

## Predicting the Entrepreneurship Intention of Undergraduate University Students in Malaysia: A Comparison Study

NURUL HIDAYANA MOHD NOOR<sup>1\*</sup>, MAHAZRIL 'AINI YAACOB<sup>1</sup>, NORALINA OMAR<sup>2</sup>, & EQMAL NAQIB MALEK<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Seremban, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author: hidayana@uitm.edu.my

### ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship allows students to learn beyond their chosen field of study and provides an interdisciplinary work and development environment. This study aims to examine the influence of attitude towards behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on entrepreneurship intention among Malaysian undergraduates. In addition, this study intends to compare the influence of attitude towards behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control on entrepreneurship intention between diploma and bachelor's degree students. Based on a quantitative approach, primary survey data were collected from 400 undergraduate students at a public university using convenience sampling to limit bias. The findings in this study indicate that attitude towards behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control are significantly positively related to entrepreneurship intention for diploma and bachelor's degree students. Notwithstanding this, the multiple regression results reveal that the strongest predictor of entrepreneurship intention for diploma students is the subjective norm while perceived behavioral control is the main predictor that affects entrepreneurship intention for bachelor's degree students. These findings contribute to the entrepreneurial intention literature by applying the theory of planned behavior in Malaysia with valuable practical implications for the management of universities and the government.

Keywords: Attitude towards behaviour, entrepreneurship intention, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm, undergraduate students

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### INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship can be defined as a dynamic process of vision, change, and creation that requires an application of energy and passion towards the creation and implementation of new ideas and creative solutions (Kuratko & Audretsch, 2009). Entrepreneurship has become a significant research topic and previous studies have proven that entrepreneurship helps to reduce the unemployment rate and improve country growth and productivity. Unemployment among graduates is regarded as a serious problem in Malaysia. With an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment rate has risen, and according to recent statistics produced by Malaysia's Department of Statistics (2020), the unemployment rate has risen from 3.9 percent in March to 4.7 percent in August 2020. In 2019, a total of 26.7 percent of graduates were unemployed, owing primarily to a lack of skilled occupations (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2020). With the rising number of graduates every year, the labor market has become incredibly competitive. Therefore, to solve unemployment issues in Malaysia, the government has taken several initiatives to create entrepreneurs among graduate students. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education also has urged that each of the subjects offered by any program needs to comprise the element of managerial and entrepreneurial skills. For example, in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), specific subjects such as Principles of Entrepreneurship (ENT530) is offered in the third semester for bachelor's degree students. With this subject, it can create successful entrepreneurs because the syllabus provides some important knowledge and inspirations for students to develop an individual's entrepreneurial intention (Abdul Kadir, Salim, & Kamarudin, 2012). Moreover, the study of Ismail *et al.* (2009) indicated that there is a high possibility that youngsters who take up entrepreneurial subjects have strong inspiration to become entrepreneurs.

In this regard, this study aims to measure and compare the influence of attitude towards behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm on entrepreneurship intention among diploma and bachelor's degree students. The current study has provided two significant insights into the state of the literature. Firstly, based on the theory of planned behavior, this study has provided insights on the overview of defined factors that can potentially determine entrepreneurship intention in which this study seeks to compare the proposed relationship between diploma and bachelor's degree students. The findings might reveal new knowledge for the current research. Although previous studies demonstrated relationships among the proposed variables, there is little evidence to support the examination of these variables from the context of demographics analyses. Thus, the purpose of this study is to compare between diploma and bachelor's degree students because empirical findings suggest that posit education level might impose a significant difference in entrepreneurship intention level (e.g., Beeka & Rimmington, 2011; Quan, 2012; Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2011). For instance, van der Sluis, van Praag, & Vijverberg (2004) shows a significant relationship between year of schooling with entrepreneurship intention. According to Iacobucci and Micozzi (2012) and Packham, Jone, Miller, Pickernel, and Thomas (2010), advanced education level provides more technical abilities and learning opportunities to the students which could help them to increase their entrepreneurial awareness. Therefore, it could be concluded that poor educational background will lead to imprudent entrepreneurship intentions. Finally, the application of this study in the context of the Malaysian setting has provided future research with a reliable tool for assessing or further developing the extent of the identified factors.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Entrepreneurship Intention***

