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Effects of Entrepreneurship Learning on Attitudes and Intentions of University Students: the Case of Sohar University, Oman

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Abstract

The quantitative research design, using a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool was used. The questionnaire consisted of items related to entrepreneurial learning, attitudes, and entrepreneurial intentions. The questionnaire used the Likert's Five-Point Scale. Surveys were conducted to collect the primary data, while secondary data was gathered from relevant academic sources such as books, journals, and research articles. The sample for the study included a total of 306 students, selected through stratified random sampling. The sample was divided proportionally among the six faculties of Sohar University to ensure representation from each faculty. The paper concludes that the students' EI is influenced by their EL via the compulsory entrepreneurship course that they have taken at Sohar University (SU). Other factors can be considered that influence their EA to startup. The results show a significant impact of students' entrepreneurial attitudes on the relationship between EL and SI to startups. This indicates that as the level of entrepreneurial learning increases, the students' intentions to become entrepreneurs also increase. The findings have implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and entrepreneurship development programs in Oman, highlighting the importance of incorporating entrepreneurship education in the curriculum to encourage entrepreneurial aspirations among students

Keywords: *University students, Entrepreneurial Learning, Entrepreneurial Attitudes, Entrepreneurial Intention.*

Introduction

The inclusion of a compulsory entrepreneurship course for all students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman shows the commitment of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) to foster entrepreneurial skills and mindset among students. By making entrepreneurship a mandatory course for all students, regardless of their disciplines or specializations, the MoHERI is recognizing the importance of equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the increasingly competitive and dynamic business environment. Such a course can help students develop various entrepreneurial skills, including creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, and innovation. It can also provide them with a solid foundation in business planning, financial management, marketing, and other critical aspects of entrepreneurship. This initiative by the MoHERI is a positive step towards nurturing a culture of entrepreneurship in Oman and encouraging students to explore entrepreneurial opportunities and start their ventures. It can also contribute to the diversification of the economy by promoting

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innovation and job creation. Overall, the compulsory entrepreneurship course in HEIs in Oman is an excellent initiative that can have a significant impact on the development of the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem and the future success of its students. That sounds like a great initiative by the government. Encouraging entrepreneurship among students can have numerous benefits, such as fostering innovation, creating job opportunities, and boosting the economy. By providing support and financing for entrepreneurship activities, the government is taking an active role in nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. This can ultimately lead to a more diverse and sustainable economy, as well as empowering individuals to take control of their career paths. The Sultanate of Oman has witnessed significant advancements in its higher education sector in recent years. To further promote innovation and entrepreneurship among students, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHERI), made a crucial decision in the academic year (2013/2014). It mandated a compulsory entrepreneurship course for all students enrolled in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman. This decision aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their disciplines or specializations, have the opportunity to develop essential entrepreneurial skills. Recently; Oman has adopted a diversified economic policy to avoid reliance on oil as the main source of income in the long term to achieve prosperity of the country. Consequently; entrepreneurship was regarded as a key to the economic diversification policy as the government has targeted higher education institutions students to promote entrepreneurial behavior. This study aims to investigate how entrepreneurship learning through various types of courses as an independent variable, affects the students' entrepreneurial attitudes and eventually their intentions to start up. Students' attitudes can be the first independent variable or a moderator variable affecting the relationship between entrepreneurship learning the intention. Besides the fact that there might be other factors influencing students to start up in addition to their acquired entrepreneurship skills through formal education and learning. This is why the study limits its scope to only these variables.

Research Questions

The study will try to answer its main questions which are:

1. What is the impact of students' Entrepreneurship Learning (EL) on their Entrepreneurship Intentions (EI)?
2. What is the mediating role of Entrepreneurship Attitude (EA) between (EL) and (EI)?

Research Objectives

This article is trying to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the impact of (EL) on (EI)
2. To test the mediating role of (EA) between (EL) and (EI)

Study Hypotheses

Based on the problem and questions stated above, the research hypotheses are as follows:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between (EL) and students' (EI).
2. There is no statistically significant relationship between students' (EA) and their (EI).

