

Entrepreneurship as a Career Path among University Students: An Action Research on Hands-On Learning and Follow Up Approach in Business through the Introduction to Entrepreneurship Course

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship has become one of the main agenda of the most countries' economic development including Malaysia. The government through its' ministries and agencies aim to embed the entrepreneurial culture within the nation's education system throughout and gives special attention to the development of entrepreneurship through the inception of entrepreneurship education (EE). However, the initiative does not reflect on the reduction over the unemployment rate. In fact, the number is surging particularly post pandemic Covid-19. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a follow-up program called "Beyond BPME1013" to nurture students becoming a potential graduate entrepreneur. Also, this study aims to investigate whether the entrepreneurship program 'Beyond BPME1013' able to nurture graduates with a solid ground of entrepreneurship and becoming a prospective entrepreneur. A focus group group of 20 students whom attended the Introduction to Entrepreneurship course (BPME 1013) in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is employed in this study. Methodologically, this study which underpinned by both the Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) is using a mixed method approach. A self-administered pre and post-questionnaire survey were used to examine the effectiveness of the program, followed by in-depth interviews among participants. The findings of the study revealed that the respondents agreed that the program is a beneficial one and most importantly, able to ignite their interest in starting up their own ventures in the near future. This study practically implicates the current implementation of EE particularly within higher education institutions (HEIs). While from policy perspective, a more effective measure is required needed to be seen as the continuity of the EE implemented towards achieving the nation's entrepreneurship agenda as a whole.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Intrapreneurship, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Action Research, Hands-on Learning

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a strategic instrument in driving national economic development and sustaining global competitiveness. Scholars such as Mamun et al. (2017) and Kamarudin et al. (2025) underscore its pivotal role in fostering innovation, employment, and economic resilience. In the Malaysian context, entrepreneurship has been elevated to a central policy agenda, with concerted efforts by government ministries including the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Cooperative Development (MECD) and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) which to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture across societal strata (Wei, Liu, & Sha, 2019).

To institutionalize this agenda, the Malaysian government has embedded Entrepreneurship Education (EE) across all levels of the national education system, from primary to tertiary institutions (Wei et al., 2019; Ahmad, 2013). This strategic move reflects the belief that entrepreneurship serves as a viable solution to mitigate graduate unemployment and promote self-reliance. The increasing academic interest in entrepreneurship, as highlighted by Mamun et al. (2017), has further positioned EE as a prominent field of study within higher education institutions (HEIs), contributing to the development of entrepreneurial competencies among youth.

In alignment with national policy, public universities such as Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) have made entrepreneurship courses compulsory for all students. The Introduction to Entrepreneurship course (BPME1013) serves as a foundational module, equipping students with essential knowledge on entrepreneurial theories, personal development, creative thinking, and business start-up processes (Koe et al., 2021). This curricular integration aims to instill entrepreneurial mindsets and prepare graduates for dynamic labor market demands.

Despite these efforts, Malaysia continues to face a concerning unemployment rate, reported at 5.3 percent as of May 2020 (Kamarudin et al., 2023a; Vishnu et al., 2022). Vishnu et al. (2022) note that this figure represents the highest unemployment level in three decades, with youth unemployment constituting a significant portion. The overdependence on conventional salaried employment among graduates has been identified as a key contributor to this issue (Embi, Jaiyeoba, & Yussof, 2019; Mamun et al., 2017), suggesting a disconnect between EE initiatives and actual entrepreneurial engagement.

Both studies by Mamun et al. (2017) and Murad et al. (2024a) further argued that graduates often perceive limited job opportunities as their only pathway into the workforce, overlooking entrepreneurship as a viable alternative. This perception persists despite the mandatory inclusion of EE in university curricula, indicating a gap between educational exposure and entrepreneurial action. Such findings raise critical questions about the effectiveness of EE in transforming student attitudes and behaviors toward entrepreneurship.

Although existing literature affirms the positive influence of EE on students' entrepreneurial intentions (Mahlaole & Malebana, 2021; Masood et al., 2024; Murad et al., 2024b), there remains a paucity of research on post-curricular interventions that facilitate entrepreneurial start-ups. Jegede and Nieuwenhuizen (2021) emphasize the need for mechanisms that extend beyond classroom instruction to support entrepreneurial realization. Similarly, Delanoe-Greguen and Linan (2019) critique the lack of practical implementation strategies in EE studies, while Wu and Wu (2017) advocate for innovative pedagogical approaches to enhance experiential learning in entrepreneurship education.

The absence of structured follow-up and continuity in EE programs has been shown to undermine their effectiveness. Kamarudin, Nordin, and Siti Nabiha (2021b) report that government-led training and development initiatives for SMEs often fail to yield measurable outcomes due to inadequate monitoring and resource allocation. These shortcomings contradict best practices in educational and entrepreneurial development, which emphasize sustained intervention and consultation as critical to nurturing entrepreneurs at various stages (Botha, Nieman, & Van Vuuren, 2007). Consequently, the lack of post-classroom engagement limits the transformative potential of EE and its contribution to national economic advancement.

To address these challenges, it is imperative that EE programs in Malaysian universities be reinforced through comprehensive post-instructional strategies. This includes mentorship, incubation support, and performance-based evaluation mechanisms that bridge the gap between theoretical learning and entrepreneurial practice. Without such interventions, the core objective of EE which is to produce competent, innovative entrepreneurs, thereby diminishing its impact on graduate employability and broader economic development.