Ajzen (1991) proposed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) which recognized several determinants that influence people's intention and behavior. The theory was built based on the advancement of the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). The TPB predicted three determinants that affect individual intention. Firstly, it is the attitude towards the behavior. Attitude is described as the extent to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior. Next, the second determinant is subjective norms. Subjective norms are described as the degree to which a person felt a social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior. Finally, the third element is perceived behavioral control where it refers to the anticipated ease or difficulty while performing the behavior and is expected to mirror previous experiences as well as perceived barriers and obstacles. According to Zain, Akram, and Ghani (2010), entrepreneurial intention involves the internal nerve, desire, and courage to stand alone by own feet. Intentions to be entrepreneurship can arise in an individual's inner self and mind if they have any transition and by that, the individuals can be potential entrepreneurs (Ismail *et al.*, 2009). According to Walter and Dohse (2012), the entrepreneurial intention is access to know-how which means how to develop a new business or enter a new business, access to know who. The following are the main determinants that could affect entrepreneurial intention:

### ***Attitude towards Behavior***

Attitude towards the behavior is classified by the set of accessible behavioral beliefs which is according to the expectancy-value model (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Liñán, Rodríguez-Cohard, and Rueda-Cantuche (2011) found that high entrepreneurial intention is led by a positive attitude. Based on a systematic literature review, Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) found 16 studies that indicated a positive relationship between attitude and intention. In a similar vein, Mahfud, Triyono, Sudira, and Mulyani's (2020) study towards 215 polytechnic students in Indonesia revealed that entrepreneurial attitude affects psychological capital and business willingness. Thus, the students with a tendency or disposition to respond with some degree of favorableness towards entrepreneurship will engage more on entrepreneurship. Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between attitude towards behavior and entrepreneurial intention for diploma and bachelor's degree students.

### ***Perceived Behavioral Control***

Perceived behavioral control associate's people's intention and action with resources and opportunities in which people will engage in a particular action if they have available resources such as money, time, and others (Ajzen,

1991). Ajzen (1991), Mwiya, Wang, Shikaputo, Kaulungombe, and Kayekesi (2017), and Paço, Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, and Dinis (2011) have confirmed that perceived behavioral control predicts entrepreneurial intention. Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015), Urban and Pendame (2015), and Wong, Lee, and Leung (2006) strongly believed that perceived behavioral control could acts as the strongest predictor as compared to the subjective norm and attitude towards the behavior. For instance, research confirms that strong financial support could affect the success of business initiation (Gimmon & Levie, 2010). Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between perceived behavioral control and entrepreneurial intention for diploma and bachelor's degree students.

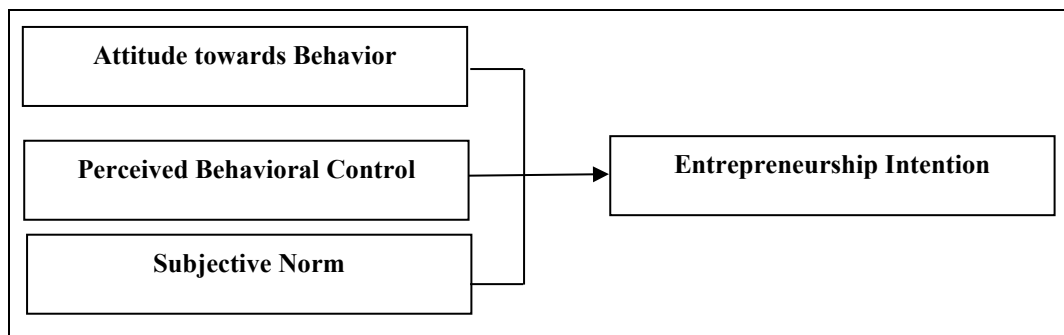
### **Subjective Norm**

Subjective norm can be defined as the social norm that individuals can perform or not perform towards desired behavior (Ajzen, 1991). It is recognized as the influence of a third party such as family or friends in influencing people to act and behave. Previous research has noted that subjective norms have an important role in underlying entrepreneurial intentions (e.g., Ariff, Bidin, Sharif, & Ahmad, 2010; Bhuyan & Pathak, 2019; Xue, David, & Liang, 2011). For instance, the study of Saraih, Ali, Sufian, and Ruslan (2020) towards 488 undergraduate students in one of the public universities in the Northern Region of Malaysia, has found that subjective norm is positively significant towards entrepreneurial intention ( $r=0.63$ ,  $p=0.00$ ). Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between subjective norm and entrepreneurial intention for diploma and bachelor's degree students.

### **Research Framework**

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework established to study the relationship between dependent and independent variables.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a quantitative survey and a simple random sampling for 400 public university students in Malaysia. From this sample, 180 respondents are diploma students and 177 respondents are bachelor's degree students. Thus, this constitutes 88.5% of the response rate. Table 1 summarizes the demographic profiles of this study.