Literature Review

This section examines how (EL) influences entrepreneurial intentions through the development of skills, and information, and altering attitudes about starting a business. (Buana, 2016), investigates the elements that influence entrepreneurial intentions in Indonesia. He starts by thinking about initiatives started by state institutions, universities, funders, and nonprofit groups. He considers the variables that foster entrepreneurial purpose, which span from personal to social and economic issues, and how these aspects interact to impact students' choices and behavior. He also explains how the economic crisis, as well as social and economic factors, maybe a driving force behind the increase in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, he contrasts the notions of "entrepreneurial event" (Shapero & Sokol, 1982) with "planned behavior" (Ajzen, 1991). He conducted a study with 794 respondents who were students at the same university. The study examined the key motivators for entrepreneurial intention and found that those who come from entrepreneurial families are more likely to develop entrepreneurial intention. (Al Mamum, A., et al, 2016), emphasized the significance of entrepreneurship in driving national development.

They explored the concept of entrepreneurship and its connection to the emergence of business ventures. Additionally, they investigated the influence of various competencies on students' entrepreneurial intentions. Moreover, they highlighted the crucial role played by universities in fostering these competencies and skills. As a case study, they examined the entrepreneurship programs offered by University Malaysia Kelantan, which aim to enhance students' knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship. Moreover; (Wei, X., Liu, X., & Sha, J., 2019) found a positive relationship between perceptions of entrepreneurship education and perceptions of innovation. In their study, (Purwana, et al, 2018) explored the government of Indonesia's strategy to boost the economy by fostering new entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial education. They examined two theories, namely the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Theory of Entrepreneurial Event by (Shapero and Sokol, 1982), to understand entrepreneurial intention. The researchers surveyed 413 participants and found that both theories could predict entrepreneurial intention. However, the Theory of Entrepreneurial Events; showed more favorable results in terms of entrepreneurial intention. The study also highlighted the interconnectedness of both theories in their application to entrepreneurship research. To understand the differences between educated and uneducated entrepreneurs, it is essential to consider the nature of the concept. A study conducted by (Ahmad, Baharun, and Rahman, 2014) confirmed that entrepreneurship is primarily seen as a business discipline, leaving students from other disciplines who are interested in starting their organizations

after graduation feeling neglected, despite often being the originators of product ideas. In Malaysia, there is a growing concern that technical students lack the necessary entrepreneurial skills to venture into business, particularly in running small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This highlights the need for universities to introduce entrepreneurship education. According to (Lazear, Edward, P., 2004) formal schooling is used to supplement the set of skills needed for those who can become entrepreneurs. While (Kuratko, D. F., 2005) focuses on the trends and challenges in entrepreneurship education for the 21st century.

Entrepreneurial learning (EL) is considered a supportive measure that helps students prepare for new challenges and identify the appropriate elements and opportunities in entrepreneurship. (Cumming and Zhan, 2018) argued that while entrepreneurship education cannot be taught, it can create interest in entrepreneurship education. (Byabashaija and Katono, 2011) found a positive impact of entrepreneurial education and societal subjective norms on the entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions of university students in Uganda. Students are expected to do anything that they have passion about.

If they have a passion or the EL created this passion about entrepreneurship then they might be engaged in such activities as argued by (Vallerand, R. J., et al, 2003) that passion is a strong inclination toward an activity that people like and find important, and in which they invest time and energy, (Sierra, K., 2006), (Mwiya, B. et al, 2017) and (Rotefoss, B. and Kolvereid, L., 2005). Graduates from Oman's HEIs seek steady jobs in the public sector or major enterprises (Al Lamki, 1998). These choices are frequently influenced by cultural values (Swailes and Al Fadhi, 2011). Graduates choose the fixed salary, stability, and other perceived perks of government service such as long-term security, etc. In contrast, entrepreneurship entails taking risks and receiving little initial cash gains in the early phases.

The nature of entrepreneurial activity frequently contradicts collectivist and tribe-based societies in terms of cultural values and attitudes (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012). (Athayde, R., 2009) argued that Demographic differences and training or internship influence entrepreneurial intention. (Al Mamum, A., et al, 2016), found that students' ability to spot business ideas, entrepreneurial training and skills, innovativeness, and information-seeking competencies has a significant effect on their entrepreneurial intention.

