The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurship Education on the Relationship Between Entrepreneurial Attitude and Entrepreneurship Intention

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Abstract

Past studies suggested that entrepreneurship is a key to economic growth and a potential force to exponential economic development. Entrepreneurship has also been identified as the solution to unemployment and a choice of career option. This paper examined Entrepreneurship Education (EE) and its mediation role in the relationship between Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA) and Entrepreneurship Intention (EI) among Malaysian university students. The study employed a quantitative research design with self-administered questionnaires adopted from past research, and administered to 120 students from universities in Malaysia. Smart PLS software was then utilised to attain the ideal Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in confirming the hypotheses of study. The results showed EA has no direct effect nor influence on EI. However, for mediating interaction of EE, the results further showed that EE significantly mediates the relationship between EA and EI. This proves that EE, prior graduation has positive effect and leads to behaviour intention among Malaysian students towards choosing entrepreneur as their first career option.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of entrepreneurship in today's life has attracted the attention of stakeholders in many countries around the world, irrespective of their political affiliations, economic status and country prosperities in development (Etzkowitz, 2014; Puni, Anlesinya, & Korsorku, 2018). D'Silva (2020) stated that the uncertainties in economic environment, limited job opportunities and increased job automation were among the reasons many graduates got trapped in unemployment, unable to secure stable career with established financial income. Additionally, vigilance in business sentiment has caused many businesses to freeze new recruitments and operate with constrained workforce. The imbalance between job opportunities and higher number of graduates in the market has become a major problem especially among fresh graduates to obtain employment compared with experienced employees (Choudhry, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2012; Shah, Jafeer, Saeed, Aslam, & Ali, 2020). It is evident

that these pose great challenges for graduates employability that match their qualification compared with graduates from previous decades.

In addition, current situation of surplus workforce has also contributed significantly to these worrisome situations, not to mention its negative impact on youths alone, the consequences continue to affect the nation's economic stability, by causing societal problems and a waste of human resources.

Nowadays, unemployment among the young in Malaysia is getting serious and the groups are considered as the groups with the highest number without jobs compared with the other groups (Cheng & Juita, 2020). Within the context of ASEAN region, unemployment among youth in Malaysia is the third highest after Indonesia and the Philippines. In fact, the study further shows significant increase of unemployment among undergraduates. Latest statistics from the Malaysia's Graduate Tracer Study by the Ministry of Education

revealed that higher learning institutions comprising of local and private institutions produced almost 51,000 graduates across various fields of study annually, whereby 60% of them remained jobless after one year (D'Silva, 2020). As the situation becomes the new norm, it has received great attention from policy makers, educators, financial institutions and the government (Cheng & Juita, 2020). Clearly, the situation is worrisome and is getting more complex with the current economic conditions; and since entrepreneurship is seen as an ideal solution to address unemployment among fresh graduates, the government gives a special attention to its development through the inception of EE in its syllabus at tertiary level. In line with the rapid development of the economy in the country and globalisation trend, the importance of entrepreneurship seems to be more obvious compared with the previous decade and the economic cycle (Galloway & Brown, 2002; Wei, Liu, & Sha, 2019). A study by Coulibaly, Erbao, and Mekongcho (2018) also added that entrepreneurship is viewed as detrimental in job creation that opens up more employment opportunities and that it is a part of the key elements to a country's economic prosperity. Additionally, various studies proved that entrepreneurship has been considered as the engine to economic growth and a country's prosperity because of its ability to create job opportunities and generate stable income to the entrepreneurs (Coulibaly et al., 2018; Lui, Zhu, Serapio, & Cavusgil, 2019; Meoli, Fini, Sobrero, & Wiklund, 2019). In line with this, higher learning institutions take the cue by introducing various entrepreneurial activities and programmes which serve as the media to foster entrepreneurship culture and interest among their students. This is where entrepreneurship education (EE) has been actively nurtured, introduced and implemented at many tertiary institutions in Malaysia. EE was embedded in the entrepreneurship subjects, modules or even as specific courses where they aim to impart entrepreneurship skills among their students. It has made the Malaysian education system, especially at higher learning institutions, a perfect platform to influence students' entrepreneurial interest, equip them with sufficient entrepreneurial skills, knowledge to be holistically prepared enough to venture in new business creation that further inculcate their interest on entrepreneurship.

