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Fostering Entrepreneurship in Universities: Analyzing attitude, subjective norms and risk taking on student entrepreneurial intentions

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Abstract

This study examines student entrepreneurial intention affected by attitude and subjective norms among undergraduate Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students. The independent variables consist of attitudes and subjective norms. This study applied quantitative and cross-sectional design to 317 students from UiTM across Malaysia. The data was collected through a survey questionnaire using a simple random sampling technique. The findings indicate a positive relationship between attitude and subjective norms in shaping students' intention to be entrepreneurs in the future. Understanding these factors will inform both educational practices and serve as guidance for policy initiatives aimed at fostering youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Intention, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Undergraduate Students, Malaysia

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1.0 Introduction

The graduate unemployment rate in Malaysia stands at 4.3%, prompting the government to encourage self-employment among university graduates (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021). Recognizing the increasing difficulty for young graduates to secure jobs aligned with their qualifications, Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education has integrated entrepreneurial elements into university curricula. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has taken a proactive role in this effort, emphasizing entrepreneurship within its academic programs. UiTM's 2025 Strategic Plan and Strategic Theme 2 aim to produce entrepreneurial and well-balanced graduates, with a target of 10% becoming competitive entrepreneurs locally and globally. This reflects the university's commitment to nurturing entrepreneurial talent within a supportive ecosystem. Malaysia's rapid economic growth and global integration, entrepreneurship is now viewed as a critical driver of socio-economic development. The government advocates entrepreneurship as a viable career path to enhance national prosperity and reduce youth unemployment (Ambad & Damit, 2016; Wei et al., 2019). Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of attitude, subjective norms, and risk-taking on entrepreneurial intention among undergraduate university students. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of attitude, subjective norms and risk taking on entrepreneurial intention among undergraduate university students.

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Specifically, there are three research objectives:

- i. To determine the relationship between attitude and entrepreneurial intention
- ii. To identify the effect of subjective norms towards entrepreneurial intention
- iii. To study the relationship between risk taking and entrepreneurial intention

2.0 Literature Review

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) has garnered significant attention in academic research, particularly as a predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour. In Malaysia, this interest is amplified by national initiatives aimed at fostering innovation-driven economic growth and reducing unemployment through entrepreneurship. Understanding the factors influencing EI among Malaysians is thus pivotal for both policymakers and educators. Recent empirical studies have explored various determinants of EI within the Malaysian context. For instance, Husin et al. (2023) employed Structural Equation Modeling to assess the impact of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and entrepreneurial knowledge on university students' EI. Their findings indicate that while attitude, subjective norms, and entrepreneurial knowledge positively influence EI, perceived behavioral control does not exhibit a significant effect. Similarly, Mohd Yusof and Sulaiman (2025) utilized the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior to examine EI among public university students. Their study confirmed that attitude towards behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly predict EI, highlighting the psychological underpinnings of entrepreneurial decision-making. Furthermore, Mohamed Mohan et al. (2024) explored the influence of entrepreneurial behavior, motivation, and risk-taking propensity on EI among fresh graduates in Klang Valley. Their study revealed that while entrepreneurial behavior and motivation positively affect EI, entrepreneurial skills do not have a significant impact, prompting a reevaluation of how such skills are taught and developed.

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) has been used in recent years as a theoretical framework to explain university students' entrepreneurial intention. TPB is the fundamental theory for explaining entrepreneurial intention (Duong et al., 2020). The theory offers a critical and appropriate framework to explain individual planned behavior and thus allows researchers to predict entrepreneurial intention with consideration of both individual and social factors concurrently (Liñán & Chen, 2009). Original TPB contains three variables that affect entrepreneurial intention, namely perceived behavioral control (PBC, i.e., individuals evaluating a to-be-executed behavior according to its ease of execution), attitude toward entrepreneurship (personal belief in certain behaviors or actions, such as entrepreneurial spirit), and subjective norms (an individual's views on what people around them or people of influence, e.g., parents, friends, or coworkers, think about a certain behavior (starting business ventures). These variables were found to directly predict the entrepreneurial intention of entrepreneurs (Al-Jubari, 2019; Ajzen, 1991).

