

Key Factors affecting Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Intentions among Social Sciences and Humanities Students

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Abstract

The concept of self-employment through entrepreneurial activities needs to be given attention by all parties, especially in helping to solve problems and challenges related to employment opportunities. Therefore, this study aims to examine the factors that influence the self-employment opportunity through entrepreneurial activities. Based on previous studies, there were four identified factors namely self-efficacy, recognition of opportunities, entrepreneurship education and attitudes towards entrepreneurship. For the purpose of this study, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire instrument and involved a total of 111 respondents consisting of year one to year three students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. The data of this study was analysed using SPSS version 27 software which involved descriptive analysis, correlation and multiple regression. The findings of the study showed that the factors of self-efficacy and attitude towards entrepreneurship had an established and significant relationship with the intention to be self-employed while opportunity recognition and entrepreneurship education had a moderately strong relationship with intention to be self-employed. The findings also revealed that only two critical factors, namely self-efficacy and attitude towards entrepreneurship had a significant relationship with the self-employment intention while the other two variables; opportunity recognition and entrepreneurship education did not contribute to the intention to be self-employed. Based on the findings of the study, there is a need to improve the entrepreneurship education system and the exposure on opportunities in entrepreneurial activities that should be strengthened so that students can obtain benefits and knowledge regarding the concept of self-employment through entrepreneurial activities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Employment Relations, Human Resource, Undergraduate, Self-Employment

Introduction

Self-employment has gained attention not only among academics but has also become the focus of the government, practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders. Thus, self-employment has been identified by past researchers as well as policy makers as an alternative in helping to solve issues concerning the country's socio-economy. Issues such as poverty, the imbalance between labour market demand and supply, as well as the crisis among graduates who are unable to participate in employment in the formal sector and unemployment, do not only affect a country's economic development, but has also raised social issues and socio-political instability of the country (Anwar et al., 2020; Burchell et al., 2015; Do Paço et al., 2011; Hassan et al., 2020).

Various parties especially governments around the world and international organisations have begun to identify various efforts done to ensure that these issues can be addressed mainly through labour market intervention (Burchell et al., 2015). Nonetheless, in the current economic context, the government also has limitations in providing employment opportunities for the people, especially the graduates. Therefore, there are many researchers proposing the concept of self-employment in mitigating the issues related to unemployment and the avalanche of graduates (Burchell et al., 2015; Fairlie & Meyer, 2000; Faloye & Olatunji, 2018; Lucky & Minai, 2012; Tkachev & Kolvereid, 1999). Furthermore, most governments around the world have started to view self-employment as another alternative to addressing the issue.

Based on research on the development of self-employment, especially in certain populous countries such as China, encouragement for the development of self-employment has helped to solve the employment issues apart from encouraging the emergence of space for innovation and economic development (Wan, 2017). Meanwhile, in developing countries especially in Australia, Canada, Britain and the United States, self-employment has been recognized as a solution to unemployment and poverty problems and self-employment has been an important working class since 1990s (Anh Do, 1999).

Self-employment through entrepreneurial activities has become one of the main focus in finding solutions to related issues especially among students and graduates as dependence on employment in almost all type and categories of formal sector is no longer a strength in their career development. Therefore, this article examined the critical factors that influence the desire to be self-employed through entrepreneurial activities among students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

Literature Review

Discussion of entrepreneurial self-employment as an alternative solution to the employment problem has attracted the attention of previous researchers (Blundell & Machin, 2020; Carroll & Mosakowski, 1987; Gindling & Newhouse, 2014). Various problems related to employment opportunities have been suggested the need to be self-employed through the entrepreneurial process (Dvouletý, 2018; Hassan et al., 2020). The concept of self-employment through entrepreneurial activities aims to help the graduates, particularly in having their own jobs and financial resources. At the same time, as the business grows, they can also offer employment opportunities to others. In other words, the profits obtained benefited not only the graduates but also the local community.