Problem Statement

Despite the widespread implementation of compulsory entrepreneurship courses such as BPME1013 in Malaysian public universities, there remains a persistent gap between theoretical exposure and actual entrepreneurial engagement among graduates. While these foundational courses introduce students to basic

entrepreneurial concepts, they often lack continuity and practical reinforcement beyond the classroom (Kamarudin et al., 2023b; Mamun et al., 2017). As a result, many students struggle to translate their academic understanding into viable business ventures or entrepreneurial mindsets. This disconnect is particularly concerning given Malaysia's strategic push to cultivate graduate entrepreneurs as a response to youth unemployment and economic volatility (Sulaiman et al., 2024; Murad et al., 2025). Recent studies emphasize that entrepreneurial education must evolve beyond content delivery to foster opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial intention (Isa et al., 2024).

The absence of structured post-course interventions has limited the long-term impact of entrepreneurship education. Without sustained support, mentorship, or experiential learning opportunities, students are less likely to develop the confidence, skills, and resilience required to pursue entrepreneurship upon graduation. The "Beyond BPME1013" program was introduced to address this gap by offering a follow-up platform that integrates practical activities, digital tools, and collaborative ideation. However, its effectiveness in nurturing entrepreneurial potential and establishing a solid foundation for future start-ups has yet to be empirically examined. As Kamarudin, Murad, and Othman (2024) argue, entrepreneurial university support must be strategically embedded across input, process, and output dimensions to influence students' entrepreneurial behavior and career trajectories. Their findings underscore the importance of institutional mechanisms that go beyond curriculum design to foster entrepreneurial ecosystems within higher education.

Therefore, this study is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Beyond BPME1013" program in supporting students' transition from theoretical learning to entrepreneurial practice. By investigating its impact and identifying areas for improvement, the research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing entrepreneurship education at the tertiary level. These findings will not only inform curriculum development and instructional design but also contribute to broader policy discussions on how to cultivate a sustainable pipeline of graduate entrepreneurs in Malaysia's evolving economic landscape. The study aligns with recent calls for experiential, digitally integrated, and policy-responsive entrepreneurship education frameworks that reflect the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and national development priorities (Kamarudin et al., 2024; Ren et al., 2024).

Research Objectives

This study is carried out with the following objectives:

- To investigate the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship program "Beyond BPME1013" effective to serve as a follow-up action to nurture students becoming a potential graduate entrepreneur.
- To investigate whether the entrepreneurship program 'Beyond BPME1013' able to nurture graduates with a solid ground of entrepreneurship and to be a prospective entrepreneur.
- To make recommendations based on the results and findings from the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial Theory and Concept

At the foundational stage of entrepreneurship education, students are introduced to essential theories and concepts that define entrepreneurial practice. This phase serves as a critical juncture where learners either cultivate a deeper interest in entrepreneurship or disengage due to perceived irrelevance or lack of contextual application. Entrepreneurship theories play a vital role in helping students understand the diverse behaviors and strategic decisions of business owners. These frameworks illuminate the psychological traits, motivations, and environmental factors that influence entrepreneurial tendencies, thereby offering a structured lens through which students can interpret entrepreneurial phenomena.

One influential framework is the value creation and appropriation paradigm within the Theory of Entrepreneurship, which provides insight into the entrepreneur's cognitive and strategic processes (Abaidah et al., 2024; Masood et al., 2024; Mishra & Zachary, 2015). In the initial phase of venture creation, entrepreneurs identify external opportunities which sometimes even before articulating a specific goal and employ effectuation strategies to leverage available resources. This reconfiguration of opportunity grants entrepreneurs an asymmetric advantage, enabling them to cultivate entrepreneurial competencies through adaptive learning and resourcefulness (Mishra & Zachary, 2014).

During the early stages of venture development, entrepreneurs often engage in bricolage, a practice that involves creatively repurposing existing resources and collaborating within their social networks (Baker & Nelson, 2005). This approach emphasizes improvisation and resilience, as entrepreneurs rely on what is readily accessible rather than acquiring new assets. By mobilizing support from peers, customers, and fellow entrepreneurs, they build initial traction. Once a competitive edge is established, the entrepreneur transitions into the second phase of value creation, where strategic positioning becomes essential for sustained growth.

In the subsequent phase of venture monetization, entrepreneurs seek external resources such as venture capital, strategic partnerships, and dynamic capabilities to scale their operations. These capabilities when integrated into the business model could be beneficial to enhance the venture's adaptability and long-term value generation (Alvarez, Barney, & Young, 2010). This stage reflects a shift from informal resourcefulness to formalized strategic planning, reinforcing the importance of entrepreneurial agility and institutional support in sustaining business success.

In Malaysia, the integration of entrepreneurship education (EE) across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels reflects a national commitment to fostering entrepreneurial mindsets (Yusof, Murad, & Yusof, 2022; Looi & Maritz, 2021). Government agencies such as MARA, MDeC, MECD, MATRADE, and SME Corp. have played pivotal roles in promoting entrepreneurial culture (Kamarudin et al., 2021a; Kamarudin, 2019; Ali et al., 2018). However, recent literature highlights a critical gap in post-educational follow-up initiatives, particularly within higher education institutions (Delanoë-Gueguen & Liñán, 2019; Wei et al., 2019; Wu & Wu, 2017). Without sustained interventions, the impact of EE remains limited, failing to significantly reduce graduate unemployment. Therefore, proactive and structured follow-up programs are essential to translate entrepreneurial education into tangible socio-economic outcomes.

The Introduction to Entrepreneurship Course (BPME 1013)

Entrepreneurship education (EE) has become a strategic priority in Malaysia's higher education landscape, with the government mandating entrepreneurship courses for all students in public universities, including Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). This policy aims to cultivate entrepreneurial competencies among graduates and support the national agenda of fostering innovation-driven economic growth (Embi et al., 2019; Ren et al., 2024). At UUM, the core subject *Introduction to Entrepreneurship* (BPME1013) serves as a foundational course for all students, offering exposure to key concepts, theories, entrepreneurial behaviors, and the business start-up process (Azahari Ramli et al., 2018). Recent evaluations suggest that such compulsory courses play a pivotal role in shaping entrepreneurial intentions and opportunity recognition among students (Isa, Razak & Husain, 2024).

