

# ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILL ACQUISITION, PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS AND YOUTH'S SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The study aimed to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial skill acquisition, self-motivation, social influence and self-employment practice among Malaysian university graduates. Arguably, the technological advancement in any country could be made possible through innovative sciences, ideas and utilizing uncommon opportunities; and entrepreneurship is the best way to achieve this. Studies have shown that skill acquisition is the most critical factor in utilizing entrepreneurship opportunity for self-employment. However, researches have reported that most of entrepreneurship graduates from Malaysian universities do not go into entrepreneurship practice five years after graduation. To examine whether self-motivation and social influence could be possible reasons, the study adopted a survey method and a proportionate stratified random sampling method to collect data from 600 entrepreneurship graduates. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation method. One of the findings indicated that self-motivation had higher influence on self-employment than social influence; though both had significant positive relationships. It was also found that most Malaysian youth graduates had low risk-taking propensity. The study recommended that parents, government, universities and youth organizations should place more emphasize on ability to create value to the society, as learning outcome, rather than on grades (As). This would produce creative and analytical thinking and problem-solving skills among the students, leading to enterprise creation after graduation.*

**Keywords:** Skill acquisition, psycho-social factors, self-employment, Malaysian graduates.

## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship development is considered a vital link to an overall economic growth of a nation through its positive impact on economic development especially at the grassroots (Barringer & Ireland, 2012; Weihrich et al. 2008). Entrepreneurships help to create wealth and reduce unemployment, produce creativity and innovation, and increase the total production of a country (Shane, 2003). Arguably, the technological advancement or transformation in any country mostly can be made possible through innovative sciences, ideas and utilizing uncommon opportunities; and entrepreneurship is the best way to achieve this. People become gainfully employed through vocational training and skill acquisition (Ebong & Asodike, 2011; Ikegwu, 2014; Nwanaka & Amaehule, 2011).

Globally, entrepreneurship skill acquisition programs introduced into educational institutions were meant to provide the level of education or knowledge needed to exploit entrepreneurial opportunity which could help the economic development of such countries (Emaikwu, 2011; Shane, 2003), and studies have shown that skill acquisition is the most critical factor in the utilization of entrepreneurship opportunity for self-employment (Ekpe et al., 2012).

In line with this, the Malaysian government has put in place several entrepreneurship development programs, including the introduction of entrepreneurship courses and establishment of entrepreneurship departments in various universities in the country in order to train aspiring entrepreneurs. The aim of such programs was to impact skills, attitudes, aspirations and competencies mostly in the youths, and provides micro-credit, to enable them practice entrepreneurship or create self-employment as well as help generate employment for others (Abdullah et al., 2009; Samian & Buntat, 2012).

Each year, many students graduate from Malaysian public universities. For example, from the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan 2013 Convocation, a total of 538 Bachelor Degree students graduated in 2013 (Konvokesyen Ke-3, 2013, pp.18, 73-86). This number is a result of high school enrolment and attendance in the country. With such level of graduates, their contribution to the national economy is quite high in term skill, knowledge and competencies; and to their families in terms of financial supports. In this way, they are highly empowered to contribute positively to national economic, political and social policies as well as participate in community decisions affecting them. However, despite the numerous government entrepreneurship development programs and the importance of entrepreneurial skill acquisition to self-employment practice, it is observed, and previous studies have also reported, that most of entrepreneurship graduates from Malaysian universities do not go into entrepreneurship practice five years after graduation by identifying and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities (Abdullah et al., 2009; Samian & Buntat, 2012). The question is: what could be the hindering factors? Could it be due to self-motivation and/or social influence?

Previous studies were available on the relationship between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial opportunity or self-employment (Abdullah et al., 2009; Ikegwu, 2014; Nwanaka & Amaehule, 2011; Ojo, 2009; Onuoha et al. 2013; Samian & Buntat, 2012) but there was scarcity of research that empirically measured entrepreneurial skill acquisition and self-employment practice, with psycho-social factors (self-motivation and social influence) as moderators especially in developing country like Malaysia. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition could not lead to self-employment practice without considering entrepreneur's characteristics or attitudes such as self-motivation, and social influence of friends, relatives, advisors and mentors.