According to Shariff and Saud (2009); Soomro and Shah (2015), entrepreneurial attitude (EA) can be a positive significance for influencing individuals towards entrepreneurial intention; and consequently become

predictors for starting new businesses. Similarly, literatures by Drucker (1970) and Gasse (1985) have stressed the importance of attitude as a primary factor in predicting entrepreneurial intention associated with prospective career choices. Since attitude is exposed to changes, the introduction of entrepreneurship education may encourage and influence behavioural intention and may have significant effect on attitude and entrepreneurial intention (Azhar, Javaid, Rehman, & Hyder, 2010; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). Consequently, the introduction of EE informal education systems will be able to foster attitude, interest and knowledge skills towards entrepreneurial intention (EI). From a practical point of view, the introduction of EE is able to stimulate positive entrepreneurship attitude, inculcate entrepreneurship spirit, and provide students with the foundations of exposure, qualification, entrepreneurial competencies to choose entrepreneurship as their first career choice. Henceforth, this study aims to examine the mediating roles of entrepreneurship education (EE) on the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude (EA) and entrepreneurial intention (EI) among Malaysian university students.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Entrepreneurial Intentions (EI)

Do and Dadvari (2017) conceptualised EI as personal intentions that con his mind and experience to plan for entrepreneurial activities. It is acknowledged as critical motivational predictor that determines individual behaviour in any business creation (Nguyen, Do, Vu, Dang, & Nguyen, 2019). Meanwhile Peng, Lu, and Kang (2012) referred to EI as a mental positioning that determines entrepreneurial action. According to Barba-Sánchez and Atienza-Sahuquillo (2018), any entrepreneurial activity must start with intention. Bosma, Wennekers, and Amorós, (2012) referred to EI as individual belief and the anticipation it garners to boldly venture into new business. With EI, it is evident that the intention to become an entrepreneur should be arrayed by the person who wants to venture into something that has the entrepreneurial elements that align with individual goals. This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), where Ajzen (2011) explained that any behavioural intention is determined by attitude towards behaviour (ATB), perceived behavioural control (PBC) and subjective norms (SN). In other words, the person cannot be an accidental entrepreneur without being triggered and this must begin with behaviour intention. The theory also posits that a person's interest and the ability to perform the

behaviour must also be taken into consideration when microscopically observing its EI.

Literature study by Wei et al., (2019) revealed that EE plays significant roles in influencing students' attitude towards EI. This is similar to the study by Ajzen (2011); Jena (2020); Gedik, Miman, and Kesici (2015). They mentioned that attitudes are main elements to determine a person's EI. Meanwhile, Do and Dadvari (2017) in their study revealed that entrepreneurial attitude has positive effect towards EI. Literatures by Cui, Sun, and Bell, (2019) indicated the introduction of EE could cognitively stimulate EI. Based on these justifications, it is evident that EE is able to ignite interest and provide knowledge skills considered as important antecedent for a person to become an entrepreneur. Consequently, the continuous development of EI refers to its inculcation during the early stages in life. However, to individuals studying at tertiary education these are at their critical stage where the preparation and training for them to become entrepreneurs or to be involved in any development of entrepreneurial activities could be positively enhanced. As a result, these efforts further show that the higher are the students' EI, the more likely will the students embark on becoming entrepreneurs.

2.2   Entrepreneurial Attitude (EA)

According to Ajzen (2011), attitude is considered as a person's characteristics that affect intentions and this could be further translated into behaviour change. Nguyen et al. (2019) added that attitude plays important roles in determining behaviour intention towards entrepreneurship activities. It is directly construed as how individuals are able to behave in a consistent manner upon exercising their interest. This operational definition corresponds with Shapero and Sokol (1982) where their study on EA described that a person's state of mind, belief and assessment are related to matters of entrepreneurship and these coincide with other definitions from various studies. Additionally, it also implies that individuals with positive EA would therefore possess higher intention to start new venture creation. Previous study indicated that attitude has direct impact on and would evidently become more favourable towards the objective and crucial predictors of behavioural intention in development of entrepreneurial intention (Ajzen, 2011; Barba-Sánchez et al., 2018; Linán, Rodríguez-Cohard, & Rueda-Cantuche, 2011).

