

Entrepreneurial competencies Perceived to be Important for Entrepreneurship Lecturers in Malaysia

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Abstract³

Entrepreneurship education has gained an important role in the eyes of both policy makers, as well as researchers across the globe. This recent rapid growth and development in entrepreneurship courses and programs can be felt through the increasing support provided by governments especially in higher learning institutions. In addition, there is the general belief amongst the academics that the entrepreneurial competencies required for successful venturing can be taught, or at the very least enhanced by entrepreneurial education and learning. Despite the exponential international growth of the discipline, over the last three decades, no significant study has been conducted on the entrepreneurial competencies among entrepreneurship lecturers in High Learning Institutions in Malaysia, as well as in other countries. Hence, this study has evolved from the research gaps and vulnerabilities identified within the literature and revolved around the following research question: What sort of entrepreneurial competencies perceived to be important for teaching entrepreneurial courses in Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia? To answer the question an empirical study was conducted involving lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses of all Public HLIs in Malaysia. The data was collected using structure questionnaire. A total of 237 valid questionnaires were successfully analyzed. This study revealed that of the three entrepreneurial competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) studied, entrepreneurial attitude (mean 5.03) found to be the most important competencies for lecturers teaching entrepreneurship subject in Malaysia, followed by entrepreneurial skills (4.84) and knowledge (4.65). It can be concluded that to ensure the effectiveness of the teaching of entrepreneurship courses in Malaysian HLIs; the entrepreneurship lectures must possess good attitudes in business as well as skills and knowledge in new venture creation and management.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial competencies,

1. Introduction

The entrepreneurship education courses have been running for more than two decades, despite this growth, the graduates are reluctant to engage in entrepreneurship as a career choice. A study conducted in Malaysia indicated that only about 2% of the graduates of HLIs chose to be self-employed. The findings further showed that the implementation of existing entrepreneurship education curriculum is not helping matters. About 53% of the respondents stated that the content and syllabus of entrepreneurship modules in higher learning institutions are not comprehensive and effective (Othman and Nasrudin, 2012). The curriculum is too theoretical, not multi-discipline, lack the application of practical knowledge and skills do not encourage creativity and innovativeness, do not emphasize on motivational and business management elements. Above all, most of the entrepreneurship lecturers lack entrepreneurial knowledge; some are

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without entrepreneurship skills or experiences as well as training and mastery of teaching methods (Othman and Nasrudin, 2012).

According to Ismail (2010), teaching methods used in teaching of entrepreneurship courses are not appropriate and the concept of entrepreneurship has been explained in a manner that is too abstract and therefore is difficult for entrepreneurial students to understand. Mostly, due to the nature of the trainings received by the lecturers, only entrepreneurship theories are taught, but the practical implications are mostly not discussed in lectures. It was also observed that there is limited research deliberation within core elements of entrepreneurship education especially training programs to enhance lecturers' (teachers') competencies. Van et al., (2007) Suggest large gaps between research, education and entrepreneurial practice. She calls on future researchers to address these gaps. Her view is shared by many eminent scholars such as the Katz, (2003) and Brush, *et al.*, (2003). Thus, entrepreneurship education lecturers must have adequate knowledge, skills, attitude and self-efficacy on entrepreneurship courses (Fauziah and Sulaiman, 2012). The main aim of this study is to identify entrepreneurial competencies perceived to be important for lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

➤ The Important of Entrepreneurship Education

The interest in entrepreneurship education is closely related to the economic contribution of small firms, especially in the context of job creation and wealth generation (Falkang and Alberty, 2000). The recognition of the importance of entrepreneurs to the economic system has led to the development of entrepreneurship education in modern educational institutions. The efforts to establish entrepreneurship training centers and schools began in the 1980s with the increases in the offerings of courses and programs, especially in some developed countries, such as United States and European countries. Entrepreneurship education has grown and received recognition by many universities and colleges all over the world as an academic field and a major area of academic research. Courses in small business management began to emerge in the 1940s, and first courses in entrepreneurship in USA at Harvard Business School were taught in 1947, the reality of entrepreneurship education as a force in business schools began in the early 1970s. By early 1980s over 300 universities were reporting courses in entrepreneurship and small business and by the 1990s the number grew to 1,050 schools and therefore its real emergence took place in 1980's (Solomon, et al., 1994). According to Vesper and Gartner (2001), 504 US Schools were offering courses in entrepreneurship in US.

