

## **UNDERSTANDING THE LINKAGES 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. Entrepreneurial interest is seen as the best channel to determine and shape the behavior of people towards entrepreneurship. This paper investigated the link between relational support, self-efficacy, university environment and entrepreneurial interest among 86 students who enrolled for the MBA program at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU), Dammam, Saudi Arabia in the last quarter of 2017. The results from a logistic regression analysis reveal that self-efficacy, university environment and relational support had a great likelihood of influencing the entrepreneurial interest of the MBA students. Furthermore, self-efficacy and the university environment were significantly associated with students' entrepreneurial interest whereas relational support was not. Therefore, it is recommended that the university should create an enabling environment for the students to start their own businesses as this would improve students' self-confidence and self-efficacy. Also, government and the private sector should sensitize the general populace on the need for households to support entrepreneurial students as a primary source of social capital.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial intention; University environment; Self-efficacy; Relational support; MBA students; Entrepreneurship

### **1. 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 of 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 and this creates the need for young graduates to move towards entrepreneurship and self-employment as a career option (Emmanuel *et al.*, 2015). The importance of small businesses and entrepreneurship is growing because of the role it plays in economic development as it allows for creating new ventures that transform new ideas into profit (Turker and Selcuk, 2009; Akinwale, 2018).

Entrepreneurship is considered as a pathway to innovation, economic efficiency, and job creation. The concept has traveled a long way since Schumpeter (1934) recognized it to hold one of the most important advantages for societal growth and employment creation. It is essential to understand entrepreneurial intention and the factors that influence it in order to attain sustainable economic growth (Yıldırım, Çakır and Aşkun, 2016). Fostering entrepreneurship is important for the reason that entrepreneurial activity is a motivator for innovation. It is also important for

technological advancement as well as 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). The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of relational support, self-efficacy and university environment on entrepreneurial interest of postgraduate business students.

Previous entrepreneurship research has focused on entrepreneurs' characteristics and how these affect the decision-making processes (Johnson, 1990; Bonnett and Furnham, 1991). However, entrepreneurs' traits and characteristics cannot be isolated from the environmental, cultural and institutional contexts in which the entrepreneurs operate (Wennekers and Thurik, 1999). While the body of entrepreneurship literature has had a focus on intention-based models, there are scanty studies on the effect of the entrepreneurial environment on students' entrepreneurial intentions (Trivedi, 2017). The university environment plays a critical role in students' attitudes (Abatain and Akinwale, 2019; Fayolle and Liñán, 2014; 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 has shown that family and friends act as role models for the individual and that they have an influence on the student's 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 their 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. The paper is divided into five sections. After this introduction which provides a background for the study, relevant empirical literature is reviewed in section two. Methodology and results are presented in section three and four respectively while section five concludes the paper.

## **2. Literature Review**

This study is situated within the context of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as propounded by Ajzen (1991, 2002). According to the theory of planned behavior, intention to perform a particular act is influenced by three factors: attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms (relational) and perceived behavioral controls (self-efficacy). This indicates that entrepreneurial intention is affected by the degree of favorableness of the behavior towards it, family support, the environment and the self-confidence of the entrepreneur. 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 to develop 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 attitude toward entrepreneurship, subjective norm, 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 on data from 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 is 'structural support' which indicates 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 self-efficacy, risk-taking and the university environment.

Trivedi (2017) conducted a comparative analysis of post-graduate management students in India, Singapore, and Malaysia. The study focused on three important factors that influence entrepreneurial intention, that is, endogenous barriers, exogenous environment, and university environment and support. The results showed that entrepreneurial intention is directly influenced by positive attitude and perceived behavioral control. Moreover, university environment and support as well as the exogenous environment have an indirect but significant influence on the students' entrepreneurial intentions. In a previous research done by Trivedi (2016) it was found that university environment and support have a positive and significant relation with self-efficacy.

Relational support refers to the attitudes of family and friends towards entrepreneurship—whether they approve of it or not (Turker and Selcuk, 2009). Zapkau, Schwens, Steinmetz and Kabst (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 is not significant. Bachiri (2016) conducted a study about determinants of students' entrepreneurial intentions and found that the Moroccan students' entrepreneurial intention is positively influenced by the 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 significant influence on Malaysian students' entrepreneurial intentions. Research on entrepreneurship has consistently emphasised 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. This relationship

was reported to be 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 and Technology graduates of the Indian Institutes 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 found 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 norms, age, ethnic group, and income.

### **3. Methodology**

Primary data were collected for the study using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered on MBA students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University in Dammam, Saudi Arabia to obtain information regarding their entrepreneurial interest and the influence of relational support, university environment munificence and self-efficacy/confidence on shaping entrepreneurial interest. 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) and adapted to Saudi Arabia. This was validated by purposively selecting three experts and two students to give their opinion on whether the questions were adequate for achieving the objectives of the study (Sekaran, 2001; Akinwale, 2017). Feedback 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 the 2017/2018 session. Forty-six (51.7%) out of 89 students returned filled copies of the questionnaire. This response rate was found appropriate for our analysis.

