

## **CHARACTERISTICS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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### *ABSTRACT*

Entrepreneurship education at secondary school levels is essential in order to cultivate entrepreneurial spirit among school students and exposure entrepreneurship concept and practices at the early stage of education training. A survey was conducted at secondary school to identify students' characteristics and entrepreneurial intention. This paper examines three elements of students' characteristics, namely innovation and creativity, social skills and behaviour, self-management and entrepreneurial intention among secondary school students. A total of 595 responses were collected. The findings and discussion were included in the paper to reflect on secondary school students' characteristics and entrepreneurial intention and interest in business related activities.

*Keywords:* secondary school students; entrepreneurial intention.

### **1. Introduction**

Entrepreneurship education was not given appropriate attention at the early stage of education. Primary and secondary school students were hardly exposed to entrepreneurship education and training. Pursuing business skills and knowledge at an early age is certainly an important factor for junior entrepreneurship development. The introduction of a more systematic entrepreneurial education is part of the strategy initiated by the Malaysian government to change the mindset of Malaysian from being salaried workers to becoming self-employed. Most experts generally agree that entrepreneurs are not born; they learn to become entrepreneurs. Thus, a more positive and convincing result could be expected if the steps taken to develop the entrepreneurship culture, interest and mind are geared up when students are still at their fundamental education level.

Preparing youth for their future in an entrepreneurship focused world is beginning to receive attention in educational programs (Biers, Jensen and Serfustini, 2006). A survey was conducted at one of secondary school in order to understand the junior entrepreneurial intention at secondary school level involving 595 students. This paper attempts to discuss some preliminary findings on the characteristics and entrepreneurial intention of secondary school students. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- To investigate the participants' innovation and creativity attributes;
- To identify the participants' social skills and behaviour relevant to entrepreneurship;
- To examine self-management elements of secondary school students;
- To determine entrepreneurial intention of secondary school students.

## **2. Junior Entrepreneurship Training**

In the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006), a serious attention was given to entrepreneurship education by virtue of its importance in supporting the economic drive of the national economy as well as in narrowing the wealth differentials among the population. In fact, entrepreneurship development was identified as one of the long-term strategies to address the issue of unemployment. Central to this strategy is the provision of students with a variety of skills and knowledge in order to produce successful entrepreneurs who can compete not only locally but also globally. Admittedly, self-reliant entrepreneurs can contribute to the development of the nation as well as helping with the reduction of the country's burden by providing job opportunities.

To realize this, various measures have been undertaken by the government with the aim of achieving the goal of complementing and exposing students to the world of entrepreneurship. Among the measures that have been implemented by the Malaysian government is the inclusion of the entrepreneurial element in all subjects or courses that are related to entrepreneurship from the primary school level to the tertiary level. Apart from that, elements of entrepreneurship are also included in the co-curricular programmes such as the Entrepreneurship Programme for Youth at the secondary level and the Entrepreneurship Programme for graduates at institutions of higher learning. It has been found that entrepreneurship education plays a role in raising awareness of the nature and importance of entrepreneurship (Hill and Cinneide, 2001), changing attitudes (McVie, 2001) and delivering skills (Leitch and Harrison, 2001).

According to Tih et al. and Ahmad Rafliis et al. (2007), to foster the entrepreneurship culture, students should be exposed to proper entrepreneurship training and action oriented entrepreneurship training such as consulting-based entrepreneurship training and small student-run businesses. In entrepreneurial-orientated countries, there is a clear move towards a holistic approach focusing on all educational levels – starting from basic through to secondary and tertiary education has been widely observed (Schoof, 2006).

Junior entrepreneurship educational programs can be resource-intensive and are in general long-term investments. As Lundström and Stevenson (2002) argued that entrepreneurship development in a long-term investment and concrete results are not visible in short-run thus there is a risk that policy-makers might lose their interest. Patient and far-sighted are important in entrepreneurship training, research and development.