The important of entrepreneurship as an engine of growth has led to the increasing interest in research on the area of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education Mason (2011). For example, some expert viewed economic growth in all industrialized and developing countries as a key issue and of particular interest is being focused and attributed on the role of entrepreneurship education in promoting small business (Garavan and O'Conneide, 1994). They further argued that economic recession, high unemployment rates and fluctuations in international trade cycles have contributed to the revival of interest in entrepreneurship as a possible solution to rising unemployment rates as a recipe for economic prosperity. Entrepreneurship education fosters entrepreneurship, which in turn results in positive outcomes on individuals, firms and society. Such types of entrepreneurial activities lead to value addition and creation of wealth, which is very essential for the industrial and economic development of the country. In fact, the impact of entrepreneurial activity for economic growth, creating career opportunities and developing employability has been well revealed and a strong belief emerges that it can develop through systematic development and planned efforts (Deakins and Freel, 2009). According to Akpomi, (2009) entrepreneurship stimulates equitable redistribution of national resources and income in the interest of the country to more people and different geographic areas, thus giving economic advantage to larger sections of the society. Entrepreneurial activities is enhance through entrepreneurship education which consequently promote and also generate more activities and give a multiplier effect in the entire economy.

In the case of Malaysia entrepreneurship is greatly emphasized and viewed as a major thrust for economic development as outlined in the Malaysia plans and the New Economic Model policy. Until today entrepreneurship education has become an important national agenda and is pursued relentlessly by the various stakeholders. Hence, various policy measures have been undertaken by the government of Malaysia with the aims to achieve the goal of complementing and exposing graduates to the world of entrepreneurship in terms of providing them with relevant skills and knowledge in order to own their businesses. Policy measures taken are the inclusion of the entrepreneurial subjects or courses related to entrepreneurship from primary school level and other educational institutions.

➤ **The Entrepreneurial Competencies**

To meet these divergent demands, lecturers have to adopt the leadership style and use more competencies like skills, knowledge and attitudes in order to play their role successfully ((Michaelowa, 2007)) and also to meet the current demand of the labor market. The concept of competency was first popularized by Boyatzis (1982) in his model of managerial competency, who conducted a detailed study of over 2000 entrepreneurs and he identified and assessed over a hundred potential entrepreneurial competencies. He defined competency as, “A capacity that exists in a person that leads to behavior that meets the job demands within the parameters of organizational environment, and that, in turn brings about desired results.” The competency is considered to be an underlying characteristic that an individual brings to a job situation, which can result in effective and/or superior performance in such job.

The term competency was defined by the European Commission (2006) as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. That is ‘individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports individuals, not only in their everyday lives at home and in society, but also in the workplace in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize opportunities, and is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance’. In addition, Lans et al. (2008) defined competencies as a mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In a related development, some prominent scholars in the entrepreneurship field have further proposed set of frameworks for entrepreneurial competencies. Johannisson (1992) in his work has proposed a framework consisting of five levels of learning;

- Know-what, or knowledge;
- Know-when, or insight;
- Know-who, or social skills;
- Know-how, or skills;
- Know-why, or attitudes, values and motives.

Based on this framework he calls for more contextual approaches in entrepreneurship teaching, involving qualified experience and social networks through action learning. Nonetheless, when verifying the broad perspectives with which the academics have approached the entrepreneurial competencies, based on the work of (Man and Lau, 2005) in which they defined competencies as comprising the “components that are deeply rooted in a person’s background (traits, character, attitudes, social role and personality) as well as those that can be acquired at work or through training and education (skills, knowledge and experience). Finally, when verifying the broad perspectives with which the academics have approached the entrepreneurial competencies, based on the work of(Sánchez, (2010a) in which they defined competencies as comprising the “components that are deeply rooted in a person’s background (traits, character, attitudes, social role and personality) as well as those that can be acquired at work or through training and education (skills, knowledge and experience).