The BPME1013 course is designed to embed entrepreneurial culture and values into students' academic and personal development. It covers essential topics such as the history and evolution of entrepreneurship, characteristics of entrepreneurs, creativity and innovation, and social entrepreneurship (Kamarudin et al., 2023a). Students are introduced to practical methods for launching small and medium enterprises, with an emphasis on experiential learning. According to Sulaiman, Yusof, and Amaran (2024), Malaysian universities must shift from grade-centric models to experiential, practice-based entrepreneurship education to effectively nurture entrepreneurial mindsets. This aligns with global best practices that advocate for dynamic, student-centered learning environments to foster entrepreneurial resilience and adaptability.

Assessment within BPME1013 reflects this experiential approach. Students are required to initiate an online business platform, conduct real-time digital transactions, and prepare a comprehensive business plan over a 14-week semester. The course culminates in a final examination to evaluate conceptual understanding. Upon completion, students are expected to achieve key learning outcomes: articulating the importance of entrepreneurship, analyzing the business environment, demonstrating online business operations, and presenting a viable business plan. However, as highlighted by Kamarudin et al. (2021a), the long-term impact of EE depends on sustained follow-up initiatives and institutional support mechanisms that extend beyond the classroom. Without such continuity, the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education may remain underutilized, particularly in addressing graduate unemployment and economic inclusion.

Entrepreneurial Experiences

An individual gains entrepreneurial experience in a business either directly or indirectly. Sometimes the experience will be gained when a person works in the business sector of goods and services, sometimes the experience will be gained when a person runs a business or manages someone's business. Entrepreneurial experience is very important for someone who wants to start a business let alone a start-up, through either business owners or business owners to hire employees with business experience (Presutti & Odorici, 2019; Clarysse, Tartari, & Salter, 2011).

It is often considered that a person's personality determines whether they will choose to become an entrepreneur (self-employment aim). This personological method coined by Gartner et al. (1994) appears to have been generally unsuccessful in predicting individual start-up decisions. Accordingly, entrepreneurship may be viewed as a sort of planned behavior for which the intention models are optimally suited. This is due to the fact that starting a business is a lengthy process that needs much forethought and planning prior to the implementation. Early citation of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1985) claimed as a preferred theory in investigating entrepreneurs' motivation in recent years. In addition, the theory posited that three core components of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral lead towards individual or group behavior (Ajzen, 2020).

From the psychological and educational perspective, experiences are deemed substantial and highly valued as an integral factor of learning process. In describing the Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) for instance, Kolb (2015) highlighted the significance of individual experience in the learning process particularly within adult learning context. In addition, Morris (2020) asserted that experiential learning is essentially unique compared to other learning theory such as behavioral theory. While Gibb's (1988) Reflective Learning Theory (RLT) is another example of valuing experience and oneself reflection in learning. Therefore, it is rather suitable to pursue both theories of ELT and RLT in understanding the theoretical foundation of this research.

Mentoring in Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship or business mentoring is a system in which a successful business owner mentors a new entrepreneur (Fauchald, Aaboen, & Haneberg, 2022; Nabi, Walmsley, & Akhtar, 2021; Gimmon, 2014). The goal of business mentoring is to assist new entrepreneurs in running successful businesses. This may also assist current business owners in making better decisions to improve business operations and revenue. From the perspective of the HEIs' students, Nabi et al. (2021) and Gimmon (2014) claimed that it is important to have a good mentoring from both academics and industry players or experts. Although it is not required, finding a business mentor in a relevant niche is preferable. Mentors' role is significant to guide the protégé or mentee in building their start-up as well as key to step in in decision making process.

Mentoring functions' effect on tertiary students' entrepreneurship has been well-researched. Research findings outline the benefits of mentoring functions (Nabi et al., 2021). Studying the effects of mentoring (in this case, the knowledge development function) on the emerging behaviors of a group of 18 student mentees revealed positive results in the areas of business planning, prototype creation, market testing, networking, and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, the study discovered that the knowledge development functions of mentoring in regard to niche market products and services, as well as financial knowledge, suggest that mentors assisting mentees to develop niche entrepreneurial knowledge influences perceived control by providing realistic knowledge about their business idea, which in turn leads to nascent behaviors.

This is supported by Kolvareid and Moen (1997), the belief that a person's level of self-control over his or her actions is correlated with that person's actual level of self-control, especially once the individual has gained access to relevant and reliable information. Mentoring for entrepreneurs is advantageous in many ways for the mentee. For instance, if the mentee is struggling, they can turn to their mentor for guidance and encouragement. In addition, the mentee will have someone to consult with before acting on important business matters.

Entrepreneurial Attributes

It is widely known that there are many characteristics that associated with entrepreneurs. Indeed, previous scholars have discussed the subject within different context and perspective of entrepreneurship studies. For instance, Mamun et al.'s (2019) study focuses on entrepreneurs' know-how (market orientation), networking and competency are they key qualities to be possessed by entrepreneurs in achieving favourable business performance involving micro enterprises in Malaysia.

While vast literature explained the importance of risk-taking propensity, creativity and proactiveness as the key entrepreneur attributes towards entrepreneurial success (Lopes, Suchek, & Gomes, 2023; Correa et al., 2022; Embi et al., 2019; Craig et al., 2014). However, for this piece of research, it is focused on three (3) significant qualities of recognizing opportunity, networking and competitiveness.

In describing the entrepreneurial process, Baron and Shane (2008) posited that recognizing opportunity is the first and foremost step or process to be undertaken by both potential or current entrepreneurs. Follow up to that crucial first step in entrepreneurship, there are five (5) more steps to follow through. The second one is decision to proceed and assemble resources including both tangibles (financial, raw materials) and intangibles one (knowledge, skills and human capital) (Kamarudin et al., 2021a). Thirdly involving launching a new venture or start-up, fourthly is building success and managing business' growth, and sixth, harvesting the rewards in term of monetary profit and wealth as well as gaining good reputation (Baron & Shane, 2008).

