Turner & Gianiodis, 2018). Precisely, the support system such as providing a conducive environment in the institution that can facilitate entrepreneurial activities beside the enculturation process through the curricula and syllabus. According to McMullan and Long (1987), entrepreneurship education can promote job creation. The entrepreneurship education that had been taught in class is supposed to prepare the youths to be enterprising individuals with a creative mind to contribute to economic development and sustainable communities. According to Lackéus (2017) entrepreneurial education based on a self-oriented search for own happiness leads to more positive outcome in entrepreneurial education.

According to several scholars, teaching method that include negotiation skills, creative thinking, new product development (McMullan & Long, 1987), hands on and simulations (Gorman et al., 1997) can increase entrepreneurial tendency. At the same time, Hamer (2000) emphasises a group project that adapt real business scenario as the context of learning to enhance the interest and motivation. The integration of suitable learning theory, can be related to entrepreneurial education towards developing entrepreneurs, via improving business knowledge and encouraging psychological traits (Rasheed & Rasheed, 2003).

## 2.3 Entrepreneurial Characteristics and Motivation

The study of entrepreneurial characteristics has included several variables that relate to the personality, behaviour and attitude. Thus, for the purpose of this study the same concept is adopted. This study believes that entrepreneurial characteristics are general and eternal personalities that can be cultivated and developed at earlier stages of the education process (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998, 2002). Individuals can be prone to entrepreneurial intentions based on a combination of personal and background factors (Bae, Qian, Miao, & Fiet, 2014; Ozaralli & Rivenburgh, 2016). Stimpson, Huefner, & Hunt (1991) found out that demographic circumstances do not enhance youth ability to predict entrepreneurial tendencies. According to several scholars such as Ferreira, Fernandes, and Raposo (2018) and Do Paço, Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, and Dinis (2015), psychological traits can produce decent outcomes for predicting whether an individual will pursue entrepreneurship.

A number of psychological attributes such as Personal Entrepreneurial Competencies have been suggested as predictors of entrepreneurial behaviour such as the initiative; sees and acts on opportunities; information seeking; risk-taking; self-confidence; assertiveness; need for independence; motivation, commitment; and persistence (McBer & McClelland, 1985).

As explained in the earlier part, there are two types of youth entrepreneurs: opportunity exploitation and by obligation (Llisterri et al., 2006). Youths with high levels of interest may be more likely to be a successful entrepreneur, since they are more interested and willing to expend their effort (Geldhof et al., 2014). Those who are seriously interested in a career as an entrepreneur are likely to have plans for future self-employment and at the same time, career choices that allow for self-employment. Research has also proven that youths that are curious about the dynamic environment are willing to expend their effort to have a higher level of self-efficacy skills and traits and will to pursue their aims in entrepreneurial prospects (Rasheed & Rasheed, 2003).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study will employ qualitative methods to gather information on youth characteristics that focus on the students in the higher learning institution, in preparing them to be an entrepreneur related to the research.

### 3.1 Qualitative Methods

This method will involve face to face semi structured interview to collect data. The main purpose of this interview is to explore additional insight of students' expectation and needs in terms of education and support. The questions will be asked of interviewees are related to kinds of experience and expectations that move them forward in becoming an entrepreneur. This

preliminary interview will be conducted with three students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam. UiTM, Shah Alam is chosen because this university has a very strong culture of entrepreneurship, since they have won three times in a row the 'Ministry of Higher Education Entrepreneurial Awards (MEA)' for the year 2012, 2013 and 2014/15.