Based on the European Commission (2006) in their study on entrepreneurial competencies and other related literatures and relevant studies by individuals and organizations, the entrepreneurial competencies is

reviewed from three different perspectives namely the entrepreneurial skills, the entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial attitudes.

➤ **Entrepreneurial Skills**

According to Kilby (1971) Entrepreneurial skills are those skills needed to succeed in business, most especially in new venture creation. In other words it refers to the basic skills necessary to enable an individual to start, develop, finance and succeed in an enterprise. The array of possible entrepreneurial skills encompasses the perception of economic opportunity, technical and organizational innovations, gaining commands over scarce resources, taking responsibilities for internal management and for external advancement of the firm in all aspects (of teaching enterprise).

Gibb (2002) refers to entrepreneurial core skills as “those capacities that constitute the basic necessary and sufficient conditions for the pursuit of effective entrepreneurial behavior individually, organizationally and societal in an increasingly turbulent and global environment”. Drawing from the literature on the characteristics on entrepreneurship, Gibb (1995) argues that entrepreneurial skills that can be taught, include intuitive decision making, creative problem solving, managing interdependency on a know-who basis, ability to conclude deals, strategic thinking, project management, time management, persuasion, selling, negotiation and motivating people by setting an example. These skills are based on several underlying qualities, such as self-confidence, self-awareness, a high level of autonomy, an internal locus of control, a high level of empathy with stakeholders, especially customers, a hard working disposition, a high achievement orientation, a high propensity to take (moderate) risks and flexibility. Brouwer (2002) argued that the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills means possessing the ability to find and evaluate business opportunities, gather all the necessary resources, initiate appropriate action to ensure success; and implement actions to take advantage of the opportunities for rewarding outcome. Entrepreneurial skills are simply business skill, which an individual acquires to enable him function effectively in the turbulent business environment as an entrepreneur of a self-employed (Folahan and Omoriyi, 2006).

In a study conducted by Salome et al., (2012) three types of entrepreneurial skills that are required by business related graduates in starting are identified. These entrepreneurial skills are management, marketing and accounting skills. These skills are very necessary in developing and managing an enterprise. This includes skills in decision making control and negotiation, essential in creating and growing a new business venture. The acquisition of entrepreneurial skills means combining personal characteristics, financial resources within one’s environment and taking advantage of them for rewarding outcome. In addition, leadership skills, communication skills, and human relations have also been seen as critical skills areas of knowledge to success. These competencies are regarded as very vital competencies for entrepreneurship because entrepreneur has to be capable to persuade and discuss with various stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, rival competitors as well as service providers and the like (Onstenk, 2003).

➤ **Entrepreneurial Attitudes**

Based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) attitude is one of the main factors that influence one’s behavior. It is defined as the beliefs and perceptions about the willingness to personal behavior, which in turn related to expectations about the impact of personal decisions as a result of behavior. It can be said that attitudes have a wide range of personality and indirect impact on certain behavior, the influence of several factors more closely associated with the behavior in question. Teachers’ attitude toward a subject not only affect their choice to teach that subject and the quality of their instructional performance (Harlen and Holroyd, 1997), but also influences students’ attitudes toward the subject, their motivation to learn the subject, and their achievement (Chong *et al.*, 2010). In entrepreneurship context, attitude has been defined as the extent to which one perceives entrepreneurial behavior and its consequences as valuable, beneficial and favorable (Ajzen, 2002).

Robinson, et al., (1991) have identified four dimensions for entrepreneurial attitude including need for achievement, personal control over behavior, innovation, and self-esteem. Need for achievement reflects the perceived results and outcomes of new venture creation. An attitude is a complex mental state involving

beliefs, feelings, values, and dispositions to act in certain ways. Attitudes tend to change across time and situations through an interactive process with the environment, and can offer a prediction about a person's future actions (Cacho and Cotton 2008).

Attitudes are habitual ways of reacting to situations. The term 'attitude' is generally reserved for an opinion which represents a person's overall inclination towards an object, idea or institution. Attitudes can be positive, negative or neutral and also dormant & more generalized. The attitude of the teacher toward teaching is an important variable. The primary attribute of a good teacher is the ability to create a warm, friendly atmosphere in the classroom. Teaching should be geared to the needs of his students. The teacher must have a positive attitude toward teaching. He must have sympathetic attitudes toward students and their achievement. The teacher must try to locate the causes of antisocial behavior and help the students to improve their personality (Chouhan, 1984).