2.2 Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurship intention (EI) defined as a person's goal that conformed with his or her cognition and experience to design entrepreneur activities (Do & Dadvari, 2017). It is widely recognised as one of the most important motivational predictors that influence individual behaviour in the course of business creation (Nguyen et al., 2019). According to Barba-Sánchez and Atienza-Sahuquillo (2018), any entrepreneurial endeavour must begin with a clear sense of purpose in order to succeed. According to the findings of Wei et al (2019), EI has a considerable impact on students' attitudes regarding environmental issues. Similarly, Jena (2020) stated that attitudes are the most important factor in determining a person's EI. Do and Dadvari (2017) discovered that having an entrepreneurial spirit had a favourable impact on employee engagement. As a result, EI that is created and inculcated during the early stages of life is specifically targeted at students and is regarded a crucial process in preparing students to become entrepreneurs or to participate in any entrepreneurial activity in the development stage. As a result, the higher a student's EI, the greater the likelihood that the student will pursue a career as an entrepreneur. In addition, Wardana et al., (2024) aimed to study entrepreneurial intentions of students in Indonesia's East Java Province. The findings indicate that subjective norms, role models, and needs for achievement affect students' entrepreneurial intention.

2.3 Attitude

Attitude toward a behavior refers to "the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question" (Ajzen, 1991). Student's own opinions about a particular habit or action, such as entrepreneurship, are reflected in their attitude (Al-Jubari, 2019). A positive attitude among students is more helpful to increase student's intention in engaging in entrepreneurship (Ambad et al., 2016). Empirical research had shown that a student's attitude about entrepreneurship has the biggest impact on their desire to become an entrepreneur (Al-Jubari, 2019; Ambad et al., 2016; Hamiruzzaman et al., 2020). Recent study by Taneja et al (2023) investigated direct impact of entrepreneurial attitude (EA) on entrepreneurial intention. Data was collected from 669 students, enrolled in entrepreneurial courses/programs. Punjab, Haryana, India. The finding found that there is a direct and strong influence of entrepreneurial attitude on entrepreneurial intention. In addition, Saufi and Hong (2024) showed attitude as key factors to social entrepreneurship intention between university students in Malaysia. Thus, this study formulates the following hypothesis: H1: Attitude has a positive effect on Entrepreneur Intention (EI).

2.4 Subjective Norms

Subjective norms refer to an individual's personal impression about how others in their immediate social circle, such as parents, relatives, and neighbors, would react to them engaged in or not engaged in a particular behavior, such as entrepreneur (Al-Jubari, 2019). Students are more confident to become entrepreneurs if they have strong support from family and relatives (Ambad et al., 2016). Thus, students may seek guidance and encouragement from those around them, and their views may impact whether or not to participate in entrepreneurial action (Al-Jubari, 2019). Subjective norm has a positive and considerable influence on the intention of young entrepreneurs, according to empirical research (Al-Jubari, 2019). Chin et al (2023) revealed subjective norms has positive effect entrepreneurial intentions based on responses from 220 final-year students registered from a final-year entrepreneurship module of private universities Malaysian students. Similarly, recent study by Hence, the above discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H²: Subjective norm (SN) has direct effect on EI.

2.5 Risk Taking

Risk taking can be defined as individual acting in a way that presents a risk to oneself or others and involves voluntarily accepting the possibility of failures. Individuals with high-risk tolerance are likely to make more excellent progress in starting a business since they do not attach too much importance to the risk and focus more time, energy and resources on starting a business (de Caroliset al., 2009). A sense of regret for missing a profit opportunity serves to encourage people to take risks, thereby increasing their entrepreneurial intentions (Bergner et al., 2022). A study by Maheshwari (2024) aims to measure the EI of students in Vietnam. Data were collected from 393 undergraduate/post-graduate university students using an online survey. Risk-propensity was found to have a direct influence on students' entrepreneurship intentions. Thus, below hypothesis was formulated:

H³: Risk Taking have significant effects on entrepreneurial intention.

2.6 Research Framework

The purpose of this study is to identify the determinants of students' entrepreneurial intention to become an entrepreneur. The research framework depicted in Figure 1.

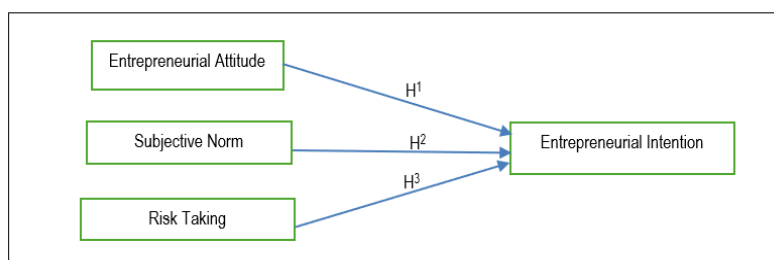


Fig 1: Research Framework of the study

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional approach. The unit of analysis for this study was the individual, specifically undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. The target population comprised students who had completed at least one entrepreneurship course offered by the university. This criterion was established to ensure that respondents had foundational knowledge of entrepreneurship theories and had participated in entrepreneurship-related activities as part of their coursework, thereby enhancing the relevance and reliability of their responses. A total of 317 completed responses were obtained through simple random sampling, which was employed to minimize sampling bias and provide every eligible student an equal opportunity to participate. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a minimum sample of approximately 300 is sufficient for a population size exceeding 10,000, thus the sample size in this study was deemed adequate for statistical analysis and generalizability.