### **3.2 Sample selection**

As mentioned earlier, students between the aged of 18 – 40 years old are selected based on the age of the higher learning institution students in the level of undergraduate or post-graduate. Three youths were selected as initial interviewees who have involved with a business. Since this is the initial study, three respondents were selected before further study is being done, for another cluster of sample. They are 24 – 36 years old and come from different industries. All three of them are taking part time courses in UiTM and are doing their own business, while they are working full time in an organization. They are taking part time study in the Masters in Applied Entrepreneurship in UiTM. The main reason for selecting UiTM students that enrolled in the Masters in Applied Entrepreneurship program is because it is convenient access for the researcher. There are two main ways of taking samples: probability and non-probability (Hair, Money, Samouel, & Page, 2007). According to these authors, probability sampling occurs when all members of the population are known, while non-probability sampling entails participants being selected based on the researcher's personal judgment or convenience. Sekaran (2006) suggested that convenience sampling is the fastest and most efficient way of obtaining information, and so this study used convenience sampling to select youth entrepreneurs. The participants come from different background of education and experience, which increased the diversity of samples. They were informed about the study before the interview and agree to participate in the research after learning the purpose of the study.

### **3.3 Interview and Data collection**

The interviews took place individually face to face. The advantage of taking interviews face to face is that the interviewer can see the body language and facial expression of the interviewees. The time of interview were booked in advance with interviewees to ensure they have enough time and take the interview seriously. The whole process of the interview was recorded and transcribed. The purpose of the study was introduced to interviewees in advance so as to keep them clear in mind what the interview is about. Questions were sent to interviewees earlier so that they can answer the question objectively without any stress or worries.

Questions are focused on the interviewee's current age and the age when they started their business, their background, motivation of starting up own business, their short and long

term goals for their business and *etcetera*. Most of questions are open questions and adjusted at any time according to their answers in order to obtain their real opinions and actual situations. Every interview lasts around one hour. Data audit was conducted after the study by examining the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as makes judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

### 3.4 Data analysis

Analytic induction is introduced in this study for data analysis which is a most common data analysis method that the researcher pursues universal explanations for various phenomena. The procedure of analytic induction follows three steps below. First, collect and accumulate a series of objects' knowledge and experience. Second, analyze the characters of obtained objects and find out the common rules that they follow with. The third is to describe and summarize (make systematic judgments) rules and characteristics of the collected information, which will predict the basic principles of these rules as similar to other things. Each of the interview questions was coded into nodes using Nvivo. These nodes represented the issue or points that have been highlighted by the interviewees.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Initiative and Information Seeking

The characteristic of these youth entrepreneurs reflected that these youth are eager in searching for knowledge and information. Information is a crucial in gaining a justifiable, competitive advantage for the dynamic business environment (Stewart Jr, May, & Kalia, 2008). It is important to gather business information as part of a preparation for operating their business. Information seeking characteristic was demonstrated when participants selected to take the initiative to search for the knowledge and information by optimizing their goal pursuit through intrinsic motivation. In that sense, youth have the qualities of initiative, that willing to explore beyond their comfort zone.

All three interviewees agree that the more knowledge and exposure they gain in entrepreneurial the more confidence for them to start a business. Participants have almost similar opinions about experience on entrepreneurship. A 24 years old entrepreneur Yant, for instance, who has run her business for 4 years, feels lack of knowledge before start-up's and said that *"I've been struggling for the past 2 years with managing the operation side, tax invoice and etc. I don't have much knowledge on how to manage a business, which sometimes makes me in trouble of dealing with problems. That is the main reason why I further my study to learn more on how to run a business."*

Another opinion from an entrepreneur of 26 years old – Wanda is that she would like to accumulate experiences from her family business. It is difficult for a graduate in Degree in

Marketing to have enough experience in agricultural sectors, but she obtained the experience while being involved in the family business. *“I started joining the family business one-year ago, but it helps little since my background is in marketing and I cannot rely too much on my previous knowledge and experience. I have to learn from my family members on how to operate this business. But when it comes to the marketing of the product, I will advise my family members the appropriate marketing strategy.”*