➤ **Entrepreneurial Knowledge**

According to Kirzner (1979) entrepreneurial knowledge is defined as a 'rarefied abstract type knowledge - the knowledge of where to obtain information (or other resources) and how to deploy it.' Acquired knowledge generates routines and decisional procedures. This shows how enterprising individuals continuously develop their entrepreneurial knowledge throughout their professional lives.

When talk about the knowledge, specifically knowledge in financial management, knowledge of engineering, knowledge of book keeping and accounting, knowledge of marketing, knowledge in new venture recognition and sales have been frequently cited as important factors responsible for the success of a business (Hood and Young, 1993). However, the European Commission(2006) were also of the opinion that skills, knowledge and behavioral/emotional attitudes linked to entrepreneurship can be fostered and nurtured through learning processes as well as through other processes. Attitudes such as being visionary, passionate or imaginative are also dependent upon other contextual factors, which are often linked to an individual's personal history (e.g. family, early childhood experience, peers, local community). Based on the various theoretical approaches to entrepreneurship it is possible to identify a range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are often associated with entrepreneurship behavior or entrepreneurial persons. The table below often linked entrepreneurship knowledge, skills and attitudes.

3. Research Methodology

A quantitative approach was employed in this study because it used for a descriptive research and where necessary it creates "standardized questions that can be interpreted the same way by all respondents" (Lewis *et al.*, 2007). A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed in 19 public universities and 5 polytechnics a cross Malaysia and 237 questionnaires were returned successfully. The populations for the study were selected using the purposive sampling techniques where each respondent was selected based on his track records and expertise in the field of entrepreneurship education courses in their respective institutions. The criteria used in the selection are purely based on the judgment of the researcher. The overall Cronbach Alpha value is 0.937, and for each of the 4 variables are above the minimum value of reliability suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), Raza and Hanif (2013), Ali and Raza (2015).

Descriptive statistics was performed to identify the most relevant entrepreneurial competencies needed by the lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses. Percentages and mean score rates as well as standard deviations were calculated based on the 6 point Likert-scale. The percentage and mean score rates provide the views and opinions of the respondents in numerical values expressed in percentage.

4. Findings of the Study

• **Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

The Table 1 below indicated that a total of 237 entrepreneurship education lecturers in Malaysian universities and polytechnics have actually participated in the study. A total of 209 entrepreneurship lecturers from Malaysian universities took part in the study which represents 88.2% of the total respondents by institution. In Malaysian polytechnics only 28 entrepreneurship lecturers participated in the study which also represents 11.8% of the total respondents.

Table 1: Respondents Profile Classified by Institution, Gender and Age

Institution	Frequency	Percent
University	209	88.2
Polytechnic	28	11.8
Total	237	100.0
Gender		
Male	106	44.7
Female	131	55.3
Total	237	100.0
Age		
20-29 years	22	9.3
30-39 years	106	44.7
40-49 years	91	38.4
50 years and above	18	7.6
Total	237	100.0

The majorities of the respondents are females (55.3) and about 106 or 44.7% of them are between the ages of 30-39 years old. The table further showed that only 7.6% of the respondents are above the age of 50 years. This clearly shows that more 93% of the lecturers of entrepreneurship education are below the age of 50 years.

Entrepreneurial Competencies Needed By the Lecturers Teaching Entrepreneurship Course

Entrepreneurial Knowledge

Table 2: Entrepreneurial Knowledge Needed By Entrepreneurship Lecturers (N=237)

Variables	Mean	STD
Knowledge In Project Opportunity Recognition	4.82	1.127
Knowledge in Human Resource Mgt.	4.73	1.298
Knowledge In Business Planning	4.72	1.332
Knowledge. in Book Keeping	4.60	1.336
Knowledge in New Venture Creation	4.77	1.437
Economic Knowledge	4.54	1.291
Knowledge in Financial Manage.	4.69	1.220
Knowledge in Strategic Skills	4.51	1.401
Knowledge of Marketing	4.59	1.295
Knowledge in Project Management	4.55	1.496

Overall/average mean: 4.65

The Table2 shows knowledge that is needed for entrepreneurship lecturers in Malaysian HLIs. Based on 10 variables used in this study the highest percentage score is knowledge in project opportunity recognition with means score of 4.82 and the lowest mean is Knowledge in project management with mean score of 4.55.