However, self-employment is not easy. There are several factors that influence the intention to become self-employed. Previous research has shown that there are several factors that influence the willingness to become self-employed (Anwar et al., 2020; Faloye & Olatunji, 2018; Halawany, 2014; Liñán et al., 2015; Yurtkoru et al., 2014). Those identified in previous

research include entrepreneurial self-competence, opportunity perception, entrepreneurial education, and attitudes towards becoming an entrepreneur. Based on previous research, the literature highlights two important aspects: the concepts of self-employment and entrepreneurship, and the factors that influence an entrepreneur's intention to become self-employed.

The Concept of Self-employment and Entrepreneurship

In general, self-employment concept is synonymous and is often associated with entrepreneurship (Burchell et al., 2015; Carroll & Mosakowski, 1987; Tkachev & Kolvereid, 1999). Preliminary studies with respect to self-employment in the context of undergraduates were introduced by (Tkachev and Kolvereid, 1999). The development of related research shows that, the study of entrepreneurship or more specifically, studies in relation to self-employment have attracted the attention of many researchers (Blanchflower, 2004; Bregger, 1996; Burchell et al., 2015; Tkachev & Kolvereid, 1999; Wan, 2017) because of its importance in striving for the economic and social development of society. Encouragement of self-employment through the spirit of entrepreneurship is an effort that can help solve poverty and unemployment, especially among graduates. In addition, according to Burchell et al (2015) the young generation, particularly the university graduates, started to consider working outside of formal jobs and they chose to be self-employed as entrepreneurs due to competition in the world of work.

Developing an awareness, spirit and desire for independence through entrepreneurial activity needs to be encouraged when students are in higher education institutions. Apart from that, prospective graduates need to change their perceptions about job options who are more likely to choose paid jobs especially in large companies, compared to self-employment (Zakaria et al., 2020). In fact, self-employment opens up space to explore various entrepreneurial opportunities that can bring about change in their lives from the financial aspect as well as the well-being of life.

Based on previous research, there has been no universal definition that can be used in defining the concept of self-employment. Previous researchers have proposed a variety of definitions, and these definitions vary by country and organizational context. There are various definitions given by previous researchers regarding the concept of self-employment. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for example, defined self-employment as “anyone who works for himself but not for others, except under long-term contracts”. While Burchell et al (2015) also defined self-employment as

“Those...who, working on their own account or with one or a few partners or in cooperative, hold the type of jobs defined as a “self-employment jobs.” i.e. jobs where the remuneration is directly dependent upon the profits derived from the goods and services produced. Self-employed workers include four sub-categories of employers, own-account workers, members of producers’ cooperatives, and contributing family workers”

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (1990) defined self-employment as employees and employers who have their own accounts (owners of unincorporated business employees). Meanwhile, Laing (2011) defined self-employment as starting and running a successful business or social enterprise. Anh Do (1999) described self-employment as individuals who perform certain occupations for the purpose of profit or family income either in the form of money or goods. Various definitions have been proposed, but in the context of this study, self-employment refers to entrepreneurial activities undertaken for career

development. The next section discusses the factors that influence self-employment intentions. It consists of four main factors he identified based on his research to date.

Factors influencing the self-employment intention

Past studies have shown that most prospective graduates prefer jobs that offer fixed income rather than working in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) or starting a business although there are many opportunities to deepen their knowledge of entrepreneurship, support and business development from various related agencies (Moy & Lee, 2002). However, in recent years, the desire to be self-employed has been growing among graduates and students due to limited employment opportunities in the formal sector, high unemployment rates and mismatch between courses taken and the existing job market (Anwar et al., 2020; Burchell et al., 2015; Liñán & Rodríguez-Cohard, 2015; Liñán et al., 2015; Yurtkoru et al., 2014; Zampetakis et al., 2011). In addition, Nguyen (2018) explained that self-employment is the best option for the students once they graduate.

In summary, self-employment intent can be defined as an individual's willingness to carry out entrepreneurial activities or to become self-employed (Nguyen, 2018; Tkachev & Kolvereid, 1999). Past studies have shown that there are various selection factors for self-employment and among them are the desire to highlight talents, skills and expertise, to share ideas, like to face challenges, find higher sources of income, are influenced by family, and have no choice but to become self-reliant through entrepreneurship (Laing, 2011). Meanwhile, a study by Nguyen (2018) found that factors such as demographics, family background and self-employment experience influence the desire to be self-employed. In another study by Do Paço et al (2011) they found that attitudes, perceptions of social norms and self-efficacy influence the desire to work on their own. Koe (2016) also explained that entrepreneurial orientation affects the desire to be self-employed. Wan's (2017) study found that the factors of personal and family characteristics, social factors, are among the factors that influence the desire to work independently.