**Table 1.** Profile of Respondents

No.	Profile	Diploma		Degree	
		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Gender:				
	Male	76	42.2	51	28.8
	Female	104	57.8	126	71.2
	Total	180	100	177	100
2	Age:				
	21 years old and below	166	92.2	30	16.9
	22 years old and above	14	7.8	147	83.1
	Total	180	100	177	100
3	Does Family Own Business:				
	Yes	60	33.3	75	42.4
	No	120	66.7	102	57.6
	Total	180	100	177	100

In this study, the questions were adapted from the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (29 items) developed by Liñán and Chen (2009) and measured using a five-point Likert scale, starting from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. The following are items for each variable:

**Attitude:**

- Being an entrepreneur would entail great satisfaction for me.
- A career as an entrepreneur is very attractive for me.
- If I had the opportunity and resources, I'd like to start a company.
- Among various options, I would rather be an entrepreneur.

**Subjective Norm**

- If I decided to create a company my close family would approve of that decision.
- If I decided to create a company my friends would approve of that decision

**Perceived Behavioral Control**

- I know the necessary practical details to start a firm.
- I can control the creation process of a new firm.
- I know how to develop an entrepreneurial project.
- If I tried to start a firm, I would have a high probability of succeeding.

**Entrepreneurship Intention**

- I will make every effort to start and run my firm.
- I am determined to create a firm in the future.
- My professional goal is to become an entrepreneur.
- I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur.

This study relies on the value of skewness and kurtosis to test the normality of the data, where these two items are referred to as the shape of the data distribution. According to Kline (2005), the value of skewness should fall within the range of -3 to +3 for the skewness while for the kurtosis the value should fall within the range of -10 to +10 to indicate normal distribution or otherwise it departs from normality. Then, the reliability of the instruments is measured using Cronbach's Alpha values, with less than 0.60 indicating poor reliability, 0.60 to

0.70 indicating moderate reliability, 0.70 to 0.80 indicating good reliability, 0.80 to 0.90 indicating extremely good reliability, and 0.90 indicating excellent (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Further, this study uses Pearson correlation to analyse the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables to test the hypothesis. The relationship is significant if the p-value is less than 0.05 (one-tailed). Finally, this study also uses multiple regression to find out the main predictors of entrepreneurship intention.

## FINDINGS

Based on the results of the normality test (Table 2), this study fulfilled the assumption of normality. Referring to Table 3, Cronbach's Alpha for attitude towards behavior (diploma=0.81, bachelor's degree=0.86), perceived behavioral control (diploma=0.85, bachelor's degree=0.85), subjective norm (diploma=0.80, bachelor's degree=0.81), and entrepreneurial intention (diploma=0.84, bachelor's degree=0.90) exceed 0.80. Hence, these variables are regarded as extremely good and reliable.

**Table 2.** Normality Results

Variables	Diploma		Bachelor's degree	
	Skewness	Kurtosis	Skewness	Kurtosis
<b>Independent variables:</b>				
Attitude toward Behaviour	-0.67	1.32	-0.53	0.18
Perceived Behavioural Control	-0.48	-0.15	0.07	-0.13
Subjective Norm	-0.85	0.64	-0.04	0.08
<b>Dependent variable:</b>				
Entrepreneurial Intention	-0.86	0.65	-0.40	-0.22

**Table 3.** Reliability Results

Variables	Diploma		Bachelor's degree	
	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
<b>Independent variables:</b>				
Attitude towards Behavior	0.81	4	0.86	7
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.85	4	0.85	6
Subjective Norm	0.80	2	0.81	7
<b>Dependent Variable:</b>				
Entrepreneurial Intention	0.84	4	0.90	6

According to the correlation analysis in Table 4, there is a significant relationship between attitude towards behavior and entrepreneurship intention of diploma students ( $r = 0.684, p = 0.000$ ) and bachelor's degree students ( $r = 0.722, p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, the first hypothesis, H1 is accepted. Second, there is a significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and entrepreneurship intention for diploma students ( $r = 0.699, p = 0.000$ ) and bachelor's degree students ( $r = 0.726, p = 0.000$ ). The second hypothesis, H2 is also accepted as a result. The final findings discovered that there is a significant relationship between subjective norm and entrepreneurship intention for both groups of students (Table 4). Therefore, the third hypothesis, H3 is accepted.

