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Understanding the Linkage between Relational Support, Self-Efficacy, University Environment and Entrepreneurial Interest among Mba Students in Dammam, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship is well documented as one of the ways of reducing unemployment and creating wealth in an economy. Understanding entrepreneurial interest is seen as the best channel to determine and shape the behavior of people towards entrepreneurship. This paper investigates the link between relational support, self-efficacy, university environment and entrepreneurial interest among 86 students who enrolled for MBA at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU), Dammam, Saudi Arabia in the last quarter of 2017. The results, using logistic regression, reveal that self-efficacy, university environment and relational support have great likelihood of influencing entrepreneurial interest of the MBA students. While self-efficacy and university environment have a significant impact on entrepreneurial interest, relational support does not. Thus, it becomes necessary for the university to create an enabling environment for the students to start their own businesses as this improves the student's self-confidence and efficacy. The Government and private sector should also sensitize the general populace on the need for the relatives to support students in their households to start their own businesses as this would create more wealth and engender sustainable development.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Intention, University Environment, Self-efficacy, Relational Support, MBA students, Entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is a serious issue in any country and Saudi Arabia is no exemption. The unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia for the fourth quarter of 2017 for Saudis was 12.8% (Saudi General Authority for Statistics, 2017). According to the General Authority for Statistics (2017), the highest percentage (34.8%) of Saudi job seekers was in the 25-29 years age group and approximately half (53.3%) of Saudi job seekers have a university degree. Having a university degree does not secure employment for graduates anymore. This calls for the attention of young graduates to move towards entrepreneurship and self-employment as a career option (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2015). The concern for small business enterprise and entrepreneurship is growing because of the role it plays in economic development as it allows for creating new ventures that transforms new ideas into profit (Turker and Selcuk, 2009; Akinwale, 2018).

Entrepreneurship is considered as a path for innovation, economic efficiency, and job creation. The concept has traveled a long way since Schumpeter (1934) recognized it to have one of the most important advantages for societal growth and employment creation. It is essential to understand the entrepreneurial intention and the factors that influence it in order to attain economic growth (Yıldırım *et al.* 2016). Fostering entrepreneurship is important for the reason that entrepreneurial activity is a motivator for innovation. It gains its importance for technological advancement as well as in international competition (Drucker, 1999). Entrepreneurial intention plays an essential role in entrepreneurship research as it provides researchers with the ability to understand the entrepreneurial process (Krueger and Carsrud, 1993). Future entrepreneurial behavior is predicted by entrepreneurial intention (Katz, 1988; Reynolds, 1995; Krueger *et al.*, 2000).

In previous entrepreneurship literature, research was focused on entrepreneurs' characteristics and how it affects the decision-making processes (Johnson, 1990; Bonnett and Furnham, 1991). However, entrepreneurs' traits and characteristics cannot be isolated from the environmental, cultural and institutional context of the entrepreneur (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). The body of entrepreneurship literature had a high focus on intention-based models but there are scanty studies on the effect of the environment where the entrepreneur is based including but not limited to the university environment on students' entrepreneurial intentions (Trivedi, 2017). The university environment plays a critical role on students' attitudes (Ababtain and Akinwale, 2019; Tkachev and Kolvereid, 1999; Autio *et al.*, 1997). Zollo *et al.* (2017) argue that the university environment significantly influences the entrepreneurial intention of students. Turker and Selcuk (2009) found that students' entrepreneurial interest is significantly affected by the support of the society - family and friends - and the university environment. Literature shows that family and friends act as role models for the individual and that they have an influence on the career option and the decision to be an entrepreneur (Nanda and Sorensen, 2009). Another aspect of this study is self-efficacy which Gist (1987) identified as a person's view of his/her ability to perform a particular task. Self-efficacy has been used for a long time as a determinant of entrepreneurial intention. It has been shown in research that there is a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial interest and self-efficacy (Ozaralli and Rivenburgh, 2016; Osakede *et al.*, 2017; and Choukir *et al.*, 2017).