Although there are various factors that influence the desire to be self-employed, this study examines self-efficacy, opportunity awareness, entrepreneurship education, and attitudes towards entrepreneurship.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the strength of an individual's belief that he or she can successfully perform various entrepreneurial roles and tasks (Chen & He, 2011). There are also past researchers who referred to self-efficacy as a notion of feasibility (Lee-Ross, 2017; Liñán, 2005; Pretheeba, 2014). Self-efficacy is an important concept to describe a person's behavior that plays an important role in influencing an individual's selection, level of effort and a person's perseverance in achieving ambitions (Chen & He, 2011). In other words, individuals with this high level of feasibility, have a higher ability in achieving the desired goals. Hassan et al (2020); Lee-Ross (2017); Liñán (2005) argued that self-efficacy is a significant factor influencing the desire to be self-employed.

Opportunity Recognition

The ability to identify opportunities is an important precondition in determining the success of a business (Filser et al., 2020). Thus, recognition of opportunity is an important aspect to be given focus because this factor refers to an individual's ability to recognise, detect or construct patterns and concepts to be shaped into solid ideas (Hunter, 2013).

In this context, the ability of students or graduates to identify, track or develop opportunities will help their efforts to succeed in entrepreneurial activities. To gain a deeper understanding of opportunity recognition, Hunter (2013) has introduced four typologies of opportunity recognition namely imitation, allocation, discovery and construction. Opportunity based on imitation refers to the ability to use and modify effective business models as well as use existing ideas to carry out entrepreneurial activities. Meanwhile, allocation opportunity refers to opportunities that occur when there is a mismatch of demand and supply of limited resources, monopolies in business or demographic changes that cause a need for specific products or in other words, the existence of these opportunities occurs when the market is not perfect (imperfection) or when there is a change in demographics.

The discovery-based opportunities stem from changes in the technological environment, customer preferences, regulations and laws as well as economic conditions that trigger entrepreneurial opportunities. The last opportunity is a construction-based opportunity. This opportunity exists because according to Hunter (2013) there is no entrepreneurial activity in certain aspects until certain individuals develop the idea. Social experiences and interactions are closely related to these discovery-based opportunities.

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is one of the factors that often gets the attention of researchers especially in the context of discussions in higher learning institutions (Rippa et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship education is able to improve the quality of human capital especially in the context of entrepreneurship (Rippa et al., 2020). Through effective entrepreneurship education, various positive impacts are gained to shape the identities of students and graduates such as changes in attitudes, skills and abilities (Lee-Ross, 2017; Francisco Liñán & Rodríguez-Cohard, 2015; Pretheeba, 2014). In addition, entrepreneurship education can aid the technical development and soft skills (Burchell et al., 2015). A study by Anwar et al (2020) showed that there is a significant relationship between the desires to be self-employed through entrepreneurial activities with this entrepreneurship education.

Efforts to strengthen the spirit of entrepreneurship should be applied through the elements of entrepreneurship in the teaching and learning process. Based on the recommendations by Liñán and Rodríguez-Cohard (2015), the emphasis should be given on entrepreneurship education at an early stage which refers to the primary and secondary school level. Through the early application of the entrepreneurship elements, it helps to cultivate the interest and spirit of entrepreneurship among students since school.

Attitude to be an Entrepreneur

Liñán (2005) explained that individual attitudes are among the relevant factors in influencing the self-employment intention. Similarly, Rippa et al (2020) also viewed students and graduates who had a positive attitude towards the entrepreneurial process such as considering that self-employment through entrepreneurial activities as an attractive, desirable, satisfying, and preferred career option had a tendency to succeed, and the attitudes towards entrepreneurship have gained the attention of many parties including researchers who see attitudes as a measure of an individual's value either positively or negatively towards a particular behavior (Liñán & Rodríguez-Cohard, 2015). In other words, this attitude refers to the evaluation held by an individual in either a positive or negative direction to become an entrepreneur.