A previous study by Olokundun, Moses, Iyiola, Ibidunni, Ogbari, Peter, and Borishade (2018) revealed that students with positive attitudes will spend more

effort to learn using various approaches such as asking questions, volunteering information and answering questions that can stimulate and inculcate entrepreneurship interest. This could also be closely associated in elucidating correlational relationships between different predictors that guide, shape and influence an individual's behaviour intention towards entrepreneurship. A study by Lope, Zaidatul, and Bagheri (2010) further suggested that employing effective pedagogy methods could be considered influential to improve students' attitudes on entrepreneurial related activities. McGroarty (1996) also highlighted that attitude consisted of three components: cognitive, affective and behavioural. These components primarily involved beliefs, emotional reactions, and behavioural tendencies related to the object of the attitudes. Kubberød and Pettersen (2017) stated that EA has a strong influence to determine student interests towards entrepreneurship. Thus, it is strongly believed that EA among students is one of the main predictors which could determine their interest to become entrepreneurs. Therefore, EA can be considered as belief and perceived entrepreneur behaviours that shape students' action towards becoming entrepreneurs and further involved with entrepreneurial activities. Based on literatures, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Entrepreneurial attitude (EA) significantly influence Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) among Malaysian university students

2.3 Entrepreneurship Education (EE)

EE is defined as an education platform offered by schools, colleges or universities with the purpose of imparting knowledge, skills and building entrepreneurial activities among students (Norberg, 2017). It has been recognised and has been found to be profoundly essential to foster entrepreneurial knowledge skills and creating awareness that could lead to job creation, driving force to economic growth, enabler to poverty reduction and a platform to create future entrepreneurs (Farashah, 2013; Meoli et al., 2019). In view of the research by Jena (2020), EE could be considered as a critical platform to introduce entrepreneurship activities and provide a possible solution to unemployment among youth. Wei et al. (2019) explained that EE serves as a strong predictor to determine students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship. EE in this sense has also been used as one of the methods to increase youths' understanding in the field of enterprise, learning applications, nurturing creativity and determinant of becoming self-employed (Kassean, Vanevenhoven, Liguori, & Winkel, 2015). Taking into consideration that EE operates as a learning process to students which leads

to exposure, teaching, and learning curve for them to improve their understanding of various business activities, concepts, risks, in order to develop skills, make informed choices and other business skills. Over the decades, many countries acknowledged EE as an influential force in the sense of creating entrepreneurial career activities that determine students' career intentions (Jena, 2020; Wei et al., 2019). This is where educational platforms, especially at higher learning institutions, allow EE to equip students with a range of skills encompassing business knowledge, skills and practical experience, stimulate creativity and building self-confidence to translate business ideas into business creations with the application of knowledge gained and further serve as a determining factor to EI and career decision. Consequently, EE would then be able to inspire confidence, passion and encourage students and their intention to pursue career in entrepreneurial sector and engage actively in its related activities.

Several literatures of studies found that EE through training and education programmes is able to foster knowledge, skills and interest to embrace entrepreneurship (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018; Ozdemir, Dabic, & Daim, 2019: Soomro & Shah, 2015). This confirmed that introduction of EE among university students is positively significant and has become the predictors towards entrepreneurial intention (Fayolle, Gailly, & Lassas-Clerc, 2006). Similarly, Rideout and Gray (2013), found EE carried a positive effect on students' attitudes and learning outcomes. This is based on the justification that the introduction of EE is able to develop, instil and inculcate positive attitude, consequently is able to establish potential characteristics among students to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Besides knowledge acquisition, EE can best be identified as the best platform for university students to develop their own entrepreneurial skills, improve business minded know-how, capabilities and develop positive attitude to becoming entrepreneurs. In fact, higher learning institutions are able to provide developmental support through theory and exposures to practical knowledge, experiential learning activities and early networking opportunities. Activities such as business plan competitions, games, simulations, role plays are able to create positive attitude, increased entrepreneurial skills, problem solvers in preparing student to become entrepreneurs. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Entrepreneurship Education (EE) mediate the effect between EA and EI among Malaysian youth

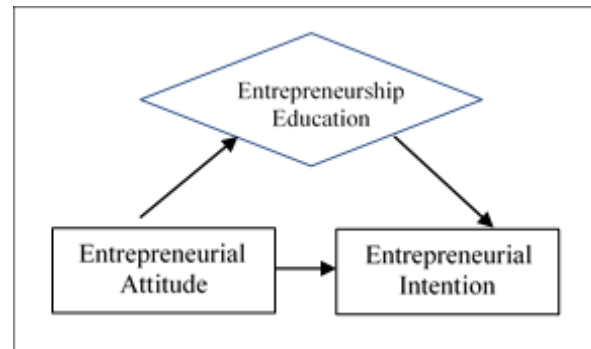The conceptual framework for this study is as follows:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of study