From the networking perspective, it is posited that entrepreneurs are at a leverage should he or she has a good networking in business (Kuratko, 2022). Indeed, many scholars highlighted that networking attribute as a key success factor in developing and sustaining entrepreneurial starts-up (Busch & Barkema, 2022; Arafat et al., 2020). According to Busch and Barkema (2022), facilitating network connection among nascent entrepreneurs including young graduates could help the development of the ventures. While, network is deemed as a vital cause of resources, ideas and information which subsequently led towards the success of a business (Arafat et al., 2020). Therefore, such significance of networking attribute needs to be comprehensively attended in the development of potential entrepreneurs.

Also, the importance of having high level of competitiveness cannot be sidelined. Past literature indicated that the ability to wind off various challenges and difficulties in business such as economic crisis, globalization and

market competition are vital (Fontana & Musa, 2017; Salvioni, Gennari, & Bosetti, 2016; Alvarez et al., 2010). Salvioni et al. (2016) posited that such ability could increase the businesses' value in the market eventually lead towards sustainability beyond current generation. In the context of potential or nascent entrepreneurs like graduates, this skill or ability needs to be embedded or exposed even prior to the start-up stage for their readiness and agility.

Entrepreneurial Intention

According to various studies university and other higher education institutions' (HEIs), generally students in Malaysia are interested in entrepreneurship (Chikari, 2021; Murad et al., 2025; Sidek et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2019). However, various issues and challenges such as lack of self-assurance or self-efficacy which deemed necessary to pursue it (Mahlaole & Malebana, 2021; Delanoe-Gueguen & Linan, 2019). It is evident in the weak link between attitudes and plans to get into business for oneself.

According to Delanoe-Gueguen and Linan (2019), students had an optimistic view of their own ability and desire in becoming entrepreneurs, however faces a pessimistic view of their peers' and friends towards self-employment. This may suggest that secondary school pupils avoid entrepreneurship because they view it as an unattractive career option. This is because introducing entrepreneurship courses in academic high schools is not enough to establish entrepreneurship as a preferred career path.

It is also concluded that a student's likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurship as a career route is significantly influenced by the subjective norm and community support. This suggests that a student's entrepreneurial intention will increase if they receive favorable community support and if the attitude and subjective norm towards becoming self-employed are both favorable (Anjum et al., 2022; Keat, Selvarajah, & Meyer, 2011). Students who believe in their own abilities and have an interest in starting their own businesses are more likely to follow through on their plans to do so.

Moreover, it is recommended that students be exposed to a curriculum that places a premium on teaching them to think and act like entrepreneurs (Anjum et al., 2022; Kamarudin et al., 2021a, 2021b). It is also highlighted that educators of entrepreneurship should receive training to refine their methods of instruction (Kamarudin et al. 2021b). This includes targeted programs should be implemented to boost students' perceptions of their own ability to succeed as business owners. Moreover, governments should incorporate a youth enterprise program into any entrepreneurial education intervention initiatives (Tanjung et al., 2020).

Both Embi et al. (2019) and Pihie and Akmaliah (2009) conducted a study among Malaysian universities and HEIs' students to learn about their views on their own potential as business owners and their willingness to take risks. The results from both studies showed a relatively same whereby most of the students have moderate levels of entrepreneurial motivation, self-efficacy, and competence in the areas of business management, accounting, and marketing. Additionally, there is a notable difference between the scores of students with and without positive entrepreneurial aspiration on measures of entrepreneurship intention and self-efficacy.

Students' perceptions of their own behavioral control were also modest, as were their views about pursuing an entrepreneurial career. Perceived behavioral control was also shown to be significantly greater among those who thought entrepreneurship was something that could be taught in college. Additionally, Pihie and Akmaliah (2009) to add more value to their graduates, university policy makers should incorporate the elements that boost the development of entrepreneurial intention and self-efficacy in the areas of management, financial, and marketing competencies, and it was proposed that certain teaching strategies be put into place to do so.

On one hand, several studies have pointed to entrepreneurs' limited access to work as a key explanation for their propensity for entrepreneurship. The structural explanation proposes that discrimination, the availability of cheap labor, or impediments to the labor market in the host community are to blame for the increased propensity for self-employment (Lilius & Hewidy, 2019). On the other hand, Fornaro (2018) highlighted that entrepreneurial self-employment is driven by factors other than structural barriers such cultural and social perspectives that lead towards the self-employment is chosen.

The value creation process in an entrepreneurial venture is propelled by the entrepreneur him or herself, who has an aim and a desire to reap the benefits of his or her efforts. The entrepreneur is an essential part in the entrepreneurial process. As a result, the entrepreneurial process relies heavily on the entrepreneur's motivation and other important factors such as capital (financial), support and assistance, knowledge and skills (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021; Nawi et al., 2019; Mamun et al., 2017; Potter, 2008). Entrepreneurship education, in particular, has been cited as a crucial tool for encouraging more proactive risk-taking (Potter, 2008). As a result, efforts to educate the public about entrepreneurship have been signaled as a viable way to boost the number of aspiring business owners and established entrepreneurs in the economy.

The Underpinning Theory

There are two (2) theories that underpin this research. First is the Achievement Goal Theory (AGT) which acts as the canvas theory the theoretical framework. According to Laine and Gegenfurtner (2013), Senko, Hulleman and Harackiewicz (2011) and Dweck (1986), AGT suggested that an individual could use an orientation as a guide in interpreting and react over the achievement-relevant information. From the institutional learning perspective, the theory could be explained as the approach adopted by an individual over his or her adaptive response pattern. In this case, students could use the knowledge, skills and exposure gained from both entrepreneurship course and the follow up approach initiative (Beyond BPME1013 Program) towards realizing their entrepreneurial intention and start-up.