To achieve the objective of this study, this study uses multiple regression analysis to test the three hypotheses. From Table 5, the adjusted R Square ( $R^2$ ) for the diploma group is 0.652 which indicates that almost 65.2% of the variance in entrepreneurial intention is significantly explained by the three independent variables of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. For diploma students, the overall results are 1) attitude toward behavior ( $\beta = 0.263, p = 0.000$ ), 2) perceived behavioral control ( $\beta = 0.282, p = 0.000$ ) and 3) subjective norm ( $\beta = 0.375, p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that the strongest independent variable is the subjective norm.

Then, the adjusted R Square( $R^2$ ) value for bachelor's degree students is 0.711 where 71.1% of all the three independent variables have a significant influence on entrepreneurial intention. For bachelor's degree students, the overall results are : 1) attitude toward behavior ( $\beta = 0.319, p = 0.000$ ), 2) perceived behavioral control ( $\beta = 0.358, p = 0.000$ ) and 3) subjective norm ( $\beta = 0.301, p = 0.000$ ). Therefore, from this result, the strongest independent variable is perceived behavioral control.

**Table 4.** Pearson Correlation Results

		Entrepreneurship Intention	
		Diploma	Bachelor's degree
Attitude towards Behavior	Pearson Correlation	0.684**	0.722**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	180	177
Perceived Behavioral Control	Pearson Correlation	0.699**	0.726**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	180	177
Subjective Norm	Pearson Correlation	0.748**	0.750**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	180	177

**Table 5.** Regression Results

Variables	Beta	Sig.
<b>Diploma students:</b>		
Attitude toward Behavior	0.263	0.000
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.282	0.000
Subjective Norm	0.375	0.000
$R^2$	0.658	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.652	
F Change	112.882	
Sig.	0.000 <sup>b</sup>	
<b>Bachelor's degree students:</b>		
Attitude toward Behavior	0.319	0.000
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.358	0.000
Subjective Norm	0.301	0.000
$R^2$	0.716	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.711	
F Change	145.317	
Sig.	0.000 <sup>b</sup>	

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the findings, attitude towards behavior, perceived behavioral control, and the subjective norm have a significant positive relationship with entrepreneurship intention for diploma and bachelor's degree students. These results are consistent with the previous studies by Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) and Liñán *et al.* (2011). This study reveals that the subjective norm ( $\beta = 0.375$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) is the strongest predictor of student entrepreneurship intention for diploma students. This means that the students' entrepreneurship can be inculcated through strong support from their close ones such as family, peers, lecturers, and anyone considered important. The result of this study also indicates that the perceived behavioral control ( $\beta = 0.358$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) variable is the main predictor of student entrepreneurship intention among the bachelor's degree students. To support this finding, Engle *et al.* (2010), Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015), Urban and Pendame (2015), and Wong *et al.* (2006) all strongly believed that perceived behavioral control was the stronger predictor than the subjective norm, with attitude toward behavior serving as a supporting factor. For instance, research confirms that strong financial performance affects enterprise performance (Gimmon & Levie, 2010). Thus, if students can perform certain behaviors and have control over them, the likelihood that he or she will become an entrepreneur increases. Therefore, this study concludes that there is a significant difference in performance between diploma and bachelor's degree students. In other words, diploma students require more social support than bachelor's degree students because their exposure to entrepreneurship education is limited. On the other hand, the perceived behavioral control such as rule and regulation, capital assistance, limited supportive business environment, and others are more important in assisting bachelor's degree students to venture into entrepreneurship. For instance, most bachelor's degree students at UiTM must register for the Principles of Entrepreneurship Course (ENT 530), which requires them to establish their own business. As a result, the exposure has occurred earlier, before they graduate.

As for managerial implications, the researchers believe that the university should provide strong support, particularly in terms of entrepreneurship education, financial assistance, moral support and development, business training and program, and others. In addition, because the university is the closest place for the student, the university must play an active role in fostering a more entrepreneurial mindset among students. Consequently, providing that assistance can improve the entrepreneur's attitude and reduce perceived barriers for the younger entrepreneur. Moreover, family and friends, as well as community surroundings play an important role in instilling entrepreneurship, as subjective norms have been discovered to have a significant influence. Therefore, the university should implement a role model or mentor to motivate students to participate in business activities.

There are certain limitations on the current study that can be used to offer recommendations for future research directions. This includes that the study was conducted as a cross-sectional study, which might have an impact on the timeline's validity. Therefore, it would be necessary for future studies to conduct longitudinal studies. Another limitation is that the research model is limited since this study only focuses on three determinants. Future research could build on the current study's findings to include mediating and moderating variables, and other important factors as variables.

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