

Dominant Entrepreneurial Competencies among Students of the National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN) in Malaysia

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is not solely aimed at producing business professionals but also focuses on developing human capital capable of navigating challenges in the workforce and adapting to the dynamics of the labour market. This study aims to identify the dominant entrepreneurial competency among students at the National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN) in Malaysia. The study adopted a quantitative methodology and implemented a survey strategy, gathering data from 619 respondents. Data were collected online via Google Forms to facilitate accessibility for participants. A descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the dominant competency from a set of 13 assessed entrepreneurial competencies. The findings revealed that the 'use of influence strategies' emerged as the most dominant competency, with a mean score of 3.67. This result indicates that IKBN students demonstrate strong interpersonal and strategic relationship skills, enabling them to leverage opportunities effectively within an entrepreneurial context.

Keywords: Dominant Entrepreneurial Competency, IKBN, Use of Influence Strategies

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is recognized as a pivotal national initiative to address unemployment while boosting economic growth. This competency is increasingly vital in shaping individuals to confront the complexities of the modern workforce. In Malaysia, entrepreneurship has become a cornerstone of national policy to enhance societal well-being. To this end, the government launched the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 in 2019. Beyond improving living standards, this policy seeks to cultivate knowledgeable, entrepreneurial-minded, innovative individuals, fostering a more competitive and sustainable economic environment (Lokman & Yakob, 2023).

Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in national economic development, particularly as a catalyst for job creation and economic growth. Evidence from developed nations shows that a robust entrepreneurial base contributes to a dynamic, competitive society capable of withstanding challenging economic conditions. From this perspective, entrepreneurship is a strategic asset for enhancing economic productivity through human capital development. Hence, educational institutions have been tasked with promoting entrepreneurship as part of their curriculum. Among these institutions is the National Youth Skills Institute (IKBN), which is an integral component of Malaysia's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system. The IKBN curriculum focuses on industry-driven practices and serves as a platform for students to master a range of skills, including entrepreneurial competencies.

Furthermore, the TVET system is strategically designed to produce highly skilled graduates who meet labour market demands. By combining strong theoretical knowledge with significant practical experience, TVET graduates are equipped to compete in the global economy. This aligns with the goals of sustainable development and the requirements of Industry 4.0, ensuring that students are prepared to thrive in a rapidly evolving economic landscape. The integration of entrepreneurship into educational systems, particularly in institutions like IKBN, underscores its potential to empower students with the competencies needed to address contemporary challenges, drive innovation and contribute meaningfully to economic and social progress.

Entrepreneurial Competencies

Entrepreneurial competencies have been introduced as a transformative element in education to produce not only entrepreneurs but also graduates capable of creating employment opportunities. These competencies enhance individual capabilities by integrating knowledge, attitudes and practical skills aligning with the demands for innovation, creativity and competitiveness necessary to foster successful entrepreneurs (Hassan et al., 2020). They encompass a combination of skills and values that enable individuals to identify opportunities, take risks and execute entrepreneurial initiatives. Additionally, entrepreneurial competencies involve the ability to think creatively, achieve success and integrate sustainable cognitive and behavioural elements (Gibb, 2002; European Commission, 2016).

According to Bakar et al., entrepreneurial competencies are defined as the individual ability to manage and develop a business to achieve profitability while being prepared to face challenges and risks. These competencies extend beyond business alone; they also include problem-solving skills, responsibility for data-driven situations and team collaboration to achieve goals and success (Huang et al., 2021). In 1985, McClelland and Mc Ber & Co identified 13 key entrepreneurial competencies linked to behaviours and attributes characteristic of successful entrepreneurs. McClelland emphasized the psychological aspects of entrepreneurship, focusing on personality traits that assist individuals in overcoming business challenges. The 13 competencies encompass core dimensions such as self-management, risk-taking, creativity, planning, organization and resource management. Specifically, these competencies include opportunity recognition, initiative, persistence, commitment to work contract, concern for high quality, concern for efficiency, problem-solving, information seeking, systematic planning, persuasion/networking, use of influence strategies, self-confidence and assertiveness.

Within the IKBN context, entrepreneurial competencies significantly reduce unemployment rates and enhance employability on a global scale. These competencies align with the need to adapt vocational and technical education to dynamic economic changes, fostering innovation and boosting student's confidence to venture into entrepreneurship (Daud et al., 2020). Through the TVET system, students equipped with entrepreneurial competencies demonstrate superior adaptability and resilience in the workforce, particularly within the technology and innovation sectors. Consequently, IKBN students are exposed to entrepreneurial practices, preparing them to face career challenges to excel in their respective skill areas, especially those with entrepreneurial inclinations. This focus ensures students can navigate and thrive in a competitive environment, leveraging their competencies to meet evolving industry demands.

The objective of this study is to identify the dominant entrepreneurial competencies among IKBN students. These findings are crucial for assisting administrators in understanding and evaluating student's adaptability and strategic approaches to challenges and opportunities in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the study offers a fresh perspective on developing creative and innovative graduates by emphasizing dominant entrepreneurial competencies tailored to the needs of modern industries. By understanding these competencies, educators and policymakers can refine curriculum and training programs to better equip students for the dynamic demands of the global workforce, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset that emphasizes creativity, resilience and innovation. This approach not only meets the immediate needs of the industry but also supports long-term economic growth through a more capable and versatile workforce.

