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Knowledge of cognition and entrepreneurial intentions: Implications for learning entrepreneurship in public and private universities

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Abstract

Cognitive perspective to entrepreneurship has recently received growing attention by educators and researchers. Yet, research on the association between knowledge of cognition and one's intention to become an entrepreneur is scarce. This study attempts to narrow the gap in the literature by examining university students' knowledge of cognition capacity and their intentions to become entrepreneurs. The sample consisted of 722 students from public (n=331) and private universities (n=391) in Malaysia. The findings indicated that students from public universities scored higher in all dimensions of knowledge of cognition including declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge. However, entrepreneurial intentions of students from private universities were higher than their counterparts from public universities. These findings highlight the importance of understanding students' knowledge of cognition capacity to improve their entrepreneurial learning and consequently their intentions to become entrepreneurs. Implications of the findings for entrepreneurship education and research and agendas for future studies are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Cognitive perspective to entrepreneurship has recently received growing attention by educators and researchers [1]. This importance given to the cognitive aspects of entrepreneurship is a response to the contradictory findings of the previous research that specified the unique characteristics of entrepreneurs [2,3]. It also reflects the critical role that entrepreneurs and their cognitive attributes play in the entire process of a new venture creation from the decision to become an entrepreneur to opportunity recognition and performance and growth of the business [4,5,6,7]. However, previous research has mostly focused on limited dimensions of entrepreneurship cognition and the consequences of using specific types of cognition for entrepreneurs' performance and success [1]. Only few studies examined the association between cognition and entrepreneurial intentions among students [8,9,10]. Although these researches measured the impact of cognitive styles on students' entrepreneurial career selections, the findings may not be fully applicable to improve students' motivation to become an entrepreneur, develop their abilities to learn entrepreneurship knowledge and skills, and direct them to set entrepreneurship as their future career

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path goal [1,8]. This study attempts to narrow the gap in the literature by examining university students' metacognition awareness (knowledge of cognition) [11] and their entrepreneurial intentions. The findings contribute to the entrepreneurship cognition literature by highlighting the critical role that individuals can play in the process of learning entrepreneurship knowledge and skills and directing their motivation, beliefs, and behavior to change their entrepreneurial intentions to a real new business. This study also contributes better understanding of entrepreneurial behavior and the factors that shape entrepreneurial intentions by measuring students' knowledge of cognition capacity. In the following sections, we explain the theoretical background of the study. Subsequently, we present the methodological approach and findings. Finally, the paper concludes with an explanation of the contributions of the findings to entrepreneurship research and education and proposes the agendas for future research.

1.1. Entrepreneurial intention: The theory of planned behavior

Measuring individuals' intentions to establish a new venture has been one of the main concerns of entrepreneurship researchers and educators [e.g.,12,13,14]. This growing prominence given to exploring entrepreneurial intentions is due to the critical importance of intention for predicting individuals' choice of vocation, entrepreneurial plans [9, 15], and their real involvement in entrepreneurship [16]. Furthermore, entrepreneurial intention leads individuals' real behavior in creating a new venture by its influence on the entrepreneurial goals they set and the commitments and efforts they make to achieve the goals [17]. Various theories have been developed to explain different factors that shape entrepreneurial career intention [18]. The Theory of Planned Behavior [19] has been mostly applied as the theoretical framework to examine entrepreneurial intention and behavior [e.g., 9,20,21]. The theory defines individual's intention to adopt a specific behavior such as students' intentions to launch their own businesses as a cognitive process and a result of interactions among three major factors. The first factor is attitude toward behavior and reflects if students consider entrepreneurship and its consequences as favorable or unfavorable. A robust body of research has found significant influence of students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship on their entrepreneurial intentions [e.g., 8,22,23]. The second factor is control over the process of entrepreneurship which has been mostly translated into entrepreneurship research as students' perceived self-efficacy in performing the required tasks and roles to establish and manage a new venture [23]. Prior research has found the influential impact of entrepreneurial self-efficacy on students' entrepreneurial intentions [22,23,24]. Finally, subjective and social norms are the value and support of students' entrepreneurial career decisions by the family, close community, and people in the country and the extent to which students comply with the values and rely on the supports. Previous research provided empirical evidence on the relationship between subjective and social norms and entrepreneurial career intentions of students [23,25]. Scholars argue that a combination of personal and environmental factors affect the formation of students' entrepreneurial intentions [9,24]. Recently, considerable attention has been paid to the significant impact of cognition on students' entrepreneurial intentions [8,9,10]. The following section describes the importance of cognition in shaping students' intention to launch their own venture.

1.2. Cognition and entrepreneurial intention

Cognition has recently emerged as a systematic theoretical foundation to explain the factors that influence entrepreneurial intention and behavior [3,7,8,9]. Cognitive approach to entrepreneurship research was based on the assumption that "entrepreneurs develop unique knowledge structures and they process (transform, store, recover and use) information differently from non-entrepreneurs" [2, p.29]. Furthermore, each phase of the entrepreneurship process requires specific cognitive qualities [9]. Cognition is the mental processes and models that individuals employ to gather, organize and use information and develops through one's interactions with other people and the environment [7]. It immediately precedes the occurrence of a conscious and intended behavior such as the decision to create a new venture [2]. Scholars argue that cognition is the organized knowledge and thought that highly guides one's motivation, beliefs and behavior specifically in challenging and complex situations such as a new venture creation [6,7,11,15]. Moreover, the decision to pursue an entrepreneurial career path is a deliberate and planned behavior that can be influenced by one's cognitive abilities [2]. Only few researchers provided a conceptual definition for entrepreneurship cognition [1]. Entrepreneurial cognitions have been defined as "the knowledge structures that people use to make assessments, judgment, or decisions involving opportunity evaluation, venture creation, and growth" [7, p. 97]. Entrepreneurs are different from other people both in their structure of their

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