To be specific, entrepreneurship training at this level is important to prepare them when they enter the pre-entrepreneurs stage. Chigunta (2002) proposes a broad categorization of young entrepreneurs into three (transitional) phases as follows:

1. Pre-entrepreneurs (age of 15-19 years): This is the formative stage - transition from the security of the home or education to the working environment.
2. Budding entrepreneurs (age of 20-25 years): This is the growth stage - gained some skills, knowledge, experience, and fund to enable them establish their own business. They often face three enterprise pathways: (a) remaining stuck in marginal activities; (b) going out of business; and (c) running successful business.
3. Emergent entrepreneurs (age of 26-29 years). This is the prime stage – with valuable experiences in business, emergent entrepreneurs have a greater level of maturity than youth in the lower age groups. Hence they are more likely to run more viable business than younger generation.

Junior entrepreneurship educational program should assist in providing considerable added value in many ways. Firstly, through awareness raising and familiarizing these very

young people with entrepreneurship as a valuable career path, it promotes positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship. Secondly, by providing children with entrepreneurial skills, attributes and behaviors it has a positive effect on their decisions to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Thus it help increases the number of so-called “Pre-entrepreneurs”. Thirdly, by providing young children with the right attitude and the necessary tools will enable them to overcome many of the existing constraints to entrepreneurship.

Although youth are rarely exposed to entrepreneurship as a career choice, surveys conducted in the US, Australia and New Zealand revealed very positive attitudes of young people towards entrepreneurship and self-employment. Walstad and Kourilsky (1999) examined attitudes toward entrepreneurship amongst 14-19 year olds in the United States. Their study found that almost 70 percent of the respondents want to control their own destinies by becoming entrepreneurs. However, many of these teens’ respondents know little about how to own a business. Given the opportunity, the majority of them would prefer to own a small business than being employed in a large corporation.

Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education (2003) reported that 41.4 percent of youth 8-12 years of age, 44.4 percent of youth 13-16 years of age, and 46.7 percent of youth 17 years of age and older have thought about venturing into business. The results also indicated that the percentage of youth who want to start their own business continues to increase as they age.

### **3. Research Method**

The participants of the junior entrepreneurship survey were selected from Form 1 and Form 2 students studying at a secondary school in Bandar Baru Bangi, Malaysia. A total of 607 students attended briefing on entrepreneurship training program held at that school and were invited to answer the survey questionnaires. Out of these 607 students, 595 usable questionnaires were collected.

The survey questionnaire captured several characteristics and entrepreneurial intention of the participants. It seeks to determine the participant’s characteristics in terms of innovation and creativity, social skills and behaviour, self-management, achievement desire, problem solving, leadership, financial awareness, marketing awareness and entrepreneurial intention. All characteristics were developed based on a 5-point measurement scale with 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 indicates strongly agree. This paper is part of a larger research which focus on the characteristics and entrepreneurial intention of secondary school students.

### **4. Results And Discussion**

In reporting the results, descriptive analyses were used to describe the characteristics and entrepreneurial intention among respondents. Discussion is divided into four parts: innovation and creativity; social skills and behaviour; self-management; and entrepreneurial intention.

#### **4.1. Innovation and Creativity**

Innovation and creativity is highly valued in business and entrepreneurship environment. At the younger stage of education, secondary school, it is suggested that students need to be encouraged to involve in creative activities. In this aspect, students like to try new things and play games. However, these activities might need guidance from educators. This is reflected in our survey results as in Table 1. The item with highest score is “I like to try new things” (3.89) while the item with lowest score is “I like to do things not within instruction” (2.87). It indicated that students like to try new things with appropriate instructions and guidance. The

overall mean score of “innovation and creativity” is 3.45 implying that degree of innovativeness among the students is just slightly above mid point of 3. None of the item score managed to reached 4.0.

It is very clear here that although they are keen to explore new things in their life, they would do it according to the specified rules and regulations. In other words, they are the just “followers” and not trend-setters. Their thinking can still be considered as “within the box” and not open enough to the various opportunities in their surrounding environments. Immediate actions or strategies must be formulated to enhance this skill as it is very important for students’ creativities enhancement.