There is a growing body of work on entrepreneurship in Oman, particularly on students' entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions (Bakheet, A., H., 2018a, 2018b), which reflects the impact of several elements such as family support, failure of failure, technical knowledge, and appropriate skills. (Dickson et al., 2008) discovered some variations in student intentions before and after taking entrepreneurship courses. As a result, students seek further information on entrepreneurship and techniques to improve their image of self-employment as a viable career option. (Bhandari, N. C., 2006) identified six variables that can affect Indian students' entrepreneurship intention: to lead, to be their own boss, to put innovative ideas into practice, determination, personal challenge, and

non-business education. (Ahmed, I., et al, 2010), found that there is a strong relation between innovativeness and entrepreneurial intentions, however, some demographical characteristics were insignificant to the intentions, but prior experience, family exposure to business, and level of exposure inclines students to become entrepreneurs.

Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to achieve the objectives of this research. For the quantitative research, the survey was used to collect primary data from students of Sohar University about their opinions regarding the mandatory course on entrepreneurship they have taken at Sohar University (SU).

The questionnaire contains general information about the respondents as well as research-specific information covering the main constructs. It is a systematic investigation that starts with data collection, evaluation, and screening of any unusable cases. After collecting the needed data, statistical analysis started using SPSS. From the literature and for the sake of this study the following framework was used, around which questions, objectives, and hypotheses were developed. The targeted population is students of Sohar University who have finished their mandatory course on entrepreneurship, and the sampling method used is cluster sampling to have representation from each faculty.

A sample size of 306 students participated in the study from different faculties at Sohar University. To make sure that the online questionnaire is reliable and working appropriately; a pilot test was conducted. Consequently; some changes were introduced to fine-tune the data set and sequence. As the study targeted Sohar University students who completed their entrepreneurship course, this sample size was found to be representative relative to the total population of targeted students which was found to be around 3000 students. Around 400 online surveys were sent to targeted students randomly and proportionately across faculties asking them to participate.

It's a random sample size chosen from students who have attended the course at the university from all faculties. The response rate was 76.5 percent which is acceptable. The questionnaire used in this study comprised close-ended questions covering the demographic details of respondents and Likert's Five-Point Scale was used for measuring research-specific statements about entrepreneurship learning, entrepreneurial attitudes, and intention. The questionnaire was provided online and distributed to students by WhatsApp study groups and university email addresses. The data screening out and checked and analysis then started after collecting all the required data. Data was transferred to SPSS for analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to find the mode, mean, median and standard deviations, while regression was used to test the hypotheses. The qualitative data is also considered in the form of discussions with some of the respondents and based on other observations of some students who lead the Sohar Enterprise Club, which includes in its membership many students from different faculties mentored by one staff from the Faculty of Business.

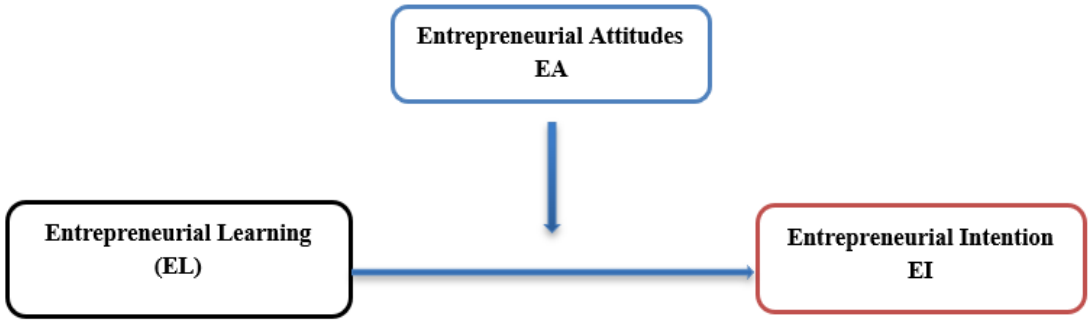

Figure (1) Study Framework

Results

A reliability test was conducted for all variables used to measure these constructs to find out whether they are consistent and valuable and no one was found to be redundant and can be dropped out. Table (1) shows Cronbach's Alpha which found ranged between (0.761 to 0.870).