The study employed a survey methodology for data collection, utilizing a carefully constructed questionnaire as the primary research instrument. To accommodate participants' language preferences, the questionnaire was made available in both English and Malay. The instruments were adapted from Zaremohzzabieh et al. (2016). All items were rated on a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 10 = Strongly Agree. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via an internet-based platform (Google Forms). This approach was chosen for its efficiency in reaching a wide geographical distribution of students across various UiTM campuses and for its cost-effectiveness. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire underwent pre-testing to ensure clarity and content validity. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent demographics and key variables, while inferential statistics, including correlation were employed to examine the relationships among the study variables. The procedures adopted ensured methodological rigor, ethical compliance, and the reliability of findings.

4.0 Findings

The respondents in the study majority female students (75.7%), mostly in the range age of 21-23 years old (55.8%) and 18-20 years old (34.4%). The range of age shows respondents are from diploma and degree level of studying at UiTM. Interestingly, 60.3% respondents does not have entrepreneurial family background who have business, while remaining 39.7% of the respondents come from entrepreneur family background.

4.1 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the scale is determined by computing the coefficient alpha. So, the traditional method specifically of Cronbach alpha was conducted to determine the reliability of the items included in the study. Based on Nunally (1978) suggestions, the better coefficient alpha is above 0.70 and this has also been admitted by Sekaran and Bougie (2010). Table 1 represents the result of Cronbach's Alpha for Entrepreneurial Intention, Attitude, Subjective Norms and Risk Taking variables were above 0.7 as suggested by Sekaran and Bougie (2010). It showed the entire variables are acceptable and reliable in measuring the response.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Variables	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Dependent variable		
Entrepreneurial Intention	8	0.976
Independent Variables		
Entrepreneurial Attitude	6	0.911
Subjective Norm	5	0.722
Risk Taking	4	0.931

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The summary result of the correlation testing in this study was showed in Table 2. The analysis shows a strong positive correlation between entrepreneurial attitude and entrepreneurial intention ($r = .805$, $p < .001$), indicating that students with a more positive attitude toward entrepreneurship are significantly more likely to exhibit stronger entrepreneurial intentions. This finding supports Hypothesis 1 and confirms that entrepreneurial attitude plays a vital role in shaping intention, aligning with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits attitude as a key determinant of intention.

The results reveal a moderate positive correlation between subjective norms and entrepreneurial intention ($r = .502$, $p < .001$), suggesting that perceived social pressure or support from peers, family, or mentors has a significant impact on a student's intention to become an entrepreneur. This supports Hypothesis 2 and reinforces the TPB framework, where subjective norms reflect the influence of important referents in shaping behavioral intentions.

The findings demonstrate a strong positive correlation between risk-taking and entrepreneurial intention ($r = .768$, $p < .001$), indicating that students who are more comfortable with taking risks are more inclined to pursue entrepreneurial careers. All three research objectives are empirically supported by statistically significant relationships, suggesting that entrepreneurial attitude, subjective norms, and risk-taking propensity are key predictors of entrepreneurial intention among university students.

Table 2. Result of Pearson Correlation and Hypothesis Testing

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Pearson Correlation	P Value (P<0.05)	Result	Hypothesis
Entrepreneurial Intention	Entrepreneurial Attitude	.805**	<.001	Significant	Supported
	Subjective Norms	.502**	<.001	Significant	Supported
	Risk Taking	.768**	<.001	Significant	Supported

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

5.0 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that entrepreneurial attitude exerts a strong and significant influence on entrepreneurial intention among UiTM students. This suggests that students who hold positive perceptions of entrepreneurship—such as viewing it as a desirable, rewarding, or meaningful career path—are more likely to express the intention to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. This result supports Hypothesis 1 (H1) and aligns with prior studies (Taneja et al., 2023; Hamiruzzaman et al., 2020; Al-Jubari, 2019), which emphasized attitude as a key motivational factor in entrepreneurship. In the Malaysian context, particularly within UiTM's educational framework where entrepreneurship courses are compulsory, students are exposed early to business simulations, ideation, and micro-enterprise activities. These experiences appear to shape students' mindsets and self-efficacy toward entrepreneurship positively. However, the strength of this influence also reflects a broader cultural shift in Malaysia, where entrepreneurship is increasingly promoted by government initiatives such as TEKUN Nasional, SUPERB, and 1MET, aimed at reducing graduate unemployment and fostering self-employment. Therefore, cultivating a favorable entrepreneurial attitude in higher education is not only desirable but essential for the success of national entrepreneurship development strategies.