Similar feelings appear for a 34 years old part time entrepreneur, Mike that holds a Degree in Marketing. He believes his previous experiences are really useful. *“I am much more proficient in dealing with my business with the relevant experiences that I have been exposed since my university days. I have worked in different industries, but the most helpful experience is those gained from the same industry to my current business.”*

Older youth usually tends to start their business when they feel the relevant experience is enough, which make them feel safe and confident. They are unlikely to start up a business in a field they are not familiar with or have little experience. In contrast, younger, youth are more prone to follow their passion to learn and improve on the way with the business as long as they like and enjoy the business they are running. All three youth believes knowledge and experiences are an important factor to entrepreneurship. All three of them agree that the university plays an important role in enculturation and engagement process among students. The syllabus and curricula that were designed helps to create the awareness; however, it is not sufficient to give an experience or exposure on the real world of doing business. These students need more practical and hands-on training to be an entrepreneur.

## 4.2 Self-Efficacy

Our candidates also exhibited high levels of goal optimization, with Yant, finding unique solutions using available resources in innovative ways, Mike describing himself as a person who grabs all the opportunity in front of him to be different and succeed, and Wanda taking advantage of facilities and support that she can get from such as learning opportunities and incorporating them with resources from her business to develop an innovative, personal vision.

Mike and Yant have started doing small business since primary school when they are nine years old, while Wanda started at the age of thirteen. All three of them have different reason involving in entrepreneurship. Yant mention that *“I feel it is my responsibility to be independent from my parents”*, while Wanda said that *“I try to challenge my ability. I would like to try to be an entrepreneur and see if it fits with my interest.”* Wanda is in the process of exploring her interest and dream. Whereas Mike is more being motivated to involved with entrepreneurship because of *“... to gain extra income”*.



In regard to short and long term goals, Mike highlights his short term goal is that he is eager to “... *focus on building material side*”, while his long term goal he mention that he will be “... *focusing more on the training and development business... because my passion....*”. Another participant, Wanda, “*aim to open a food kiosk at Melaka by launching ... rock melon chips*”. Whereas her long-term goal is to “*develop paddy factory to process rice at Melaka.*” The third participant, Yant’s long term goal is she wants to “... *focus on developing my knowledge in managing this business.*” While her short term aim is to “...*get it all settle...operation side of the business.*”

All three of them have a sustainable plan to stay competitive in the market. Yant’s aim is to “...*use the eco-friendly material that is biodegradable and recyclable*” as her business value proposition. While Wanda “...*tried to cooperate ... to come out with something new so that we can market our product to other company*” is the strategy that Wanda have for her family business. As for Mike, he has prepared a new “... *idea in improvising the new modules that is different from others and most of all the approaches are more relevant for the generation nowadays*”.

As described in the theory of Perceived Self-Efficacy, people's views about their competences to performance, including entrepreneurial interests, traits, prospects to be self-employed and willingness to expend effort. Self-efficacy predicts opportunity recognition, at the same time; self-efficacy perception is the main element toward entrepreneurship. Self-efficacy has thus indeed been consistently revealed to be one of the main characteristic of youth entrepreneur (Ho, Uy, Kang, & Chan, 2018).

#### 4.3 Motivation

Youths entrepreneur have stronger passions in doing the things they like, and this notion is supported by Herrington, Kew, Kew, and Monitor (2010). The interviewees think entrepreneurship is a good career choice as they can follow their own style of work and life. Moreover, it is thought easier to earn more money from their own business than that as an employee, which can help them to be economical independent and live a better life. All three of them agree that entrepreneurship is a tough work and they have to manage everything carefully. Through the interview, it is found that entrepreneur’s motivation to start their business is based on two aspects; passion and family support.