The average mean score of entrepreneurial knowledge was 4.65. This clearly indicated that the respondents have identified all the variables under knowledge component as very vital for the lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses in Malaysian HLIs. The table 2 provides the details result of the study.

Entrepreneurial Skills

A total of 12 variables under skills are presented to the respondents to identify which of the competency is needed for an entrepreneurship lecturer. The respondents’ views are presented in the Table3.

Table 3: Entrepreneurial Skills Needed By Entrepreneurship Lecturers (N=237)

Variable	Mean	STD
Team Building Skills	5.07	0.0773
Verbal Communication. Skills	5.03	0.823
Networking Skills	5.09	0.800
Time Management	5.03	0.797
Classroom Mgt.	4.77	0.879
Business Skills	5.04	0.942
Problem Solving Skills	5.07	0.707
Inter Personal Skills	5.09	0.756
Social Skills	4.86	0.777
Strategic Thinking Skills	4.97	0.797
Organizational Skills	4.97	0.856
Verbal Communication. Skills	4.87	0.898

Overall/ average mean: 4.84

The result revealed that the highest percentage scores for an individual variable under skill is time management with the mean score of 5.09, and the lowest score is social skills with the mean score 4.86. Except for social skills the different between the highest and lowest score rates and other skills found to be very insignificant also. The average mean score for entrepreneurial skills is 4.84. The participants have generally identified all the variables under the skills as important competencies needed by the lecturers teaching entrepreneurship in HLIs.

Entrepreneurial Attitudes

Table 4 shows the attitudes cluster of entrepreneurial competencies. The variable with the highest mean score rate is creativity with mean scores of 5.13 and the high level of energy has the lowest percentage scores with the mean of 4.85. The average means score for entrepreneurial attitudes is 5.03. This clearly shows the respondents have generally identified all the 14 variables under attitudes cluster as important competencies to be possessed by an entrepreneurship lecturer in order to the courses effectively.

Table 4: The Entrepreneurial Attitudes Needed by Entrepreneurship Lecturers (N=237)

Variable	Mean	STD
Creative	5.14	0.745
Ability to try New Ideas	5.13	0.900
Willingness to Face Uncertainty	5.11	0.738
Higher Achievement	5.10	0.817
High Self-esteem	5.07	0.826
Self-confidence	5.09	0.826
Ability to motivate others	5.06	0.824
Maintains self-efficacy	5.04	0.738
Desire for independence	5.01	0.786
Visionary	5.00	0.787

High level of energy	4.98	0.818
Ability to manage risks	4.95	0.838
Risk taking	4.93	0.866
Persuasive	4.85	0.843

Overall/ average mean: 5.03

5. Discussions and Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to identify entrepreneurial competencies among lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses in Malaysian HLIs. The respondents were asked to rate and identified which amongst the 3 competencies groups (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) are important by the entrepreneurial lecturers in HLIs in Malaysia. The competencies identified in the study are all considered essential and relevant for lecturers of entrepreneurship. However, the overall results revealed that the entrepreneurial attitude (mean 5.03) found to be most important competencies for lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses in Malaysia, followed by skills (mean 4.84) and knowledge (mean 4.65). The findings in this study are supported by a similar study conducted by Dixon, et al., (2005) and Plamen and Antti, (2011).

The lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses in HLIs in Malaysia have unanimously agreed that the 36 entrepreneurial competencies listed in the questionnaire were very important for the lecturers teaching entrepreneurship courses in order to function effectively in the course of discharging their jobs. By implications, the possessions of these entrepreneurial are considered very vital for all entrepreneurship education lecturers.

This study concluded that all hands must be on deck to ensure that all entrepreneurship courses lecturers must have good attitudes towards business and properly educated. This is because the entire success of the entrepreneurship programmer entirely depends on their contributions. The HLIs top management and policy should place emphasis on training the entrepreneurial lecturers in order to acquire the relevant educational qualifications and entrepreneurial competencies that can enhance their productivity.

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