Willingness to take risks, confidence, optimism, desire to achieve success and autonomy in doing work, self-efficacy and high internal focus are attitudes that must be present in a

student or graduate who has the intention to be self-employed (Dvouletý, 2018). Furthermore, Rodríguez et al (2020) explained that these entrepreneurial -related attitudes can be fostered through active learning of their own experiences and environments. The next section discusses the methodology employed in this study.

Methodology

This study was conducted at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSK), Universiti Malaysia Sabah which involved year one to year three students of six programs namely Industrial Relations, International Relations, History, Geography, Communication and Sociology and Social Anthropology. The involvement of students is important in assessing the intention to be self-employed through entrepreneurial activities. The survey of this study employed a simple random sampling method as well as a questionnaire as research instruments. The questionnaire distributed consisted of two main parts, namely the demographic part and the second part was concerned with the intention to be self-employed, self-efficacy, recognition of opportunities, entrepreneurship education and attitude to be an entrepreneur. This questionnaire utilised a 7-point likert scale by adapting questionnaires by Liñán (2005); Liñán and Cohard (2015); Ozgen and Baron (2007); Tkachev and Kolvereid (1999) were used in this study. Based on the current situation of Pandemic COVID 19, the distribution of questionnaires was done using the online medium of Google Form which was distributed to selected students. A total of 111 students from year one to year three were involved in this study. The data of the study were analysed using SPSS software version 27 and involved descriptive tests (frequency, percentage, mean value and standard deviation) and inferential analysis (multiple correlation and regression).

Findings of The Study

Table 1.1 shows the demographic profile for this study. The demographic characteristics in this study consisted of gender, age and year of study at FSSK. Based on the descriptive analysis, the majority of respondents were female students, which was 76.6 % (85 students), while male students consisted of 23.4 % (26 students). As for the age profile, 22-year-old students were the highest at 42.3 %, followed by 23-year-old students at 27 %, and for 20-year-olds and 21-year-olds, they recorded 1 % and 28 %, respectively. For the year of study, the number of year 1 students involved was 29 people (26.1%), year 2 was 46 people (41.4 %) while year 3 was 36 people (32.4 %).

Table 1.1

The Demographic profile

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	26	23.4
Female	85	76.6
Age		
20-year-old	1	.9
21-year-old	28	25.2
22-year-old	47	42.3
23-year-old	30	27.0
The year of study		
Year 1	29	26.1
Year 2	46	41.4
Year 3	36	32.4

Table 1.2 shows the information regarding entrepreneurship which consists of interest in self-employment as an entrepreneur, involvement in entrepreneurial activities, reasons for choosing to engage in entrepreneurial activities and the involvement of family members in entrepreneurial activities. The analysis showed that the majority of students were interested in self-employment as entrepreneurs, which was 70.3 %, while those who were not interested were 7.2 % and students who were uncertain were at 22.5 %. Apart from that, 58.6 % of students were involved in entrepreneurial activities, such as being an agent, selling certain products such as cosmetics and health, food and beverages and offering certain services. Students involved in this study explained the choice to engage in entrepreneurship was due to the desire to gain freedom (48.7 %), available potential (26.1 %), realising ambitions (18 %) and love of challenges (7.2 %). Besides, the results of the analysis of this study also discovered that 68.5 % of the students' families were involved in entrepreneurial activities and the remaining 31.5 % were not involved in any entrepreneurial activities.

Table 1.2

Information of self-employment and entrepreneurship.