Table 1 Innovation and Creativity

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I like to try new things	3.89	0.88	10 (1.7)	31 (5.2)	109 (18.3)	300 (50.4)	136 (22.9)
2. I like games that require skills	3.83	0.95	10 (1.7)	40 (6.7)	145 (24.4)	242 (40.7)	153 (25.7)
3. I like to think	3.75	0.92	12 (2.0)	35 (5.9)	165 (27.7)	258 (43.4)	123 (20.7)
4. I always find new information	3.60	0.89	7 (1.2)	51 (8.6)	207 (34.8)	235 (39.5)	93 (15.6)
5. I have my own ideas	3.58	0.86	9 (1.5)	37 (6.2)	229 (38.5)	232 (39.0)	83 (13.9)
6. I like to do things different from others	3.56	0.95	21 (3.5)	47 (7.9)	185 (31.1)	256 (43.0)	81 (13.6)
7. I use computer for useful work	3.54	0.98	15 (2.5)	58 (9.7)	220 (37.0)	195 (32.8)	107 (18.0)
8. I like to modify exiting things	3.39	1.00	23 (3.9)	78 (13.1)	212 (35.6)	194 (32.6)	79 (13.3)
9. I like to use Internet in communication	3.35	1.21	44 (7.4)	108 (18.2)	157 (26.4)	157 (26.4)	121 (20.3)
10. I like to reuse abandon items	2.96	1.13	72 (12.1)	121 (20.3)	213 (35.8)	133 (22.4)	53 (8.9)
11. I like to do things not within instructions	2.87	1.08	69 (11.6)	139 (23.4)	225 (37.8)	116 (19.5)	41 (6.9)

Note: n = 595, mean score = 3.45

#### 4.2. Social Skills and Behaviour

Social skills and behaviour is the initial stage of communication that moulds human behaviour and characteristics. Active and ability to communication with people is the pre-requisite in business and entrepreneurship networking as in Table 2. The overall mean score for the dimension of social skills and behaviour is 3.90 indicating that students like to be in group and social environment. The item “I like to have a lot of friends” scored the highest mean (4.44) implied that students are able to build-up friendship that in long-term create a useful networking in their future career and potentially business development. In addition, students also like to work in team (3.81). They are co-operative and possess the capacity to

contribute positively while working as part of a team. These characteristics are important because in entrepreneurship development team work and team spirit is needed to achieve organizational and personal goals. The survey results indicated that students at their early stage of education showing positive social skills and behaviour and have potential in social and business communication and networking.

Table 2 Social Skills and Behaviour

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	I like to have lots of friends	4.44	0.77	3 (0.5)	14 (2.4)	44 (7.4)	189 (31.8)	344 (57.8)
2.	I like to be in cheerful environment	4.41	0.79	6 (1.0)	8 (1.3)	54 (9.1)	194 (32.6)	330 (55.5)
3.	I have lots of friends in school	4.22	0.78	4 (0.7)	11 (1.8)	72 (12.1)	269 (45.2)	233 (39.2)
4.	I like to communicate with clever people	3.96	0.88	7 (1.2)	19 (3.2)	144 (24.2)	244 (41.0)	181 (30.4)
5.	I have lots of friends outside school	3.95	0.92	8 (1.3)	34 (5.7)	115 (19.3)	251 (42.2)	178 (29.9)
6.	I like to work in team	3.81	0.93	11 (1.8)	38 (6.4)	139 (23.4)	265 (44.5)	138 (23.2)
7.	I help to handle house work	3.76	0.93	15 (2.5)	35 (5.9)	151 (25.4)	268 (45.0)	126 (21.2)
8.	I easily accept new friend	3.73	0.92	10 (1.7)	40 (6.7)	168 (28.2)	247 (41.5)	121 (20.3)
9.	I like to attend gathering	3.38	1.06	36 (6.1)	77 (12.9)	182 (30.6)	220 (37.0)	76 (12.8)
10.	I like to join association	3.31	1.05	35 (5.9)	82 (13.8)	215 (36.1)	181 (30.4)	76 (12.8)

Note: n = 595, mean score = 3.90

### 4.3 Self-Management

Self-management is an important feature for self-development and to make sure individuals achieve their goals. An entrepreneur must be good in self-management to keep up good discipline. As shown in Table 3, the overall mean score of 3.77 for the dimension of “self-management” indicating that students know how to manage their activities as well as to take

care of themselves in good manners. These skills are important to ensure that their ventures either in study or other training activities are managed systematically.