Methodology

This part provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology employed, including research design, location, population, sampling techniques, research instruments, procedures and data analysis. A systematic methodological approach is crucial to ensure the study's rigor and adherence to scientific standards. This is important because an organized research process enhances the researcher's understanding and clarity during the study, ultimately yielding reliable and valid findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This quantitative study utilized a cross-sectional survey method which is suitable for collecting data on a large scale. Hence, a structured questionnaire was designed to gather information on entrepreneurial competencies, assessing dimensions such as knowledge, skills and attitudes towards entrepreneurship. The population comprised 619 students from various IKBN across Malaysia and a random sampling technique was used to ensure equal participation opportunities for respondents and to minimize bias within the population. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms, a method chosen for its efficiency in saving time and facilitating respondent access. This online approach is aligned with current technological advancements as noted by (Thohir et al., 2020).

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A collected demographic information, including gender, age, ethnicity and academic semester. Section B comprised the Entrepreneurial Skills Competency Self-Assessment Survey, which included 70 items designed to measure respondents' entrepreneurial competencies. Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential techniques conducted using SPSS version 26.0. The validity and reliability of the instrument were confirmed, with a high Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.89.

indicating a strong internal constituency. The systematic and structured methodology ensures that the findings are reliable and can be generalized to the larger population. Furthermore, the use of online tools like Google Forms demonstrates the integration of technology into data collection, aligning with modern research practices and enhancing the study's efficiency and accessibility.

Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and academic semester. Among the 619 respondents, 412 (66.6%) were male, while 207 (33.4%) were female. This indicates a significantly higher proportion of male students in the IKBN compared to female students. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (323 individuals or 52.2%) were aged between 18 and 19 years. This was followed by 250 respondents (40.4%) aged between 20 and 21 years while only respondents (7.4%) were 22 years and above.

Ethnicity data revealed that most IKBN students were Malay, with 525 respondents (84.8%) identifying as such. Indian students represented the second-largest group, comprising 22 respondents (3.6%) followed by Chinese students with only 5 respondents (0.8%). The remaining 67 respondents (10.8%) identified as belonging to other ethnic categories. For academic semesters, the majority of respondents were enrolled in semesters 3 and 4, totalling 425 students (68.7%). This was followed by 138 respondents (22.3%) in semesters 1 and 2 while only 56 respondents (9.0%) were in semester 5. The demographic distribution shown in Table 1 highlights key trends in the IKBN student population, with a notable predominance of male and Malay students. These findings provide an essential context for understanding the composition of the study's target group, contributing to a clearer analysis of their entrepreneurial competencies.

Table 1
Demographics of Respondent (n=619)

Variable		N	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	412	66.6
	Female	207	33.4
Race	Malay	525	84.8
	Indian	22	3.6
	Chinese	5	0.8
	Others	67	10.8
Age	18 - 19	323	52.2
	20 - 21	250	40.4
	21 and above	46	7.4
Academic semester	Semester 1 and 2	138	22.3
	Semester 3 and 4	425	68.7
	Semester 5	56	9.0

Dominant Entrepreneurial Competencies among IKBN Students

Referring to Table 2, descriptive analysis reveals varying levels of proficiency among respondents across 13 entrepreneurial competencies evaluated in this study. The highest-ranked competency with a mean score of 3.67 is 'the use of influence strategies'. This finding indicates that IKBN students are adept at influencing others to achieve goals, particularly within entrepreneurial contexts. The ability to employ influence strategies involves leveraging interpersonal and social relationships to meet specific objectives. In an entrepreneurial setting, this translates to skills such as persuasion, negotiation and building productive working relationships with stakeholders like clients, partners and suppliers. These findings align with McClelland's (1985) research, which underscores the importance of influence strategies in ensuring sustained business success.

The second most prominent competency is 'information-seeking' (mean = 3.65), which reflects the student's ability to gather relevant and appropriate information to support business planning and decision-making. Ranked third is 'opportunity recognition' (mean = 3.64), highlighting the capacity of students to identify opportunities within competitive environments. These two competencies emphasize the importance of being proactive in acquiring resources and creating new opportunities in entrepreneurship. Other notable competencies include 'initiative' (mean = 3.63), 'persistence' (mean = 3.61) and 'self-confidence' (mean = 3.55) which occupy middle ranks. These competencies collectively demonstrate the student's preparedness to take charge, overcome challenges and maintain confidence in their entrepreneurial pursuits.

Competencies with lower rankings include 'problem-solving' and 'concern for efficiency', both with a mean score of 3.38. This suggests that students may not prioritize innovation or consistently achieving quality in their work. These gaps highlight potential areas for further enhancement, particularly in fostering creativity and maintaining high work standards within entrepreneurial education. The findings provide valuable insights into the strengths and areas for improvement in entrepreneurial competencies among IKBN students, emphasizing the need for targeted strategies to address gaps and optimize student potential in entrepreneurial contexts.