While Experiential Learning Theory by Kolb (1984) serves as the complementary theory in this research. Kolb (1984) emphasizes on the importance of experience in the learning process. In addition, the theory uses experience to describe its vital differences from other theories like cognitive and behavioral learning theory (Morris, 2020; Kolb, 2015). Morris (2020) asserted that experiential learning is fundamentally different from other learning theory (behavioral learning theory) as ELT described that knowledge is formed through the transformation of experience knowledge. Thus, the theory valued life experience as an essential and instrumental component of the learning process.

In this context of research, the students were previously exposed to the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills (entrepreneurial theory and concept) going through a valuable journey of entrepreneurial experience (Beyond BPME 1013 Program). Over here, the students were exposed with the good and bad, achievement, progress as well as issues and challenges in realizing the intention of becoming an entrepreneur (entrepreneurial intention). In relation to the theory, the students are going through the four (4) steps or processes of learning namely, i) experiencing, ii) reflecting, iii) thinking, and iv) acting upon the entrepreneurial learning experience (Kolb 2015). Eventually, students start to take proactive action to start their enterprise even if it is a small one.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the theoretical framework is based on the stage of development of entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students. The first stage of the programme was already implemented in UUM, where students are required to take up the Introduction to Entrepreneurship (BPME 1013) course in UUM. This stage emphasizes the entrepreneurial theory and concept which implemented through teaching and learning activities in class. The second stage is the stage where the follow-up action is required to accelerate the students' interest and intention towards entrepreneurial starts-up. Here, the coping strategy used through the entrepreneurship program called *Beyond BPME1013* to support students' learning and development from Introduction to Entrepreneurship course (BPME1013).

While the third stage represents the outcome or goal to be achieved at the end of this research work. It is believed that students who have gone through both stages of learning and understanding both theory and concept of entrepreneurship, as well as experiencing the practical way to kick start their entrepreneurial journey could positively impact them in terms of their entrepreneurial interest and intention. Ultimately, the aim for students to be self-employed and starting-up their own enterprises can be achieved. Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework over the stage of development of the proposed program.

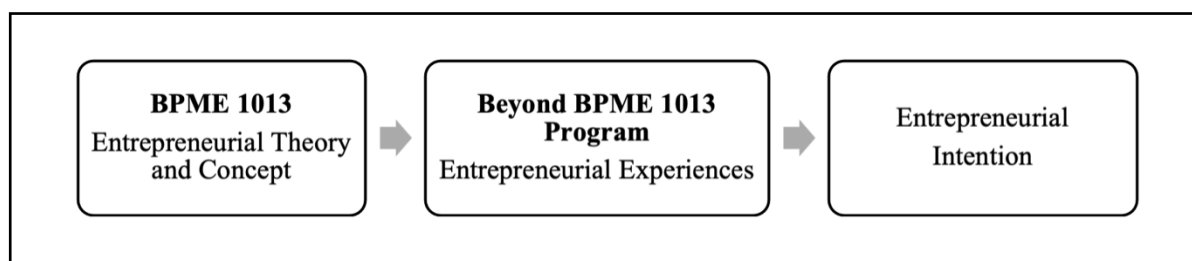


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a focus group approach as the main research methodology. The focus group consists of 20 students attended Introduction to Entrepreneurship course (BPME 1013) in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). In achieving the research aims and objectives, a set of pre-determined criteria must be fulfilled for the students in order to be chosen in this research work. There are four (4) criteria which are pre-determined by the researchers in this project namely;

- Student is participate actively in class

- Student has strong interest in entrepreneurship
- Student has great entrepreneurial attributes
- Student has experience in any sort of entrepreneurial activities under his or her own belt (i.e; as dropship, agent, etc.) preferably.

A mixed-method approach was used to complete this research project. According to studies by Kamarudin et al. (2023a) and Creswell and Clark (2017), mixed-method research is defined as an approach that involves gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating them, and using separate research designs that may include philosophical presumptions and theoretical frameworks. In addition, it is claimed that this type of approach add-up a strong methodological foundation and develops an integrated strategy, which is beneficial in tackling complicated practical issues (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018).

Furthermore, Ivankova and Wingo (2018) emphasized that from the standpoint of action research, research could result in scientifically sound, contextually relevant, and successful plans for action or intervention by using a mixed method approach. As a result, the study may offer a solid foundation for encouraging the sustainability of meaningful change and for better assuring that the action/results intervention's may be applied to other professional and community settings (Ivankova, 2015).

This study used a mixed-method of explanatory sequential design, which involves first gathering quantitative data and then qualitative data to explain or elaborate on the quantitative results (Kamarudin, Mohamad, & Jaaffar, 2023b; Bakla, 2018). This strategy is justified by the fact that quantitative information and findings give a broad overview of the study issue, whilst qualitative information is utilised to deepen or explain the general image of the phenomena.

This research was conducted in two main stages, i) pre and post-questionnaire survey which were conducted to examine the effect of consultation over the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial training conducted. The respective respondents (students) will be required to fill-up the questionnaire both before and after the program conducted. The element of knowledge absorption including acquisition, assimilation, transformation and exploitation (Andersen, 2015; Zahra & George, 2002) was measured. This stage is a quantitative nature of data collection and the data collected from the UUM students whom attended the Introduction to Entrepreneurship course (BPME1013) in their previous semesters. It is served as explanatory in nature because it is intended to explain and generalize the findings of the study.