The item “Other than study I have time to play” reported the highest mean at 4.23 showing that these students know how to divide their time between learning and leisure. Good time management and planning is crucial to create satisfactory outcomes. Similarly, in entrepreneurship training and development, candidates must be able to involve in multiple function simultaneously. Thus self-management and time-management become crucial. With these skills, secondary school students are actually prepared to be trained in the entrepreneurship discipline. They have potential to understand and start get involve in small scale entrepreneurship activities to cultivate their interest in business venture and entrepreneurship.

Table 3 Self-Management

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	Other than study I have time to play	4.23	0.85	8 (1.3)	15 (2.5)	71 (11.9)	237 (39.8)	263 (44.2)
2.	When fail I try again	3.98	0.78	2 (0.3)	18 (3.0)	121 (20.3)	300 (50.4)	153 (25.7)
3.	I always motivated	3.89	2.26	4 (0.7)	25 (4.2)	174 (29.2)	270 (45.4)	119 (20.0)
4.	I like something challenging	3.86	0.89	9 (1.5)	23 (3.9)	159 (26.7)	255 (42.9)	147 (24.7)
5.	I believe I can do something	3.81	0.93	14 (2.4)	35 (5.9)	134 (22.5)	279 (46.9)	132 (22.2)
6.	I always neatly dress	3.80	0.89	10 (1.7)	23 (3.9)	172 (28.9)	253 (42.5)	132 (22.2)
7.	I will plan what I want to do	3.75	0.85	7 (1.2)	32 (5.4)	166 (27.9)	280 (47.1)	106 (17.8)
8.	I finish school work nicely	3.70	0.94	7 (1.2)	57 (9.6)	168 (28.2)	238 (40.0)	123 (20.7)
9.	I keep my promise	3.59	0.87	9 (1.5)	30 (5.0)	250 (42.0)	210 (35.3)	95 (16.0)
10.	I good in manage my own activities	3.59	0.93	12 (2.0)	45 (7.6)	218 (36.6)	217 (36.5)	102 (17.1)
11.	I do work carefully	3.57	0.84	8 (1.3)	37 (6.2)	229 (38.5)	241 (40.5)	75 (12.6)
12.	I do thing effective and efficient	3.52	0.86	7 (1.2)	44 (7.4)	255 (42.9)	208 (35.0)	78 (13.1)

Note: n = 595, mean score = 3.77

#### 4.4 Entrepreneurial Intention

The study also indicated that students have their goals and wanted to be their own boss, in other words self-employed. Without proper attention this initial motive might be sub-minimised and forgotten. The results in Table 4 show that the mean score for the dimension of ‘Entrepreneurial Intention’ was 3.50 on a 5-point scale indicating that the secondary school

students are interested in business venture and envision of being involved in business and subsequently self-employed and succeed in business venture.

The item “I want to be my own boss” recorded the highest mean at 4.01 closely followed by item “I like to produce something profitable” with a mean score of 3.93. The strongest motivation is to become the anchor of the business venture where they are the one who in control. They can also be considered as having fairly high “business minded” where the bottom-line of financial success is always among their main priority in any venture. However, item like “I like to join selling activity in school” scored the lowest mean (3.00). The plausible explanation is that schools are not promoting marketing and selling activities. At secondary school level exposure of entrepreneurship is very limited or not emphasized at all. This suggests that entrepreneurship concept should be exposed to school students at the early stage to encourage participation and direct involvement.