3. METHODOLOGY

The quantitative approach was used through distribution of self-administered questionnaire in the data collection. A total of 120 university students from 2 higher learning institutions who pursue business, management and finance programs were involved in this study. The questionnaire contained items which include questions for screenings (1 item), demographics (5 items), EA (4 items), EE (5 items) and EI (5 items). All the questions were divided into 4 sections from Section A to Section D. One screening question was provided at the beginning of Section A. Screening question asked respondents whether they have taken any Entrepreneurship subject during their studies. This to ensure the right samples were obtained, and to confirm that only the targeted respondents are eligible to answer the questionnaires. Demographics profile provides an overview generalisation of the characteristics of respondents. Section B which covers EA was measured by four statements taken from the study by Robinson, Stimson, Huefner, and Hunt, (1991). This section examined the student's attitude in becoming entrepreneurs. Section C (EE) was measured using five statements in the questionnaire and it was adopted from the study by Jena (2020) where it focused on the impact of the EE subject or benefits to students. Finally, Section D (EI) was adopted from the study by Linan and Chen (2009) and five statements were used in this section. All variables showed good reliability and acceptability. The Alpha Cronbach value of the pilot study data for the study variables ranged from 0.703 to 0.900. All of these variables were measured based on five-point Likert scale in which; 1 for "strongly disagree" to 5 for "strongly agree. In this study, the data were analysed using SPSS software

and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM). A total of 120 questionnaires were distributed, with 96 completed questionnaires were returned thus giving an overall response rate of 80%.

4.0   DATA ANALYSIS

The first measurement model used PLS-SEM to confirm the reliability and the validity of the items and constructs. The composite reliability (CR) aspects were then employed to assess internal consistency reliability, while external loading reading or reliability indicator and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to asses convergent validity. CR values of all the constructs ranged from 0.842 to 0.85 and AVE values ranged from 0.522 to 0.611.The values showed that all the constructs had high level of internal consistency and high reliability (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). For discriminant validity, the analysis was based on Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values. HTMT explains the ratio of correlations within the constructs to the correlation between the constructs (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). It is used to assess the true correlations between the constructs, and ensured every construct is unique and different from one another. Additionally, it is also highlighted that HTMT's values also must not be higher than 0.90 (Gold, Malhotra, & Segars, 2001). Any value more than 0.90 would therefore be considered as lacking in discriminant validity. For this study, it was found that the values for EA (0.387), EE (0.661) and EI (0.277) were within the threshold values and below 0.90. The result also revealed that discriminant validity has successfully been achieved. Table 1 shows results for the measurement analysis.

Table 1 Results for Measurement Model Analysis

Indicators	Indicator reliability loadings	Convergent validity AVE	Internal consistency CR	Discriminant validity HTMT
EA1	0.785			
EA2	0.674			
EA3	0.733	0.581	0.846	0.387
EA4	0.847			
EI1	0.798			
EI2	0.821			
E13	0.728	0.522	0.842	0.277
E14	0.705			
E15	0.519			
EE1	0.72			
EE2	0.756			
EE3	0.864	0.611	0.885	0.661
EE4	0.771			
EE5	0.901			

Once validity and reliability have been achieved, the next step would then involve an assessment of the structural models. The assessment required an explanation that the model is significant and could solve the questions as hypotheses in the study. The structural model is an analytical assessment to examine the relationship of the constructs including the significance level through path coefficients. It was conducted to test the hypotheses of the study through bootstrapping process. Bootstrapping technique is a resampling technique and non-parametric procedure that allows for significant tests to be performed to analyse to prove the hypotheses. The result from the bootstrapping method gave three values, namely path coefficient (β), t and p values. (β) has a standard value of -1 and +1. A value approaching +1 indicates a stronger positive significant relationship between the constructs, and a value of -1 indicates that the relationship is increasingly strong negative relationship between the constructs. The values of t and p are the values that are referred to when determining the reliability of the hypotheses that have been formulated whether they should be accepted or rejected. To determine the significance of the β value, the standard error calculated from bootstrapping procedure would provide a t value. The t values used for a one-tailed test are 2.33, 1.645, and 1.28 for confidence levels of 99%, 95% and 90% respectively (Hair et al., 2017). For this study, a confidence level of 95% was used and the value of $t = 1.645$ was the relevant t value of reference. Any t value higher than 1.645 indicates that the relationship between the constructs is significant at the 95% confidence level, and the hypothesis for the relationship between the constructs is supported. This method is used to answer H1. Results from bootstrapping structural analysis shows that EA has no direct effect with EI when p value is 0.222 and t value is 0.765. The results obtained from this assessment are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Hypothesis Testing for H1