Table 2

Dominant Entrepreneurial Competencies

Competencies	Mean	Ranking
Use of influence strategies	3.67	1
Information seeking	3.65	2
Opportunity recognition	3.64	3
Initiative	3.63	4
Persistence	3.61	5
Self-confidence	3.55	6
Systematic planning	3.49	7
Persuasion/Networking	3.48	8
Concern for high quality	3.42	9
Commitment to work contract	3.41	10
Assertiveness	3.40	11
Problem-solving	3.38	12
Concern for efficiency	3.38	13

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that the most dominant entrepreneurial competency among IKBN students is the 'use of influence strategies'. This indicates that students possess a promising future as entrepreneurs, leveraging their interpersonal skills to influence others in achieving entrepreneurial goals. However, this competency must be continuously nurtured and strengthened through various activities to ensure its sustainability and effectiveness. By doing so, students can excel as entrepreneurs and enhance their employability (Abd Rahman et al., 2015). Similarly, Galvão et al., (2018) and Huang et al., (2021) highlight that students with strong entrepreneurial competencies are more confident in addressing challenges and proactive in responding to progressive economic changes.

To ensure the sustained effectiveness of this dominant competency, the content of entrepreneurial modules developed by IKBN management must align with the current demands of the industry. Essential elements such as business planning, financial management and innovation should be prioritized to bridge the gap between industry needs and educational offerings, particularly in terms of practical applications of entrepreneurial competencies (Hassan et al., 2020). This can be achieved through an industry-oriented and interactive curriculum design. For instance, adopting project-based learning (PBL) would allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios. It is therefore crucial to align the curriculum with market requirements to ensure holistic student preparation. This involves not only technical aspects but also essential soft skills such as communication, teamwork and leadership (Hunter & Lean, 2018) which are critical for building successful entrepreneurial careers.

Furthermore, IKBN management should establish closer ties with industry sectors through smart partnerships to expose students to real-world business challenges and opportunities. These initiatives should include a strong emphasis on digital empowerment, equipping students with essential digital skills in the era of Industry 4.0. Such efforts can also encourage students to create innovative and market-relevant products or services. Entrepreneurial competencies are vital assets for IKBN students, enabling them to adapt to dynamic economic environments and prepare for career challenges. It is anticipated that these students will drive change within the entrepreneurial landscape and emerge as leaders in their respective fields.

Conclusions

Entrepreneurial competencies have garnered significant attention in economic and social development. The exploration of such competencies among students in IKBN holds considerable theoretical and contextual importance. This analysis unpacks these dimensions to highlight how the study contributes to academia and addresses practical realities. Entrepreneurial competencies encompass the knowledge, skills and attitudes for successfully starting and managing a business. The study adds to theoretical frameworks such as the Competency-Based View (CBW) that links specific ability to entrepreneurial success. Identifying dominant competencies among IKBN students refines existing theories by integrating context-specific insights.

Although there is a wealth of research on entrepreneurial competencies worldwide, there are still few studies that focus specifically on young people, particularly in skilled-based

institutions. By illuminating how technical and vocational training impacts entrepreneurial potential, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of youth entrepreneurship. Additionally, this study supports transdisciplinary theories that encourage skill learning through practice such as Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. These theoretical foundations offer a thorough framework for examining skills. The study also provides theoretical insights into how education shapes entrepreneurial behaviours by concentrating on students in a vocational environment. It influences the creation of competency-based curricula, which prioritizes applied learning, flexibility and creativity as essential components of entrepreneurship education.

Youth unemployment remains a pressing issue in Malaysia. By identifying dominant entrepreneurial competencies, the study provides actionable insights to empower IKBN students to pursue self-employment and generate job opportunities. This contextual relevance addresses a critical societal challenge. Furthermore, this study also evaluates a significant vocational training organization and supports the development of entrepreneurial potential aligned with the perspective of Malaysia's economic blueprint, which includes initiatives of National Entrepreneurship Policy, 2030.

In sum, the findings of this study indicate that IKBN students possess certain entrepreneurial competencies, and its contribution to advancing entrepreneurial theory, enhancing educational practices and addressing pressing socio-economic challenges in Malaysia. The research bridges academic and practical domains, offering valuable insights for educators, policy makers and broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, a more holistic approach is needed to enhance creativity, work management and systematic planning skills. This aligns with the evolving needs of increasingly dynamic and globally competitive industries. Furthermore, entrepreneurial skills extend beyond business endeavors alone. They also encompass competencies such as problem-solving, data-driven decision-making and teamwork to foster innovation. Identifying and understanding the dominant entrepreneurial competencies among IKBN students provides an essential foundation for equipping them with a well-rounded and up-to-date knowledge base. This preparation is crucial for enabling students to navigate the challenges and demands of contemporary entrepreneurship effectively. By emphasizing the development of these competencies, students are better positioned to respond to dynamic market conditions and make meaningful contributions to the evolving entrepreneurial landscape. Such a study not only enriches academic discourse but also supports Malaysia's aspirations for a resilient and innovative workforce.

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