Table 4 Entrepreneurial Intention

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	I want to be my own boss	4.01	0.99	11 (1.8)	25 (4.2)	146 (24.5)	179 (30.1)	232 (39.0)
2.	I like to produce something that profitable	3.93	0.97	10 (1.7)	38 (6.4)	125 (21.0)	231 (38.8)	187 (31.4)
3.	I like to receive money after doing something	3.73	1.09	23 (3.9)	57 (9.6)	145 (24.4)	196 (32.9)	169 (28.4)
4.	I like to receive money via selling	3.71	0.99	17 (2.9)	43 (7.2)	165 (27.7)	232 (39.0)	131 (22.0)
5.	I want to be an entrepreneur	3.64	1.14	32 (5.4)	45 (7.6)	205 (34.5)	133 (22.4)	177 (29.7)
6.	I like to help people do selling	3.55	1.01	22 (3.7)	60 (10.1)	174 (29.2)	229 (38.5)	99 (16.6)
7.	I like to be self-employed	3.52	1.06	26 (4.4)	55 (9.2)	218 (36.6)	165 (27.7)	123 (20.7)
8.	I like to help family to buy something	3.44	1.02	29 (4.9)	60 (10.1)	206 (34.6)	207 (34.8)	86 (14.5)
9.	I like to do business in future	3.44	1.14	36 (6.1)	71 (11.9)	206 (34.6)	147 (24.7)	128 (21.5)
10.	I like to see selling activity	3.40	1.03	31 (5.2)	66 (11.1)	213 (35.8)	196 (32.9)	84 (14.1)
11.	I think selling activity is easy	3.35	1.02	27 (4.5)	76 (12.8)	234 (39.3)	167 (28.1)	83 (13.9)
12.	I like to do thing and sell	3.23	1.12	42 (7.1)	94 (15.8)	240 (40.3)	117 (19.7)	100 (16.8)
13.	I like to sell used goods	3.02	1.06	57 (9.6)	107 (18.0)	242 (40.7)	136 (22.9)	49 (8.2)
14.	I like to join selling activity in school	3.00	1.02	51 (8.6)	110 (18.5)	260 (43.7)	127 (21.3)	42 (7.1)

Note: n =595, mean score = 3.50

## 5. Conclusion

In general, this study attempts to provide a clearer picture of characteristics and entrepreneurial intention of secondary school students. It is clear that entrepreneurship education is a key issue to foster entrepreneurship development and it should be introduced at the early stage of education learning such as secondary school levels. This is because at this stage, students are motivated and possess appropriate characteristics to cultivate their interest and skills. Secondary school students are hardly exposed to entrepreneurship activities yet the results indicated that they are actually interested in field without properly developed. Schools students should also be told that besides being an employee, entrepreneurship and business venture is an option after the completion of studies. The advantages of being an entrepreneur should be promoted throughout all levels in the education system.

The survey has revealed and reinforced several important findings. Most importantly, the results indicated that at secondary school level, characteristics such as innovation and creativity, social skills, self-management and entrepreneurial intention are obvious and students' motivation towards entrepreneurship are moderate to high. If this hidden talent is not appropriately developed, it would disappear or sub-minimized at the later late of education.

It is hoped that these research findings will stimulate policy debate on the factors that foster or impede junior entrepreneurship culture at a more fundamental level and the policy measures that can facilitate them to involve in entrepreneurship activities in the future.

The findings presented in this paper should be interpreted in light of several limitations. This study only recruited participants from a secondary school. Even though they are from same school, there are still certain external factors that might influence their characteristics and behavior. Furthermore, we do not control external factors that might have impact on junior learners' perception, knowledge and skills. However, this study does not aim at generalizing its results. This is an initial effort to understand junior learners, namely secondary school students' characteristics and entrepreneurial intention. This study triggers several possibilities for further research. Future study is recommended to enlarge its scope of study and of various schools to represent the actual total population to gain more understand of secondary school students' characteristics, behavior and entrepreneurial intention.

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