Next, the second stage of the research involved in-depth interviews among participants (or respondents). The data was gathered from interviewees (the students) and analyzed using the NVivo12 software. The interview serves as the complimentary data to support the findings gathered from the quantitative data collection method of using questionnaire (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In addition, it is descriptive in nature as only limited knowledge is available on the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship program “*Beyond BPME1013*” as the mechanism or coping strategy towards realizing students’ interest and intention to their entrepreneurial start-ups in the near future.

FINDINGS

The results and findings of the study is starts with the findings of the participants' views on the training series that have been conducted and the learning and awareness on the training, the difference in the training series attended this time, the suggestion to further improve with this program and the outcome after participants join the training.

Quantitative Data: pre-and Post-Program Feedback

In this piece of research, a total number of 20 usable responses gathered from the students focus group respondents whom joining the follow up action program. There are three (3) main categories are measured in the pre and post questionnaires which consists of sixteen (16) questions altogether. The three main categories are, namely (i) awareness of the values of business financial reporting; (ii) basic knowledge/ability in entrepreneurship knowledge and skills, and (iii) practical benefits of the follow-up program (see Appendix 1 for the list of questions).

Learning Reflection

Reflective practice is ‘learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice’ (Finlay, 2008). The students who involved in this program reflected that this program allow much exposure and meaningful experience which led towards their conviction of becoming potential entrepreneurs afterwards. This reflection is consistent with Kamarudin et al.’s (2023a) study which had a relatively similar capacity within the same context (university or HEIs) of action research implementation. It is reported that the implementation of buddy system program among newly appointed academic served as a good transition in nurturing future reputable academics in the university (Kamarudin et al., 2023a).

Table 1 shows the responses to the items in the questionnaire. The data showed that the respondents overwhelmingly agreed to the initiative of the Beyond BPME 1013 program implemented in the university. A total of 16 out of 21 items received “*Strongly Agree*” and “*Agree*” responses from the respondents. It is worthy to highlight that there were no “*Strongly Disagree*” and “*Disagree*” responses from the respondents. None of the respondents responded negatively towards the learning reflection reflecting on the entrepreneurship follow-up program overall. The responses gave an indication that the implementation of the *Beyond BPME1013* program is well-received and accepted, at least among the respondents of this study.

In addition, there were few neutral responses to the survey items. Out of the 21 items posted in the questionnaire survey, there were only 3 “*Neutral*” responses for one (1) item in the survey: i) the involvement and attention required for the Beyond BPME1013 program initiative was acceptable (Item No.13). While there were only two (2) “*Neutral*” responses for one (1) of the items which is, “*the initiative enhanced the student’s interest to become an entrepreneur*” (Item No. 9). Meanwhile, there were three (3) other items received one “*Neutral*” response which reflects on the overall learning and the *Beyond BPME1013* program implementation. Table 6.1 shows the learning reflection responses among the respondents upon participating in the *Beyond BPME1013* program.

Table 1: Respondents’ Learning Reflection (n=20)

Evaluation Statement	Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree / Agree
1. Overall, participating in the Beyond BPME1013 program enhanced the student’s understanding the concept of entrepreneurship.	0	0	20 (100%)
2. There were many learning opportunities for the student when he/she attended the Beyond BPME1013 program session.	0	1 (5.0%)	19 (95.0%)
3. As a result of the experience in the Beyond BPME1013 program, the student could understand better the knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship.	0	0	20 (100.0%)
4. I found the Beyond BPME1013 program made the student more confident in starting his/her entrepreneurship activities (i.e., dropship, online business agent, start own business, etc.).	0	1 (5.0%)	19 (95.0%)
5. The Beyond BPME1013 program sessions provided opportunities for the student to learn from his/her entrepreneurship educators.	0	0	20 (100.0%)
6. The Beyond BPME1013 program sessions provided the students with opportunities to clarify some of the issues or difficulties in realizing their entrepreneurial starts-up soon.	0	0	20 (100%)
7. The Beyond BPME1013 program sessions provided the student with the opportunity to direct the other colleagues learning.	0	0	20 (100%)
8. This initiative facilitated the development of lifelong learning skills.	0	0	20 (100%)
9. The initiative enhanced the student’s interest to become an entrepreneur.	0	2 (10.0)	18 (90.0%)
10. The initiative allowed the student to synthesize his/her past and present knowledge in entrepreneurship.	0	0	20 (100%)
11. The initiative further sharpens the student’s entrepreneurial skills	0	0	20 (100%)
12. The Beyond BPME1013 program initiative provided extra support to the student with academic and non-academic matters.	0	0	20 (100%)
13. The involvement and attention required for the Beyond BPME1013 program initiative was acceptable.	0	3 (15.0 %)	18 (85.0%)
14. The initiative assisted the student to learn on a regular basis.	0	0	20 (100%)
15. It provided opportunities to interact among students.	0	0	20 (100%)

16. I am satisfied with the program instructor	0	0	20 (100%)
17. My expectations of the Beyond BPME1013 program sessions were fulfilled.	0	1 (5.0%)	19 (95.0%)
18. The program was a good initiative.	0	0	20 (100%)
19. Attending the Beyond BPME1013 program sessions is an effective way for the student to learn in an informal environment.	0	0	20 (100%)
20. The Beyond BPME1013 program is an innovative way for the student to learn with others.	0	0	20 (100%)
21. This initiative is recommended to other students to facilitate entrepreneurial interest and intention for starts-up.	0	0	20 (100%)

Qualitative Data: In-depth Interviews

From the perspective of qualitative methodology, five (5) individual in-depth interview sessions have been conducted among students who involved in this entrepreneurial follow-up program. Their views on the content of the program, program approach, learning and learning reflections are gathered to understand the participants' views and thoughts over the program conducted while verifying the findings gathered from the quantitative data collection method using pre and post questionnaire. Below are the themes pointed out from the interview sessions conducted.