The word passion, which was mentioned frequently during the interview, stated the reason behind their business start-up. Mike said “*I started the training company because of passion in it when I started facilitating training during my diploma.*” While Yant mentioned “*To start this business I start with my passion. My passion is in the fashion industry so I started this business...*”

All three youths have strong passions on entrepreneurship and would like to be independent and involved full time in their business after they have gain sufficient knowledge in entrepreneurship. Yant said *"I need to focus on generating more knowledge in handling business. I realised that I don't have any basic in business thus I can't push the business forward."* Wanda plan to improve her knowledge in *"...accounting and management thus I try to develop and enhance my skills in managing this business."* While Mike emphasis on *"The new entrepreneurs are hunger for knowledge, thus a proper knowledge need to be transfer to these new entrepreneurs."* They are more likely to seek opportunities for entrepreneurship in the work and *pursue a better career and wealth by running own business* depending on their *capability, opportunity, work status and demand*.

According to Yant, *"I don't really have the heart working with others. I am working with others just for the sake of I have completed my degree thus I need to use my knowledge in that field."* The new generation prefers a relaxed and free work style. They think entrepreneurship is a good career choice as they can follow their own style of work and life. However, Wanda has her own opinion on working with others *"...working with other, I want to build up my skills and get as much experience as we can in handling problems and issues."* Mike is more realistic in his opinion when he decides to be a part time entrepreneur *"When you are an entrepreneur...all the risk will be on top of your head."*

All three participants talked generously on how the support from the family plays an important part in their decision. Mike said that *"Families, friends and lectures mostly in moral support."* Wanda mentions that his family give her the *"...moral support and also sharing of knowledge."* For Yant, *"My family and partner are very supportive, but not my friends."* Youths who have an entrepreneurial family are more likely to start their own business than the others (Edelman, Manolova, Shirokova, & Tsukanova, 2016), which in turn explained the influence of family members on these participants.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Despite the scarcity of job opportunities, many youths continue searching for jobs since they have lacked knowledge in the entrepreneurship. At the same time, their motivations and important characteristics needed to become self-employed do not exist. The study objectives of this study are to evaluate the youth characteristics and motivation that focus on the students in the higher learning institution, in preparing them to be an entrepreneur. Through the findings, entrepreneurial characteristics are influenced by youth's self-efficacy, initiative and information seeking, while their motivation is driven by passion and family support. Without these characteristics and motivation, it is difficult to nurture higher learning institution students to be an entrepreneur. The training, syllabus and curricula that are being design need to fit the passion of these students. At the same time, there must be a program to expose these students

to new opening in the dynamic environment, so that they can identify new opportunity. The main character of self-efficacy is important to build on the confidence among these students. Last but not least, support from family members.

Knowledge and experiences have an impact on venture creations (Basu, Sahaym, Howard, & Boeker, 2015). Entrepreneurs in the study expressed strong desires to have as much knowledge and experience before venture creation, and the interviewees also believe that the more they are exposed to the working environment the more they will learn. Exposure is the most important factor that affects youths' entrepreneurial intention and behavior. In addition, the source of money is not a serious issue. Youths' financial sources are mainly from parents and families, however, these participants will try to be as independent as possible.

Youth entrepreneurs are generally opportunity-driven, which is consistent with the findings from Wakkee, Hoestenbergh, and Mwasalwiba (2017). These participants have strong passions, interests, and willingness on entrepreneurship and would like to reach self-realization, recognition and independence through entrepreneurship. Youths who choose to become an entrepreneur have to analyse and assess his or her own decision and readiness to venture into business. This is because it takes more than internal factors to be an entrepreneur, such as the external factors, for instance financing, training, and personal economic circumstances are also the critical features in attaining business victory.

By understanding the relevance of these factors, appropriate approaches can be designed especially for these youths. However, the potential for sustainable socioeconomic and regional development depends considerably on the responsiveness of government (at the local, state, and federal levels) and universities, towards introducing entrepreneur-friendly alterations necessary to facilitate the creation and growth of SMEs in the country. With the national youth unemployment rate for the year 2014 increased from 2.87% to 3.4% in January 2018, the transformed demand for youth's commitment in entrepreneurship was never more critical and vital.

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