The study used ordered logistic regression for analyzing the data because the dependent variable is categorical data that is arranged in an orderly manner (Brooks, 2008; Akinwale *et al.*, 2018). A diagnostic test was conducted to determine the normality of the data and its suitability for inferential analysis. No heteroskedasticity and serial correlation was reported. This indicates that the model passed the required diagnostic tests conducted. The dependent variable in this study is the level of interest of the students in entrepreneurship (Y). The dependent variable was captured by asking the respondents to rate their level of interest in starting their own businesses in the nearest future. This was ranked on a 5-point Likert-scale.

Three variables were used to proxy relational support (R1, R2, R3) and the university's environment context (U1, U2, U3), while four variables are used to proxy self-efficacy (S1, S2, S3, S4). Each of the variables was captured on a 5-point Likert-scale starting from 'not at all/very low extent' to 'very high extent'. These variables 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 (This is coded in a reverse version)
- 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 by myself is a great opportunity for success
- S4: I believe I could operate a successful small business

The ordered logistic regression model allows for the prediction of the likelihood of outcome variable (entrepreneurial interest). The regression model which would be predicting the logit, that is, the log of the odds of the entrepreneurial interest, is specified as follows:

$$\text{Log (odds)} = \ln \frac{p_1+p_2+\dots+p_j-1}{1-p_1-p_2-\dots-p_{j-1}} = \text{Logit } Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1+ \beta_2X_2 + \dots+ \beta_nX_n \dots (1)$$

Meanwhile, there are ten independent variables which are categorized into three constructs (relational support, self-efficacy and university environment context) and 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,  $\beta_0$  represents the constant and  $\beta_1\dots\beta_n$  represents the coefficient of the independent variables from the first to the last one.

**4. Results and Discussion**

The outcome of the survey shows that 72% of the MBA students have a high level of interest in starting their own businesses in the future, 15% have a low level of interest, while 13% of them have a moderate level of interest. This suggests that majority of the respondents are possibly exposed to entrepreneurship and are willing to start their own business. Table 1 shows that majority (80%) of the sampled postgraduate students are between the ages of 20 and 30 years, and 70% of them are female. The registration of a large number of women in the MBA program could be as a result of the policy to increase the enrolment of women in tertiary education in the country by the Saudi government towards the realization of Vision 2030.

**Table 1: Descriptive Analysis**

Respondent’s demographics	Description	Frequency	%
Entrepreneurial interest level	High	33	72
	Moderate	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 variables on MBA students’ entrepreneurial interest as considered in this paper is shown in Table 2. All the variables have a positive relationship with the MBA students’ entrepreneurial interest except ‘U1’. However, the results also indicate that, three variables are statistically significant at 5%, viz ‘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’ respectively. This implies that only one variable out of three in university context and two variables out of four in self-efficacy have a significant relationship with entrepreneurial interest of MBA students in Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. None of the proxies for relational support has a significant association with students’ entrepreneurial interest. The results on the university environment and self-efficacy are similar to

that of Trivedi (2017), Ababtain and Akinwale (2019) and De Moraes *et al.* (2018). Whereas the result on relational support is in line with Bachiri (2016) but differs 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.

**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 <sub>1</sub> )	0.20	0.40	0.69	1.22
I am confident that my friends will support me if I start a business (R <sub>2</sub> )	0.12	0.24	0.81	1.12
Nobody will support me if I start a business of my own (R <sub>3</sub> )	0.22	0.45	0.65	1.25
My university environment encourages me to engage in entrepreneurial activities (U <sub>1</sub> )	-0.54	-1.59	0.11	0.58
The atmosphere at my university inspires me to develop new business ideas (U <sub>2</sub> )	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 <sub>3</sub> )	0.82	2.6	0.01	2.27
Starting a firm and keeping it viable would be easy for me (S <sub>1</sub> )	0.18	0.44	0.66	1.20
I am confident I have all the necessary skills to start a business (S <sub>2</sub> )	0.60	1.50	0.13	1.82
Starting a business by myself is a great opportunity for success (S <sub>3</sub> )	0.99	2.24	0.02	2.69
I believe I could operate a successful small business (S <sub>4</sub> )	1.84	2.43	0.01	6.30
Pseudo R-squared	0.24			
Prob (LR statistic)	0.001			
Sample	46			

This clearly shows that MBA students in Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University did not perceive relational support from family and friends as a significant factor influencing their interest. This might be as a result of lack of support by friends and family for student entrepreneurship. Rather, many relations tend to prefer that young persons in their households search for wage employment in private companies or government establishments. Moreover, the university environment has not been able to influence the entrepreneurial interest as it was hypothesized. In the Saudi university context, though significant, has not been able to inspire the students to start their own businesses as expected. However, 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 in starting their own businesses, having learnt the necessary skills to start a business venture.

#### 4. Conclusion

Entrepreneurship has been highlighted as one of the sustainable solutions to unemployment and as a source of wealth creation. This study therefore examined the linkages between relational support, self-efficacy, university environment and entrepreneurial interest among MBA students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. The results showed that university environment, relational support and self-efficacy are generally positively associated with the entrepreneurial interest of the MBA students. However, this association is only significant for some of the variables of university context and self-efficacy.

The managerial implication of the study is 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 in turn fosters self-efficacy. It is also necessary for the government and private organisations 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 in developing a large number of entrepreneurial youths who would start viable businesses which may lead to sustainable development.

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