	Frequency	Percentage
Interest in self-employment as an entrepreneur		
Yes	78	70.3
No	8	7.2
Uncertain	25	22.5
Involved in entrepreneurial activities		
Yes	65	58.6
No	46	41.4
The choice to engage in entrepreneurship		
Challenges	8	7.2
Freedom	54	48.7
Potential	29	26.1
Realising ambitions	20	18.0
The students' families were involved in entrepreneurial activities		
Yes	35	31.5
No	76	68.5

Reliability of the Study

Reliability tests for the instruments were performed to assess the level of reliability in this study. Cronbach's Alpha values were employed and, according to Nunnally and Bernstein, (1994), Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.7 and above are accepted values in determining the reliability of an instrument. Table 1.3 summarises Cronbach's Alpha values for each of the variables involved in this study. Based on Table 1.3, the Cronbach's Alpha values for the study variables ranged from 0.814 to 0.935.

Table 1.3

The value of Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	No of Items	Dropped Number	Item	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Self-efficacy	5	-		.921
Opportunity Recognition	4	-		.814
Entrepreneurship Education	4	-		.814
Attitude to be an entrepreneur	5	-		.858
Intention to self employment through entrepreneurial activities	5	-		.935

Correlation Analysis

Inferential statistical analysis in this study consisted of multiple correlation analysis and regression analysis. Pearson Product-Moment correlation test was used in this study to determine the relationship between each study variable. Based on the Rules of Thumb suggested by Hair et al (2006); Pallant (2010), self-employment intention had a moderately positive and significant relationship with opportunity recognition ($r = .679$, $p < .01$) and entrepreneurship education ($r = .665$, $p < .01$). Meanwhile, the relationship between self-employed intention through entrepreneurial activities with the variable of self-efficacy ($r =$

.766, $p < .01$) and attitude towards entrepreneurship ($r = .819$, $p < .01$) showed that the relationship of these variables was respectively established. Table 1.4 summarises the correlation tests performed on the study variables.

Table 1.4
Summary of the Correlation Tests

	Intention	Self -efficacy	Opportunity Recognition	Education	Attitude
Intention	1.000				
Self -efficacy	.766**	1.000			
Opportunity Recognition	.679**	.769**	1.000		
Education	.665**	.728**	.737**	1.000	
Attitude	.819**	.677**	.656**	.674**	1.000

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 1.5 shows the findings of the multiple regression analysis in this study. Multiple regression analysis used in this study aimed to understand the relationship between intention to self-employment through entrepreneurial activities as well as factors such as self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, entrepreneurship education and attitudes towards entrepreneurship. According to Zikmund (2000) multiple regression analysis describes the extent to which variation of a criterion variable (dependent) is related to a predictor variable (independent). Based on the results of the study analysis, Statistics F ($F = 81.46$, $p < .001$) showed that the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable was significant. An R^2 value of .755 indicates that 75.5 % of the change in the criterion variable (intention to self-employment through entrepreneurial activity) was contributed by the change in the predictor variables. Meanwhile, another 24.5 % are other factors that were not studied in this study.

The results of the study analysis also found out that only two variables, namely self-efficacy and attitude towards entrepreneurship were significant predictors of self-employment intention. Recognition of opportunities and entrepreneurship, education were discovered not to influence the intention to be self-employed through entrepreneurial activities.

Table 1.5
Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variable	Standard Beta
Self -efficacy	.366**
Opportunity Recognition	.039
Entrepreneurship Education	.003
Attitude to be an entrepreneur	.544**
F Value	81.46
R^2	.755
Adjusted R^2	.755

** $p < .001$

Discussion and Future Research

Self-employment as an entrepreneur is a significant alternative to being given attention, because it is the best opportunity to ensure employment opportunities experienced by the youngsters, including students and graduates. Efforts to instil an entrepreneurial mindset into the students or graduates' minds must be nurtured from the early stage of education.

Based on the analysis of the study, it was found that the majority of students involved had an interest in self-employment as entrepreneurs. With the development of information technology and the changes in the era of the Industrial Revolution which emphasises the use of information and communication technology (ICT), the information and knowledge related to entrepreneurship can be obtained easily. Similarly, participation in business using ICT such as social media is useful for business development, especially online business. In addition, there are various platforms for students to start any business such as Shopee, Lazada and various other platforms.

Apart from that, This millennial generation values work freedom and doesn't want to be tied down to rigid, long hours. Instead, flexible working hours and workplaces are priorities for today's generation (Baral & Bhargava, 2011; Healy et al., 2004; Kotey, 2017) Furthermore, the involvement of immediate family members such as parents, siblings or relatives can influence an individual to also carry out entrepreneurial activities.