Exploring what influences entrepreneurial intention is important in entrepreneurship research. Many studies have examined various factors. However, none of such studies has been conducted in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Based on the Vision 2030 of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as well as dearth of studies in this area, there is a need to investigate whether there is a relationship between relational support, self-efficacy, university environment and entrepreneurial interest among students in higher education in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Hence, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature and precisely filling the gap of such study in KSA.

Recent studies such as Hassan *et al.* (2017) in Bangladesh and Shahid *et al.* (2017) in Pakistan argued that the university environment where students learn plays an essential role in helping students in developing business ideas and starting up their own business. Emmanuel *et al.* (2015) conducted a study on 168 final year Business Administration and Marketing students from private Universities in Nigeria and found that their attitude towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control had a positive and significant impact on entrepreneurial intentions. Moreover, their study discovered that perceived feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurship is influenced by subjective norms, such as parents, relatives and friends' approval of a specific behavior.

Turker and Selcuk (2009) found in their study using hierarchical regression analysis among 300 students in Turkey that the entrepreneurial interest of students in Turkey is significantly influenced by two factors, the first one is ‘educational support’ which indicates supportive university environment, and the second factor is ‘structural support’ which indicates the support of family and friends.

De Moraes *et al.* (2018) conducted a study in Brazil among 287 engineering and business undergraduates to understand the effects of entrepreneurial characteristics and university environment on entrepreneurial intention. Using structural equation models, the study showed that entrepreneurial intention of students is positively affected by the university environment, self-efficacy, risk-taking and university environment.

Trivedi (2017) conducted a comparative analysis among 1097 postgraduate management students in India, Singapore, and Malaysia. The study focused on three important factors that influence entrepreneurial intention, which are endogenous barriers, exogenous environment, and the university’s environment and support. Results showed that entrepreneurial intention is directly influenced by positive attitude and perceived behavioral control. Moreover, university environment and support and exogenous environment had an indirect but significant influence of the students’ entrepreneurial intentions. In a previous research done by Trivedi (2016) it was found that university environment and support has a positive and significant relationship with self-efficacy.

Relational support refers to the attitude of family and friends towards entrepreneurship. That is, whether they approve of it or not (Turker and Selcuk, 2009). Zapkau *et al.* (2015) found that parental role models have a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention. Ozaralli and Rivenburgh (2016) argued that parents with successful businesses are significant factors in increasing entrepreneurial intention. Gelaidan and Abdullateef (2017) conducted a study among 227 business students at a university in Malaysia to examine the impact of relational support, educational support, and self-confidence on undergraduate students’ entrepreneurial intentions. Their study, using structural equation modeling, showed that the students’ entrepreneurial intention is significantly impacted by relational support as well as educational support. The mediating role of self-efficacy was not significant. Bachiri (2016) conducted a study about determinants of students’ entrepreneurial intentions and found that Moroccan students’ entrepreneurial intention is positively influenced by their attitude toward entrepreneurship and self-efficacy whereas subjective norms did not have a significant impact on Moroccan students’ entrepreneurial intention.

Ambad and Damit (2016) conducted a research to study determinants of entrepreneurial intention among 351 undergraduate students and their results showed that perceived relational support, personal attitude, and perceived self-efficacy have a significant influence on Malaysian students’ entrepreneurial intentions.

Research in entrepreneurship has consistently emphasized the importance of self-efficacy as an important element in determining human motivations and actions (Bandura, 1989). In a longitudinal study on the relationship between entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurship intention among 249 undergraduate students, Shinnar *et al.* (2014) found a positive correlation between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention, and that this relationship is moderated by gender. Bandura (1997) states that a person with high levels of self-efficacy for a given task is expected to be more inclined to perform it.

Roy *et al.* (2017) surveyed 476 young Science & Technology graduates at the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), and their results using structural equation modeling revealed that self-efficacy and entrepreneurial personality traits have a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention.