Motivation is a general term applying to the entire class of drives, desires, needs, wishes and similar forces (Wehrich et al., 2008). As such, an individual can be motivated by personal drive or desire to achieve success. Attitudinal studies (e.g Ajzen, 1991) have also shown that a person's attitude correlates with his/her intention or commitment. Previous literature (Amadi, 2012; Ojo, 2009; Shane, 2003) have agreed that entrepreneurial skill acquisition is positively related to opportunity for self-employment. However, self-motivation can aid or hamper this relationship because a graduate who had received entrepreneurial skill acquisition may not venture into entrepreneurship practice if he/she is risk-averse characterized person, has a negative attitude to hard work, and misuses the acquired knowledge, talent or skill. This is in line with human development and welfare issues which places the 'individual' at the centre of employees' motivation. It is also observed that Malaysia does not have entrepreneurship programs at the Primary and Secondary School levels like other developing countries such as Nigeria; as such there is no enough motivation for youth entrepreneurs.

Again, it has been observed that the society, especially in developing countries, looks down on entrepreneurship compared to paid jobs upon graduation. Poor perceptions mostly come from social networks such as friends, family members, role models and advisors (Emaikwu, 2011; Mayer et al., 2007; Shastri & Sinha, 2010) and this can hinder entrepreneurial skill

acquisition from maturing into self-employment practice. Hence, the inclusion of psycho-social factors (self-motivation and social influence) as moderators, and their empirical measurements in this study is a novel contribution which helped to strengthen the existing theories on entrepreneurship.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study is linked with Schumpeter 1942 Entrepreneurship Theory (Jones & Wadhvani, 2006); Ajzen 1991 Theory of Planned Behaviour; and Blau 1964 Social Exchange Theory. For example, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) explains that social change and stability result from negotiated exchanges between parties. That is, human relationships are formed through subjective cost-benefit analysis. It could be argued that the country's investment in giving entrepreneurial education to the youths should be reciprocated with self-employment and employment generation among the youths.

### **Entrepreneurial skill acquisition**

Entrepreneurial skill acquisition is a process whereby a person acquires or learns a particular skill or type of behavior needed for business through training or education (Amadi, 2012; Chukwunenye & Igboke, 2011; Ibru, 2009; IFC, 2007) in order to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunity for self-employment (Samian & Buntat, 2012; Stohmeyer, 2007). It also helps entrepreneurs to acquire self-confidence, self-esteem and participate in decision-making at household and community levels (Cheston & Kuhn, 2002; Rufai et al., 2013). Skill training and tertiary education could lead to business opportunities and impact on entrepreneurship (Emaikwu, 2011; Gatewood et al., 2004). Exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunity also depends on the entrepreneur's level of education, skills or knowledge acquired through training, work experience and social network (Shane, 2003; Shastri & Sinha (2010). Training and/or education produce prior experience which leads to preparedness for entrepreneurial activity (Shane, 2003).

The awareness of the need for entrepreneurial skill training and supports in order to stimulate entrepreneurial activity and reduce business failure have been increased among stakeholders in the industry, business and government of many countries because entrepreneurs could be born or made (Abdullah et al., 2009). It is also a vital source of developing human capital (Brana, 2008; Ikegwu, 2014). Though Rufai et al. (2013) and Dasmani (2011) found that entrepreneurship graduates could not get employment because they possessed low skills and low self-confidence required by industries since there was no industrial exposures while in school, however; numerous studies asserted that skill training and tertiary education could lead to entrepreneurial activity or self-employment (Amadi, 2012; Salman, 2009; Stohmeyer, 2007). Skill acquisition training was found to have positive effect on entrepreneurial activity in Nigeria (Ebong et al., 2011; Ibru, 2009; Ikegwu, 2014). Skill acquisition training was found to have positive effect on entrepreneurial activity in France (Brana, 2008). Skill acquisition training had positive impact on entrepreneurial opportunity in Germany (Stohmeyer, 2007). Skill acquisition training was also found to have positive effect on entrepreneurial activity in Malaysia (Samian & Buntat, 2012). We therefore hypothesized that:

*H1: Entrepreneurial skill acquisition is positively related to self-employment practice among youth graduates.*

## Self-motivation

Wehrich et al. (2008) refers to motivation as a general term applying to the entire class of drives, desires, needs, wishes and similar forces. Therefore, one can be motivated by personal/self drive or desire to achieve success. Attitude towards behaviour means the degree to which an individual has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). For entrepreneurial intentions to be translated into self-employment, it depends on the entrepreneur's personality and abilities (Majumdar, 2008). Studies, such as Crisp and Turner (2007), found that attitude and behavioural intentions are positively related; and attitude towards behaviour leads to intention which eventually leads to actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It has also been posited by previous literature (Emaikwu, 2011; Onuoha et al. 2013; Salman, 2009; Shane, 2003; Stohmeyer, 2007) that skill training and tertiary education could lead to entrepreneurial activity or self-employment. Other studies also found a positive relationship between skill acquisition and self-employment (Kickul et al., 2007; Ojo, 2009; Samian & Buntat, 2012). However, self-motivation can aid or hamper these variables' relationship because an entrepreneurship graduate may not venture into self-employment if he/she is not determined to work hard, is risk-averse or misuses the acquired skill (Udida et al., 2012). This is in line with attitudinal studies (e.g Ajzen, 1991) which place the 'individual' at the centre of employees' motivation. We therefore hypothesized that:

*H2: Self-motivation is positively related self-employment practice among youth graduates.*

## Social influence

Similarly, the acquired skill may not lead to self-employment if there is a negative social influence. Social influence involves the social ties, the influence of friends and family, role models and advisors. This could affect aspiring entrepreneur's decision for self-employment (Asikhia, 2010; Shastri & Sinha, 2010). Society's perception about, and attitude towards, entrepreneurship is poor (Mayer et al., 2007); whereas social networks was found to be positively related to entrepreneurial opportunity for self-employment in USA, UK and Nigeria respectively (Carter & Shaw, 2006; Lawal et al., 2009; Shane, 2003). Perceived social environment also had positive impact on students' entrepreneurial intentions in China (Yun & Yuan-qiong, 2010). A weak relation was found to exist between social norms and entrepreneurial intention, indicating that social environment affect individual's attitude to entrepreneurial intention (Ajzen, 1991; Kruger, 2004). On the other hand, Vob and Muller (2009) concluded that entrepreneur's behaviour towards entrepreneurial activity is influenced by a set of factors such as personality in form of attitude, resources and environment. Other studies concluded that the possession of education, right attitude to risk, motivation and work experience aside; social environment could hinder identification and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunity (Ekpe & Mat, 2012; Shastri & Sinha, 2010). However; Nasurdin et al. (2009) found that social identity (appreciation from family, friends and society if someone becomes an entrepreneur) did not have any significant relationship with entrepreneurial intentions in Malaysia. We therefore hypothesized that:

*H3: Social influence is positively related to self-employment practice among youth graduates.*

## METHODOLOGY

### Survey Procedures

Using structured questionnaire, a survey of entrepreneurship university graduates from three public universities in Malaysia Peninsula who had received entrepreneurial skill training on business start-up, was employed. The questionnaires were mailed to the respondents through their contact addresses provided by their university alumni offices. Stratified random sampling was adopted to select the sample members from the research population. The population for this study was degree graduates, from Faculties of Business and Entrepreneurship, who studied entrepreneurship from Malaysian public universities and graduated from year 2009 upwards. The method was used because business and entrepreneurship faculties of the universities offer similar courses. The respondents were sourced from the convocation list and database of their previous universities, as were provided by their alumni offices. From 2009 to 2014 is five years. The benchmark of year 2009 was chosen because previous studies have found that five years period was enough for aspiring entrepreneur to start business after graduation (Stohmeyer, 2007); and to transit from practical or managerial experience resulting from paid employment to self-employment (Gatewood et al., 2004; Ikegwu, 2014).

Though scholars (e.g. Cavana et al., 2001; Hair et al., 2010; Pallant, 2007) have suggested different methods for sample size determination; however in this study, a sample size determination for finite population by Israel (1992) based on Yamane's (1967) formula ( $n = N/1+N(e)^2$ ) was adopted; where  $n$  is the required sample size,  $N$  is the population size and 'e' is the error margin or the alpha level. With a total population of 600 students from the three university business faculties, a sample size of 240 students was chosen. However, 221 questionnaires were returned of which data for 121 respondents were usable for the analysis. Data analysis was done through descriptive statistics and correlation method.

### Measures

Entrepreneurial skill training was measured as skill acquisition, general or business training, in line with previous studies (e.g. Kickul et al., 2007). Self-motivation was measured in terms of determination to succeed (Osunloye, 2008). Social influence was regarded as influence of friends, families, role models and advisors, and the measures were adapted from Kennedy et al. (2003). Self-employment was defined in terms of the tendency to engage in new business or business expansion; and measured in line with Shane (2003), Tata and Prasad (2008). All measures are tapped on a 4-point scale.