Table (1): Reliability Statistics of the Study Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Students' Intentions to start-up	8	0.798
Students Attitudes	9	0.761
Entrepreneurship Learning	10	0.870

Respondents' Profile

Table (2) contains the general information statistics, which show that the highest rate of respondents is females (68 percent) and the majority were between 18-24 years old (63 percent). Those who are at a bachelor's degree are 56 percent. Due to the large number of engineering students, they constitute the majority of the sample (37 percent). As the number of international students is generally low at SU, the majority of the sample students are Omanis (96 percent). As SU is located in North Al-Batinah Region, 70 percent of the sample students were from this region.

Table (2): Respondents Profile

Item	Description	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24	193	63.1
	24-28	57	18.6
	28-32	29	9.5
	32-36	9	2.9
	above 36	18	5.9
Gender	Male	99	32.4
	Female	207	67.6
qualifications	Diploma	67	21.9
	Advanced Diploma	69	22.5

Table Continues:

	Bachelor	170	55.6
	Total	306	100.0
Nationality	Omani	294	96.1
	Non-Omani	12	3.9
Residential Area	Al-Batinah	213	69.6
	Muscat	32	10.5
	Al-Dakhiliya	7	2.3
	Al-Dhahrah	15	4.9
	Al-Sharqiya	12	3.9
	Musandam	10	3.3
	Al-Buraimi	16	5.2
	Al-Wustah	1	.3
Faculty	Faculty of Business	71	23.2
	Faculty of Engineering	113	36.9
	Faculty of Computing and Information Technology	28	9.2
	Faculty of Languages Study	35	11.4
	Faculty of Law	49	16.0
	Faculty of Education and Arts	10	3.3

Descriptive Statistics

Table (3) contains the descriptive statistics of the study variables. Entrepreneurship learning has a mean score of 2.17, a median score of 2.11, and a mode score of 1.78 with a standard deviation of 0.99. Similar statistics were shown for attitudes while little fewer statistics were shown for intentions, where the mean score is 1.13, the median score is 1.75, the mode score of 1.38, and the standard deviation of .83.

These numbers reflect that the course has all the required information needed for increasing awareness and changing attitudes.

It also shows that students irrespective of their faculties and specializations, believe that they can become entrepreneurs. Students prefer to have government jobs over starting their businesses. Students believe that starting their businesses will contribute to the development of Oman in the future.

Table (3): Descriptive Statistics Entrepreneurial Learning

Item	**N**	**Mean**	**Median**	**Mode**	**σ**
Entrepreneurial Learning	306	2.17	2.11	1.78	0.99
Students' Entrepreneurial Attitudes	306	2.08	2.0	1.78	0.94
Students' Entrepreneurial Intentions	306	1.13	1.75	1.38	0.83

Hypotheses testing

The results of the linear regression analysis to test the hypotheses using moderation analysis are shown in the following regression model, ANOVA, and Coefficients. To investigate if entrepreneurial attitudes have any effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial learning and intention, see the significance column in the Coefficients table. First, the R square value in the regression model summary table is 0.33 which means that the independent variable explains 33 percent of the variation in the dependent variable.

Table (4): Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.573[a]	.328	.324	.44764

a. Predictors: (Constant), Learning, INT

The one-way ANOVA examines the means of the dependent, independent, and interaction terms to evaluate whether any of them are statistically significantly different from one another. In this case, the one-way ANOVA shows significance (Sig. = 0.000).

Table (5): ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	29.664	2	14.832	74.020	.000[b]
	Residual	60.715	303	.200		
	Total	90.380	305			

a. Dependent Variable: Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Learning, INT

There is a strong causal effect between entrepreneurship learning and the students' entrepreneurial intentions, where (P-value = 0.000). Since the P-value is P-value ≤ 0.05**,** the relationship between entrepreneurship learning and the students' entrepreneurial intentions is significant.

Table (6): Coefficientsa

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.848	.086		9.913	.000
	INT	.091	.021	.203	4.302	.000
	Learning	.414	.037	.531	11.275	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Intention

Concerning the moderation effect results, it can be seen that the interaction term (INT) has a P-value of 0.000. Since the P-value is lower than the significance level of 0.05, we can consider that the moderator variable entrepreneurial attitudes affect the relationship between the independent variable, entrepreneurship learning (EL), and the dependent variable, which is students' entrepreneurial intentions.