In summary, the inference test in this study showed that there was a moderate strength of relationship between opportunity recognition and entrepreneurship education and empirical evidence showed that self-efficacy and attitudes towards entrepreneurship are well-established and significantly related to the intention to become self-employed through entrepreneurial activity. Statistical tests of multiple regression analysis showed that self-efficacy and entrepreneurial attitudes were significantly related with intention to become self-employed through entrepreneurial activities

In the context of this study, several suggestions are presented based on the findings of the study to ensure that the encouragement to self-employment through entrepreneurial activities can be implemented. Among the essence of this study are:

a. Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education needs to be nurtured from the early stages of the educational session, that is, during, the school days, to ensure interest, knowledge, skills and attitudes to venturing into entrepreneurial activities. This entrepreneurship education can be implemented in both formal and informal environments. To further strengthen efforts to cultivate the spirit of self-employment through entrepreneurial activities, this program can be implemented by using interesting and interactive course modules through the use of appropriate ICT. Entrepreneurship training and education programs need to be implemented holistically with emphasis on theoretical and practical elements as well as the development of establishes soft skills. Apart from that, this training and education needs to be delivered in the context of the real business environment. In other words, the training may use the mentoring methods that involve successful entrepreneurs to guide the students in understanding the needs and knowledge in the entrepreneurial activities.

b. Opportunity Recognition

The adoption of successful business models or best business practices is an initiative that can be undertaken by stakeholders, especially executives and researchers involved in higher education. This is important to help students open their minds and discover business

opportunities in the local community. Awareness of these opportunities can be implemented through a holistic approach that combines elements such as education, campaigns, empowerment, and fostering enthusiasm and attitudes towards self-employment.

Secondly, by introducing the concept of innovation and creativity, individuals consciously create new opportunities in the entrepreneurial process. In addition, with the explosion of Industrial Revolution 4.0, the relatively high use of ICT will further facilitate entrepreneurial activities that can be used by students to plan, start and maintain the business venture. At the same time, entrepreneurial opportunities are becoming more widespread with the advent of new concepts such as dropship, agents and stockists that do not require capital or required only minimal capital. In other words, students and graduates need to be aware and more resourceful by reviewing the opportunities available which offer various initiatives, and make use of available resources for them.

c. Implication for Future Studies

The creation of new employment by working independently has received attention from many parties. Self-employment can bring satisfaction as well as freedom in work. In addition, the support of the government, including in Malaysia, has developed various policies to support self-employment activities. This sort of encouragement can be seen through financial and non-financial provisions for the unemployed to start a business, tax exemption and training related to management, finance and skills.

Since the studies on self-employment is important as highlighted in previous studies as well as this study, then there are some suggestions of future studies forwarded for the researchers:

- Future researchers are advised to take into account family influence factors and peer encouragement in influencing the intention to do any job for income on their own and not depend on employers. These two actors play a very important role and have a great influence on the desire and the right path to start an entrepreneurial activity.
- In addition to focusing on students at the higher education level, researchers are also advised to examine psychographic variables such as the intention to work on their own among students at the primary and secondary school levels. This micro study of individual students is important to help researchers find out a person's tendency to engage in any job on their own and these characteristics can be reviewed since the early stages of schooling. This information and knowledge will be able to help form the basis of the study on the formation of the framework and career path as an entrepreneur from the beginning.
- Next, it is necessary to further expand research on the intention of self-employment, such as scrutinizing the intention of self-employment among vocational school students.

Conclusion

The concept of entrepreneurial self-employment should be considered by all parties to help solve problems and challenges related to employment opportunities. Self-employment can bring about a high return on income and experience employment freedom and flexibility in terms of time and space. However, much still needs to be understood about the concept of self-employment, especially from contrasting perspectives of employment knowledge, in order to understand the factors that influence self-employment intentions. An exhaustive understanding of these factors can help contour policies among stakeholders and efforts to help stakeholders, especially students and alumni, to grow into outstanding self-employed.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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