## RESULTS

### Data cleaning

The data used were free from errors. For instance, outliers were detected by comparing the Mahalanobis distance ( $D^2$ ) or chi-square value of each respondent with the critical or table chi-square value, using the number of predictor variables as the degrees of freedom, at  $p < 0.001$  (Hair et al., 2010). Extreme observations in a sufficient number of variables in multivariate and univariate detections were deleted (Hair et al., 2010). Normality was handled through skewness and kurtosis. Observations with Z-score above or below the critical value of 1.96, at  $p = 0.05$

were deleted (Hair et al., 2010). Linearity was detected through Pearson correlation matrix and all predictors correlated with the criterion variable. The output of the hierarchical regression analysis indicated that the error term (as indicated by Durbin Watson statistics) were all within the recommended range of 1.50-2.50. There was no case of multicollinearity as the collinearity statistics of the regression output indicated Tolerance > 0.10, Variance Inflationary Factor < 10 and Condition Index < 30 in most cases (Hair et al., 2010). Homoscedasticity (equality of variance) was verified through an examination of the residuals of the regression output which showed no clear relationship between the residual and the predicted values (Coakes & Steed, 2003).

### Goodness of measures

The principal component analysis (EFA) for entrepreneurial skill acquisition revealed the presence of one component with eigenvalues greater than one, using Varimax with Kaiser's normalization rotation method. This one component was renamed 'training gave me assurance for success'. The naming was done according to the items with the highest factor loadings in the component. The one component explained a total variance of 78.33%. Communalities were above 0.6 for most variables, anti-image (MSA) was above 0.5 for each item and Barlett's test of sphericity (sig.) was 0.000 which was <0.05. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin' measure of sampling adequacy was 0.929 and factor loadings were above 0.5 as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Self-motivation converged into two components renamed 'I do not fear risk-taking if I start business' and 'I attended most seminars on enterprise start-up' with a total variance explained as 64.57%. Communalities were above 0.6 for most items, MSA was also above 0.5 and Barlett's test of sphericity (sig.) was 0.000. Factor loadings were above 0.5 and KMO was 0.789. Social influence converged into two components renamed 'I have discussed my business ideas with my parents' and 'I will only start business if close friends agree' with a total variance explained as 77.21%. Communalities were above 0.6 for most items, MSA was also above 0.5 and Barlett's test of sphericity (sig.) was 0.000. Factor loadings were above 0.5 and KMO was 0.732. Self-employment practice (criterion variable) converged into one component renamed 'skill acquisition gave me opportunity to start a business' with a total variance explained as 68.03%. Communalities were above 0.6 for most items, MSA was above 0.5 and Barlett's test of sphericity (sig.) was 0.000. Factor loadings were above 0.5 and KMO was 0.616.

For proper understanding of the data analysis procedure, it is not out of place to state here that, after the principal component factor analysis (EFA), the data were standardized by finding the mean of items of each factor or construct which then became the variables for subsequent analyses such as 'reliability'.

Reliability test was performed on the factors after the exploratory factor analysis. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition had Cronbach's alpha of 0.956. Alpha for self-motivation (do not fear risk-taking) was 0.869. Alpha for self-motivation (attended most seminars on start-up) was 0.791. Alpha for social influence (discuss business idea with parents) was 0.885. Alpha for social influence (only start business if close friends agree) was 0.773, and alpha for self-employment practice was 0.768. Among the predictor variables, it is evident that entrepreneurial skill acquisition (M=3.58, SD=0.97), self-motivation (M=3.82, SD=0.79), and social influence (M=3.51, SD=1.00) were the critical factors that influenced self-employment practice among Malaysian youth graduates. The implication here is that, although skill acquisition is imparted upon the youths by the educational institutions, self-determination of the youths themselves and

the encouragement from the society are also required to result in self-employment among the youths as well as employment generation for others in the country. Therefore, more advocacy programs are needed to solicit interest for self-employment among the youths and the society at large. The result of this descriptive analysis is presented in Table 1.

**Table-1**  
**DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE VARIABLES (MEAN, STD. DEV. & RELIABILITY)**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach' alpha	No. of Items after EFA	Sample size (N)
Skill Acquisition (SA)	3.58	0.97	0.956	8	121
Self-Motivation (SM 1)	3.82	0.79	0.869	5	121
(SM 2)	2.80	0.97	0.791	4	121
Social Influence (SI 1)	3.51	1.00	0.885	4	121
(SI 2)	2.99	1.04	0.773	3	121
Self-Employment (SEP)	4.00	0.71	0.768	3	121

Pearson Correlation analysis was also carried out to test the variables relationships. That is, to show if any relationship exist between the predictor and the criterion variables, and to determine which of the predictor variables has higher influence on criterion variable (self-employment). The result was presented in Table 2.