A “Walk the Talk” Entrepreneurship Program

Most of the respondents are very much appreciated chosen (or participated) in this program. Apparently, they responded that by joining this program, they managed to discover various new knowledge and skills that could improve and strengthen their entrepreneurial intention. Most importantly, those experience walk them through a simple yet meaningful entrepreneurial journey as a rookie entrepreneur.

One of the respondents, R1 highlighted that participating in this kind of competition was his first experience and felt that he is in shortcoming joining the competition without previous experience or exposure in the past.

“Indeed, is a new experience for me to get involved in this competition (program) and of course it is a shame for me to not get involved in many of its due to lacking experience. However, it is an honor to start from the beginning and learn from my teammates and hope that I can use my experience and knowledge wisely to help the coffee to get further as we can” (R1)

Another respondent, R2 has the same kind of impression over the program. He commented that the program particularly the competition enables him to connect and forge more professional networking with other businesses, while publicizes his start-up.

“The program has introduced me to various business coaches and judges through networking, I met like-minded students and investors. Some are linked to industry specialists. These networks will help my business. Competing has taught me valuable skills for growing my business.” (R2)

R3 says that she has a sense of pride and joy.

“Yes, this program introduces me to actual entrepreneurship and the field. In one of the activities during the competition, we are required to write a business plan. Indeed, it is a reinforcement from the course (Introduction to Entrepreneurship) that I learned before where it teaches me business fundamentals. This course is a wonderful start for entrepreneurship-minded students. It showed me that business is fun.” (R3)

The other respondent (R4) says that the program was helpful.

“This program taught me a lot about business startups and what to look out for, such as knowledge and practice of online advertising and knowledge of how to approach a customer learned through this program”.

Avenue of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Skills

As of the reflection gathered, respondents were argued that this program has strengthened their understanding as well as their entrepreneurial attributes. The program which touches few important elements of entrepreneurship including opportunity recognition, networking and competitiveness are able to further develop those

aforementioned qualities individually. As for the R2 and R3, this program introduced them to various business networking and recognizing opportunity in business through engagement with multiple coaches, experts and judges.

“Networking, I got the chance to meet up with like-minded students and investors. Some more connected with experienced experts from different industries. These networks will surely benefit my business in future. Experience, the competition has made me master different skill sets that are vital to expand my business”. (R2)

“Get great experience, know more people, get an expanding networking and building own profiles. Such exposure enables me to recognize more opportunity that could be useful for my business”. (R3)

Moreover, the competition that the respondents involved in has instilled them with competitive spirit with motivation to strive for their best in every aspect of the competition. Although the results are yet to be revealed, the respondents were felt satisfied and enjoyable on their efforts that have been putting in to materialize the final outcomes. R2 and R3 have shared the same views on their level of competitiveness

“A yes! Joining the competition exposes me to more university entrepreneurs who are developing their business better than mine. Meeting them let me learn that I must improve myself more to grow my business better than them. Hence, it became a motivation to me to continuously grow my capabilities and keep learning from other competitors' advantages”. (R2)

“Yes, we are giving chances to present ourselves and sharpen our skill in completing our task in a limited time”. (R3)

While R5 suggested that the competition serves as an arena of rivalries towards herself as it is deemed as a self-exposure for her to a new level of business is exciting. However, a little disappointment raised over a prolonged period of competition done by the organizer makes her feel demotivated.

“The competition its self-exposed a new level of business world but expectation on how the competition flow goes is bit disappointing especially the schedule keeps on postpone and we as students can't commit to it because our schedule is messed up after they keep arranging the schedule”. (R5)

A Self-Development Gateway

Based on the interviews conducted, it is revealed that most of the respondents claimed that this program improved their personal development in various capacities. The respondents highlighted that they are developing in terms of teamwork, planning and management, communication and presentation skills and leadership skill.

Respondent R1 and R5 said that this program helps to develop a good teamwork among group members to achieve targets. R1 claimed that she has never worked on a team before, she is excited to learn new skills like planning, executing, the ability to have productive conversations and accept each other's perspectives can prove useful as they figure out how to work together most effectively. In addition, the respondents can expand my knowledge base and gain skills in areas outside of the major, such as marketing and business development.

“Team spirit, our leader works hard to make sure the product goes in the market”. (R5)

“Team working experience and something such as planning and execution which I haven't experienced before”. (R1)

From the communication perspective, this program boost students' self-confidence. Through the emphasis on communication, opportunity recognition and networking, the respondents (students) are trained and exposed with the daily business activities such as selling, dealing, and negotiating with respective stakeholders such as business experts, industry players, government agencies and financial institutions. From there, respondents are able to get first-hand information over specific subject matters, for instance opportunity, idea, market information while learning from respective parties on tips and tricks on starting up and building up the business moving forward.

“Of course, because I can learn other than my field such as marketing, how to start up a business and more.... Indeed, it is improved communication skills and teamwork planning all those fundamental skills for a startup business”. (R1)

“Yes, this program is building our own skill (communication skill, interpersonal skill, presentation skill and networking) and develop our profile as a graduate entrepreneur soon....have a greater power & ability in entrepreneurship”. (R3)

“I have developed some parts of it. Because from zero now I know a bit of knowledge”. (R4)

Beneficial Program to Cultivate Entrepreneurship Among Students

Based on the interviews conducted, it is a proof that this programme has a definitive added value to the respondents' skills and knowledge in entrepreneurship. This program has taught respondent, R1 such as the ability to communicate and plan well as a team, and other key abilities for a new business.

“This program has taught me a lot about entrepreneurship. I strongly recommend this program for other students in UUM to gauge better understanding and practical skills through entrepreneurship”. (R1)

“This course is a wonderful start for entrepreneurship-minded students. It showed students that business is fun. Every class in this programme is like helping expand some of the respondent's existing businesses. As a result, student could be prompted to start their own businesses after joining this program.” (R2)

Interestingly, R4 did commented that the value of intrapreneurship should students being introduced with this kind of follow up program. In other words, this *Beyond BPME1013* program strengthen respondents' basic knowledge and skills learnt in Introduction to Entrepreneurship course.