	Relationship	Std. beta (ß)	Std error	t value	p value	Result
H₁	EA-EI	0.806	0.112	0.765	0.222	Not Supported

Notes: t > 1.645, p < 0.05

From the first model, EE was added as mediator. Mediation analysis was used to analyse the influence of EE on the relationship between EA and EI. The result shows that EE mediates the relationship between EA and EI. The results obtained from this assessment are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing for H1

Relationship	Std Beta (ß)	Std error	t value	p value	Confidence interval BC)		Resuult
					UL	LL	
EA->EE->EI	0.177	0.058	3.076	0.001	0.049	0.268	Supported

Notes: t > 1.645, p < 0.05

Results from bootstrapping as shown in Table 2 shows that EA has no direct significant effect on EI. EA has no effect on EI when β value = 0.222 and *t* value = 0.765. Therefore, the hypothesis is not supported. This shows that EA has no influence on Malaysian students and it is not a consistent predictor to their entrepreneurial intention. Despite numerous literature reviews stating that EA is significant in determining EI, it shows the opposite in the Malaysian context. In the second stage of analysis, the researchers identified the extent of EE as the mediating factor in the relationship between EA and EI. When analysing EE as a mediating variable between EA and EI (Table 3), the result showed that EE was significant in representing full mediation between EA and EI. Bootstrapping results showed the result when *p* interacted on EE as a mediator to the relationship between EA and EI. Here, EE significantly mediates the effect on the relationship between EA with EE. β had a value of 0.001 and *t* had a value of 3.076. The findings showed that the path relationship of EE was significant when EE was introduced as a mediating variable. Thus hypothesis 2 was supported. This finding further indicates that EE is a full mediator for the relationships between EA and EI. The full mediation situation exists because the variance of the influence of EA in predicting EI was fully absorbed by EE, thus making EE as a full mediator. The role of EE was largely to produce positive attitude towards EI. Thus, it further shows that EE is an important element in determining students' job employment choice. The value of confidence interval bias (CI) at upper level (UL) and lower level (LL) should be considered. The absence of a value 0 for CI, indicates the existence of mediating effect between EA and EI (Ramayah, Cheah, Chuah, Ting, & Memon, 2018). This means that any changes in EI is a result of changes in EE as a mediator that effects EI.

5.0   DISCUSSION

Nowadays, entrepreneurship has become a force to be reckoned with because it could significantly determine a country's economic growth. It can solve unemployment problems in many countries around the world and it is a strong element for sustainable and independent self-employment. Preparing students with sufficient knowledge and skills during student life is crucial because it is considered as an ideal platform to build awareness, to develop entrepreneurial knowledge skills and to create intentions to become entrepreneurs among students. Although several studies showed that EA has a direct effect on ET (Kubberød et al., 2017), the findings however, showed that the study gave a different result from other studies. The fact that Malaysian education landscape is very much different from that of many other countries, it could probably be one of the contributing factors to the findings. Another possible explanation is that many other factors may contribute to influence EA towards EI which in this study it referred specifically to EE.

In this study, the results showed that EE has been recognised as an important component in preparing and developing students' positive attitude, knowledge and skills to prepare them to be entrepreneurs. The findings of this study showed that EE played an important role to foster students' attitudes and interest towards entrepreneurial intentions (EI). EE could develop and create awareness among students and could influence their EA and interests. The findings revealed that EE is the best platform to promote positive EA towards EI. Through EE, students could visibly engage in theoretical and practical approaches that could cultivate and draw positive entrepreneurial attitudes among students. In addition, it can create possible solutions to unemployment problems and further inculcate the interest among students to choose entrepreneurship as their first career option. Meanwhile at the university level students can pursue finance, business, and economics programmes. Those enrolled in EE subjects are at an advantage compared with others because they have the exposure; they would eventually gain. When EE is introduced as one of the subjects, students' perception might positively be skewed towards the intention to become entrepreneurs as one of their career options irrespective of their field of study. Then, it can inculcate

positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship.Additionally, the introduction of EE may encourage students to look for self-employment as attractive career prospects than becoming paid employees.

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