**Table-2**  
**PEARSON CORRELATION ANALYSIS**

	MSA	MSM1	MSM2	MSI1	MSI2	MSEP
MSA Pearson Correlation	1.000					
Sig. (2-tailed)						
N	121.000					
MSM1 Pearson Correlation	.032	1.000				
Sig. (2-tailed)	.725					
N	121	121.000				
MSM2 Pearson Correlation	.392**	.395**	1.000			
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000				
N	121	121	121.000			
MSI1 Pearson Correlation	.377**	.252**	.422**	1.000		
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005	.000			
N	121	121	121	121.000		
MSI2 Pearson Correlation	.257**	.035	.263**	.330**	1.000	
Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.705	.004	.000		
N	121	121	121	121	121.000	
MSEP Pearson Correlation	.292**	.454**	.219*	.254**	.093	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.016	.005	.309	
N	121	121	121	121	121	121.000

\*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed), \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Dependent Variable: Self-Employment Practice (SEP)

Note: SA=Skill acquisition, SM1=Self-motivation (not fear risk), SM2=Self-motivation (attended most seminars on start-up), SI1=Social influence (discuss business idea with parents), SI2=Social influence (only start business if close friends agree)

From Table 2, it is evident that entrepreneurial skill acquisition (beta .292\*\*,  $p < .01$ ) was positively related to self-employment practice among Malaysian university graduates. Self-motivation (do not fear risk) (beta .454\*\*,  $p < .01$ ) was also positive related to self-employment. Again, another dimension of self-motivation (attended most seminars on start-up) (beta .219\*,  $p < .05$ ) was positively related to self-employment. In addition, social influence (discuss business

idea with parents) ( $\beta = .254^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was positively related to self-employment. However, the other dimension of social influence (only start business if close friends agree) ( $\beta = .093$ ) did not have any influence on self-employment practice among the graduates.

## DISCUSSION

The study set out to examine the relationship between entrepreneurial skill acquisition, self-motivation, social influence and self-employment practice, and what causes low enterprise start-up among Malaysian university graduates, especially those from business and entrepreneurship faculties. The above results proved that all the predictor variables had significant positive relationship with self-employment practice, except friend's influence which was another dimension of social influence. Furthermore, this study found that most Malaysian youth graduates do not venture into enterprise start-up due to lack of self-motivation occasioned by fear of failure risk, coupled with the fact that the government provides most jobs for graduate youths. The private sector also provides better paid jobs to graduates. This low risk-taking propensity may also be the reason while some of the graduates who could not secure better paid or government jobs decided to join their family businesses.

The current findings support previous studies in other contexts that skill acquisition training has positive effect on entrepreneurial activity in Nigeria (Ebong & Asodike, 2011; Ibru, 2009; Ikegwu, 2014), in France (Brana, 2008), in Germany (Stohmeyer, 2007) and in Malaysia (Samian & Buntat, 2012). The study also supported the fact that for entrepreneurial intentions to be translated into self-employment, it depends on the entrepreneur's personality and abilities (Majumdar, 2008). Therefore, self-motivation can only lead to self-employment if the entrepreneur does not fear risk, does not misuse the acquired skill and is determined to work hard (Udida et al., 2012). Similarly, this study also supported Dasmani (2011) who found that low self-confidence hindered youth's employment in Ghana. Previous studies (e.g. Asikhia, 2010; Shastri & Sinha, 2010) have argued that social influence affects aspiring entrepreneur's decision for self-employment because society's perception about, and attitude towards, entrepreneurship is poor (Mayer et al., 2007). In support of previous studies conducted in USA, Nigeria, UK, India, and China respectively (Carter & Shaw, 2006; Ekpe & Mat, 2012; Shane, 2003; Shastri & Sinha, 2010; Yun & Yuan-qiong, 2010), this study found that social influence had positive relationship with self-employment. However; the second dimension of social influence (only start business if close friends agree) had insignificant relationship with self-employment among Malaysian youths. This also supported Nasuridin et al. (2009) who found that social identity (appreciation from family, friends and society if someone becomes an entrepreneur) did not have any significant relationship with entrepreneurial intentions in Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

Generally, the results of this study indicated that entrepreneurial skill acquisition, self-motivation and social influence had significant positive relationship with self-employment among Malaysian graduate youths. Individual coefficients showed that self-motivation had highest positive influence on self-employment than social influence and skill acquisition. It was also found that most Malaysian youth graduates had low risk-taking propensity. The study recommended that parents, government, universities and youth organizations should place more emphasis on ability to create value to the society, as learning outcome, rather than on grades (As). This would produce creative and analytical thinking and problem-solving skills among the



students, leading to enterprise creation after graduation. The youths themselves should have self-confidence in venture creation, and the society should encourage them in this regard. The study is limited to university business faculties. Future studies can investigate graduates from other educational institutions in Malaysia, such as secondary, technical and vocational schools.

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