“We have learned overall in our syllabus and here we are applying it”. (R1)

“The course (Introduction to Entrepreneurship) gives me an overview about true entrepreneurship while this program (Beyond BPME1013) has strengthened my knowledge and skill in entrepreneurship and leads me into the field. The course teaches me about all basic aspects of business through writing a business plan. To students who are passionate about entrepreneurship, this course is a great start for them”. (R2)

“I still remember during my Asas Keusahawanan course, where I learn about intrapreneurship which is a set of qualities possessed by an entrepreneur says, creative, recognize and exploit opportunity and risk-taker, applied by an intrapreneur (staff or employee) within an organisation. So, this is a good tool for students to develop those qualities as well”. (R4)

“Yes, because the basics I learned from BPME1013 are implemented in the competition (or program)”. (R5)

Interest in Start-Up

The respondents also agreeable that this follow-up program has increased their interest in starting up a business.

“It showed me that business can be interesting. Every commitment into the class and competition is just like guiding them to build up my business kingdom brick by brick. In the end, a very surprising result may appear that was beyond my expectation at first. For instance, my expectation entering the class was just to learn more about business, but then at the end of the class, I resulted in setting up my own business. This was out of my expectation and the result is fantastic as it shaped who I am now.” (R2)

“Yes, because I am interested in creating ideas & business”. (R3)

“I have an interest in opening my own business but need more knowledge about the business and skills”. (R4)

“It does but if I do by ratio my interest to be a start-up 20:80”. (R5)

UUM an Entrepreneurial University if...

At the end of the interview sessions, respondents were asked about way forward to accelerate and encourage more students to involve in entrepreneurship activities, either small or big scale. The respondents highlighted few issues or suggestions that can be considered by the university to work towards a status of entrepreneurial university.

The issues including financial, physical entrepreneurship activity and also boosting students' confidence level to try out.

"Of course, related to funding as many startups business scare to have not enough money to keep innovate and improve their business." (R1)

Moreover, R2 and R3 suggested that students should be encouraged to have physical entrepreneurship activities such as an entrepreneurship carnival which involves buying and selling products and services. Furthermore, make it more like a competition could boost the students' teamwork and business experience while making entrepreneurship is rather fun and interesting.

"I would suggest letting the students study the course offline and perhaps organize an entrepreneurship carnival and let them sell their products. Make it a sales competition also to encourage their team spirit and the experience in business." (R2)

"Hands on, get into real business and you can feel the difference." (R3)

While both R4 and R5 raised the concern over the difficulties in starting up a business that requires courage, motivation and dedication in each student. Otherwise, students would never overcome their hesitation and worries to start a new venture, even if it is a small one. One suggestion mentioned is that sharing experience by the experienced individual could prove vital to breakthrough the aforementioned challenges.

"Confidence is the main key of success and don't give up, every business has up and down plus not always gone to get profit so try hard to get it." (R4)

"Yeah, students are afraid to do start up since they know being a startup is not easy and not all could take the risk so maybe a simple explanation on what they should do if this certain kind of risk showed up to them, they need to do this. As experienced people they should share a tip on how to survive when face the risk." (R5)

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings revealed that the respondents are agreeable that this program is a beneficial one and most importantly, able to ignite their interest in starting up their own ventures in the near future. It is noted that the program is complementing their entrepreneurial knowledge and skills gained through the course taught in the earlier semester particularly the Introduction to Entrepreneurship (BPME 1013) course. Those knowledge and skills such as preparing a business plan and exposure in online business (digital marketing) are directly applied in the program which gave such an invaluable experience for them to be used in their entrepreneurship or business pathway afterwards.

Last but not least, the respondents would love to see more initiatives and programs conducted at the university level to accelerate the entrepreneurial culture among students overall. Initiatives such as availability of more business funds or grants, events and activities like entrepreneurship carnival and competition in the university as well as more engagement with industry players or experts to get a hands-on experience in starting-up and managing their business in the future. From there, the university could move closer towards envisioning Universiti Utara Malaysia as an entrepreneurial university and supports the nation's entrepreneurship agenda.

From this piece of research, it is suggested that the program *Beyond BPME1013* could be implemented or expanded to wider audiences among students in the university. It is believed that the program is deemed beneficial for students to ignite and encourage students' interest and intention in entrepreneurship and becoming a potential graduate entrepreneur in the future. Also, such efforts could help to verify the effectiveness of the program in a bigger scale and most importantly, any necessary improvements could be done to produce more entrepreneurs among students of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM).

Moreover, it is also viable to expand the application of this program to the other universities or higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia either public or private. From there, any differences in results and findings from different institutions could be reviewed and further investigated. Such evaluation is deemed vital in aiming for improvement of the follow-up program. Eventually, the efforts could lead towards greater achievement in terms of increase number of students' starts-up or self-employed, subsequently improve both unemployment situation as well as the nation economic.

CONCLUSION

From the macro perspective, entrepreneurship education implemented in the university which translated in the form of the Introduction to Entrepreneurship (BPME 1013) course serves as a good purpose in exposing and encouraging students towards entrepreneurship activities. However, a follow-up and hands-on strategy needs to supplement the entrepreneurial knowledge and skills gained through the courses. The program called Beyond BPME 1013 is a small initiative that focused to accelerate students' interest and intention to start-up their own venture in near future.

Through three (3) activities conducted in this action research project, students are exposed to various entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and experiences that not only beneficial, but also meaningful to instill entrepreneurial characteristics in them. From there, a vision to become both entrepreneur or intrapreneur later is even clearer. Such invaluable experiences certainly beneficial for their future endeavor beyond their higher education studies in the university.

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