Osakede *et al.* (2017) using logistic regression revealed in their study among 250 undergraduate students at University of Ibadan in Nigeria that the entrepreneurial intentions of students were influenced by family business background, perceived behavioral control, subjective norm, age, ethnic group, and income.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses questionnaire as a survey instrument to obtain information regarding the entrepreneurial interest of MBA students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. This survey was carried out between the last quarter of 2017 and first quarter of 2018. The research instrument was obtained from the standardised work of some scholars (Wang and Wong, 2004; Siyanbola *et al.*, 2012; Tshikovi and Shambare, 2015) in the literature and adapted to Saudi Arabia. This was validated by sending it to three experts and the students to give their opinion on whether the questions were adequate for achieving the objectives of the study (Sekaran, 2001; Akinwale, 2017). Feedbacks from the students and the experts were incorporated into the final questionnaire that was administered. The instrument was administered to the entire population of MBA students who enrolled in 2017/2018 session, and the 46 (out of 89 administered) returned copies questionnaire was found appropriate for our analysis. This indicates a response rate of 51.7%.

This study used ordered logistic regression for analyzing the data as this method seems to be very appropriate when the dependent variable is categorical in an orderly manner (Brooks, 2008; Akinwale *et al.*, 2018). The dependent variable in this study is the level of interest of the students in entrepreneurship (Y). The ordered logistic regression model allows for the prediction of the likelihood of outcome variable (entrepreneurial interest). The regression model which will be predicting the logit, that is, the log of the odds of the entrepreneurial interest, is specified as follows:

$$\text{Log (odds)} = \ln \frac{p_1 + p_2 + \dots + p_j - 1}{1 - p_1 - p_2 - \dots - p_{j-1}} = \text{Logit } Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n \quad 1$$

Meanwhile, the independent variables are relational support, self-efficacy and university environment context which are stated in equation 1 as X_1 to X_n . While J represents number of categories, $P_1 \dots P_j$ represent probabilities of each categories, β_0 represents constant and $\beta_1 \dots \beta_n$ represent coefficient of the independent variables from the first variable to the last one.

The three constructs are being used to proxy each of relational support (R1, R2, R3) and university environment context (U1, U2, U3), four constructs are used to proxy self-efficacy (S1, S2, S3, S4). Each of the constructs is in a 5-item Likert-scale starting from 'not at all/very low extent' to 'very high extent'. These constructs are specified as follows:

- R1:** I am confident that my family and siblings will support me if I start a business
- R2:** I am confident that my friends will support me if I start a business
- R3:** Nobody will support me if I start a business of my own
- U1:** My university environment has encouraged me to engage in entrepreneurial activities
- U2:** The atmosphere at my university inspires me to develop ideas for new businesses
- U3:** The knowledge of entrepreneurship in my university has enabled me to know the actions I need to start my own business
- S1:** Starting a firm and keeping it viable would be easy for me
- S2:** I am confident I have all the necessary skills to start a business
- S3:** Starting a business is a great opportunity for success
- S4:** I believe I could operate a successful small business

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcome of the survey shows that 72% of the MBA students have high interest level in starting their own business in the future, 15% of them have low interest level while 13% of them falls in between high and low interest levels. This means that majority of those studying MBA are possibly exposed to entrepreneurship and are therefore willing to start their own business. Moreso, Table 1 shows that majority (80%) of the sampled postgraduate students are between the ages of 20 and 30 years, and most (70%) of them are female students.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Respondents

Respondent's demographics	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Entrepreneurial interest level	High	33	72
	Medium	6	13
	Low	7	15
Age (in years)	20 – 30	37	80
	Above 30	9	20
Gender	Female	32	70
	Male	14	30