The study also confirms that subjective norms significantly affect entrepreneurial intention, though the strength of this relationship is moderate. This finding supports Hypothesis 2 (H2) and is consistent with the work of Sulaiman et al. (2024) and Chin et al. (2024), who found that while social pressure does influence entrepreneurial intention, it may not be the dominant driver among Malaysian youth. For UiTM students, the influence of family expectations, peer involvement in entrepreneurial ventures, and faculty encouragement play meaningful roles. However, in contrast to more collectivist Asian societies like Japan or China—where family pressure can be a major determinant—Malaysian students may still prioritize personal attitude and self-efficacy over conformity to societal expectations. This nuanced finding reflects a changing socio-cultural landscape in Malaysia, where youths are encouraged to be job creators rather than job seekers, yet parental preference for stable, government or corporate employment still lingers. The implication here is that for entrepreneurship education to have maximal effect, it must also engage stakeholders such as parents, mentors, and alumni to create a broader ecosystem of support for aspiring student entrepreneurs.

Additionally, the study found that risk-taking propensity has a strong and positive relationship with entrepreneurial intention, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3 (H3). This aligns with Maheshwari (2024), who posits risk-taking as a distinguishing psychological trait among entrepreneurs. In the Malaysian university context, students with higher tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty are more likely to envision entrepreneurship as a viable path. For UiTM students, this may be linked to the university's emphasis on hands-on entrepreneurial experiences, such as running temporary businesses through entrepreneurship carnivals or business expos. However, it is crucial to consider that risk appetite may be constrained by financial insecurity, cultural expectations, or fear of failure—factors often more pronounced among students from B40 (lower-income) families, which make up a significant portion of UiTM's student demographic. Hence, while risk-taking appears as a strong predictor, institutional and financial support systems (e.g., seed grants, mentoring, incubation programs) are necessary to translate this intention into action.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study draws on Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explore attitudes, subjective norms and risk taking on entrepreneurial intention among UiTM students. Based on responses from 317 respondents, result indicated that attitudes and risk taking have strong positive and significant impact towards entrepreneurial intention. On the other hand, subjective norms found to have moderate positive effect on entrepreneurial intention of UiTM undergraduate students.

From a theoretical perspective, the study reinforces the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in the Malaysian educational context, but also suggests the value of extending the model to include personality traits such as risk-taking. This calls for future research to explore more integrated frameworks that combine social, cognitive, and personality factors.

Practically, these findings carry significant implications for entrepreneurship education policy and program design. Universities like UiTM should continue embedding experiential learning into the curriculum while also addressing the psychological and social dimensions of entrepreneurship. Faculty should be trained not just to deliver content but also to mentor students and cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets. Furthermore, engagement with parents, alumni entrepreneurs, and industry partners could amplify the impact of subjective norms and provide students with relatable role models.

In conclusion, the study highlights that while attitude and risk-taking are strong predictors, a supportive social environment remains essential. For Malaysia's broader entrepreneurial ecosystem to thrive, especially among the younger generation, a holistic and inclusive approach is needed—one that bridges academic, social, and policy efforts.

As with any study, our study is not without its limitations. First, this study is limited by its design, which was cross-sectional in nature. Future studies may adopt longitudinal designs to explore entrepreneurial intention evolve over time. Secondly, the scope of the research was confined to undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). While UiTM represents one of the largest public universities in Malaysia and houses a diverse student population, the findings may not be fully representative of undergraduates from other public or private universities across the country. Future studies should aim to broaden the sampling frame to include multiple universities and a more heterogeneous population, which would enhance the external validity of the findings. In addition, the study did not account for potential moderating or mediating variables such as perceived behavioral control, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, family business background, or exposure to real-life entrepreneurial role models. These factors may significantly influence the strength or direction of the relationships between the predictors and entrepreneurial intention. Future research could extend the current model by integrating these variables to better explain the complexity of entrepreneurial decision-making.

In summary, while the current study provides valuable insights into the determinants of entrepreneurial intention among UiTM students, its limitations open avenues for future exploration. Addressing these gaps will help build a more holistic understanding of youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia, thereby contributing to the design of more effective educational policies and support systems to cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study supports the idea that attitude, risk-taking, and subjective norms significantly influence entrepreneurial intention among students. The empirical evidence affirms the relevance of the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** in explaining entrepreneurial decision-making within the Malaysian educational context. The findings offer practical implications for **educators and policymakers**, who play a critical role in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset of future graduates. Higher education institutions and national policymakers can design more targeted entrepreneurship education programs, risk-management training, and peer engagement strategies to nurture entrepreneurial talent by understanding the key psychological and social factors that drive entrepreneurial intention.

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