To see the conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator, PROCESS macro will be used. The moderation analysis results using PROCESS macro, are shown in Table (7), which shows the most significant indices and matrices for moderation analysis using PROCESS macro. The model summary shows that the *R-square* is 0.399 meaning that the independent variable explains about 40 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. All P-values for EL, EA, and EI are significant (P-value ≤ 0.05).

Model 1: about 40 percent of variations are being explained in entrepreneurship learning (EL) by students' attitudes (SA). This shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurship learning and students' attitudes (SA), where (β=0.632; p<0.01; and t=14.446).

Model 2: 29.4 percent of variations are being explained in entrepreneurship learning by students' intentions (SI). Therefore; there is a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurship learning and students' intentions, where (β=0.464; p<0.01; t=8.326).

Model 3: 40.6 percent of variations are being explained in students' attitudes by students' intentions. This shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between students' entrepreneurial attitudes and students' intentions to start up, where, (β=0.637; p<0.01; t=14.660).

Table (7): Moderation Analysis Using PROCESS Macro

	Model 1		**Model 2**		**Model 3**	
Independent Variables	**B**	***SE***	**B**	***SE***	**B**	**SE**
1. Students' Intentions	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.637	0.00
2. Students' Attitudes	0.464	0.00	0.464	0.00	0.00	0.00
R^2	0.399***		0.294***		0.406***	
Adjusted R^2	0.397***		0.292***		0..406***	
F Values	14.446***		8.326***		14.660***	

Note: Dependent Variable: Studying Entrepreneurship; Number of cases 306.
+p <.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001 (significance levels).
Model 1: Model 2: The table shows the standardized beta-coefficients (B), and SE (Standardized Error) along with the significance level of their t-statistics as well as the F-Value, R^2, and adjusted R^2 are significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results of the study shown above, there is a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurship learning at university and students' intentions to start up. It was also realized that the student entrepreneurial attitudes are influenced by the EL and it was found different among SU students across its faculties, which can be referred to many factors including the preferences to find a stable government job.

The study revealed that there is a significant relationship between EL, studying the entrepreneurship course at the university, and the students; EA which influences their EI. It was found that there is a positive relationship between student EL and intention and this is consistent with the theories of entrepreneurship event and learned behaviour which were reviewed earlier. In line with similar studies in the wider Gulf region, students are inclined to view entrepreneurship learning and its impact, positively in their university education. In the study of (Ibrahim et al, 2017), entrepreneurship education was found to be positively correlated with attitudes toward entrepreneurship. This study's findings also confirmed most of the literature being reviewed.

One more thing to mention is the reality that Sohar University is promoting entrepreneurship among students and they have both Sohar Students Entrepreneurship Club and Sohar Entrepreneurship Centre. Faculty of Business (FB) is also supporting students and encouraging them by providing different business plan competitions, relevant petitions, and prizes.

In doing so, FB liaises with internal and external bodies including the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the SMEs Development Fund, and the General Establishment of Promoting SMEs (Riyadah). Recently, SU and Oman Qaboos (OQ); the biggest government organization in the country have agreed to support students' entrepreneurship initiatives through incubation and technical support. The issue that is clear from the results is that even though entrepreneurship is viewed positively by students, there are fewer average statistics of students starting businesses after graduation. General economic problems may be a factor as per the discussion with some students through the interviews besides the cultural factors, and risks associated with startups.

This is justifying why students prefer public sector employment and it becomes in the GCC well-known graduates' expectations. This is also supported by (Drennan et al., 2005), who argued that perceptions of entrepreneurship were influenced by what they called difficult childhood and frequent relocation. The paper concludes that the students' EI is influenced by their EL via the compulsory entrepreneurship course that they have taken at Sohar University (SU). Other factors can be considered that influence their EA to startup. The results show a significant impact of students' entrepreneurial attitudes on the relationship between EL and SI to startups. Students have shown a clear interest in public sector jobs or even private sector jobs compared to starting their businesses. SU encourages students to develop their ideas into business ventures by providing support and opportunity to use campus facilities. Results show that there are many success factors as many students in SU have a positive EI to start their own business.

Limitation of the Study

The limited scope of the study to include only SU students could be considered as a limitation of this study to generalize its results. In future researchers can conduct a country-wide survey or a regional survey in collaboration with other regional research centres or universities. Besides the selected variables of EL, SA, and SI are limited and more variables can be included in future studies

such as culture, family support, personal traits, etc.

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