The outcome of the logistic regression which shows the level of influence of the 10 constructs on MBA students' entrepreneurial interest as considered in this paper is shown in Table 2. All the constructs have a positive and great likelihood of improving MBA students' entrepreneurial interest except 'UI'. This is shown by the values of the coefficients of the constructs which are positive as well as their odds ratio which are above the value of 1. However, the results also indicate that all the hypotheses are rejected except for the constructs 'U3: My university environment has encouraged me to engage in entrepreneurial activities', 'S3: Starting a business by myself is a great opportunity for success' and 'S4: I believe I could operate a successful small business' using 10% level of significance with p-values of 0.01, 0.02 and 0.01 respectively. This implies that only one construct out of three in university context and two constructs out of four in self-efficacy have a significant influence on entrepreneurial interest of MBA students in IAU while no constructs out of the three for relational support have any significant influence on students' entrepreneurial interest. The results of the university environment and self-efficacy is similar to [Trivedi \(2017\)](#), [Ababtain and Akinwale \(2019\)](#) and [De Moraes et al. \(2018\)](#), and that of relational support is in line with [Bachiri \(2016\)](#) but differ from that of [Ozaralli and Rivenburgh \(2016\)](#) and [Gelaidan and Abdullateef \(2017\)](#). The value of pseudo R-square (0.24) indicates that the model is moderately fitted.

This clearly shows that MBA students in IAU did not perceive relational support from family and friends as a significant factor influencing their interest, and this might be as a result of lack of support by friends and family for them to start their own businesses. Rather, many of their relations might prefer them searching for employment in private companies or government establishments. Moreso, the university environment context has not been able to influence the entrepreneurial interest as it was hypothesized as only one out of three constructs is significant. University context though significant, has not been able to inspire the students to start their own businesses as expected but the knowledge acquired from the university influences the level of entrepreneurial interest. Self-efficacy significantly impacts entrepreneurial interest though this can also be improved as there is need for MBA students to be more confident to start their own businesses having learnt the necessary skills to start a business venture.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship has been highlighted as one of the sustainable solutions to unemployment as well as wealth creation. This study therefore examines the linkages between relational support, self-efficacy, university environment context and entrepreneurial interest among the MBA students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. The results show that university environment context, relational support and self-efficacy have a great likelihood of influencing entrepreneurial interest of the MBA students. Meanwhile, university context and self-efficacy have a significant impact on the level of MBA students' entrepreneurial interest, relational support does not have an impact.

Table 2: Ordered Logit Regression Results for the level of MBA Students' Entrepreneurial Interest in Starting Own Business

Explanatory variables	B	z-Statistic	Prob (p-value)	Odd-ratio Exp(B)
I am confident that my family and siblings will support me if I start a business (R ₁)	0.20	0.40	0.69	1.22
I am confident that my friends will support me if I start a business (R ₂)	0.12	0.24	0.81	1.12
Nobody will support me if I start a business of my own (R ₃)	0.22	0.45	0.65	1.25
My university environment encourages me to engage in entrepreneurial activities (U ₁)	-0.54	-1.59	0.11	0.58
The atmosphere at my university inspires me to develop new business ideas (U ₂)	0.38	0.85	0.39	1.46
The knowledge of entrepreneurship in my university has enabled me to know the actions I need to take to start my own business (U ₃)	0.82	2.6	0.01	2.27
Starting a firm and keeping it viable would be easy for me (S ₁)	0.18	0.44	0.66	1.20
I am confident I have all the necessary skills to start a business (S ₂)	0.60	1.50	0.13	1.82
Starting a business by myself is a great opportunity for success (S ₃)	0.99	2.24	0.02	2.69
I believe I could operate a successful small business (S ₄)	1.84	2.43	0.01	6.30
Pseudo R-squared	0.24			
Prob(LR statistic)	0.001			
Sample	46			

The managerial implication of the study indicates that there is need for the university to create an environment that would motivate MBA students to start a business while schooling. The environment and the support of the university in terms of business idea generation, nurturing, mentoring, finances and business advisory are expected to improve the entrepreneurship confidence of the MBA students which fosters self-efficacy. It is also necessary for the government and private organizations to sensitize the general public so that they would be enlightened on what entrepreneurship entails, so as to provide relational support for their relatives who are interested in starting their own businesses. This would go a long way to develop a large number of entrepreneurial youths who would start a viable business which may lead to sustainable development instead of them searching for jobs that are not always available.

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