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Fostering the entrepreneurship career choice through entrepreneurial social support and business opportunity identification among tertiary students: a preliminary study

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Abstract

This preliminary study investigates the impact of entrepreneurial social support (ESS) and business opportunity identification (BOI) on the entrepreneurial career choice (ECC) of tertiary students in Malaysia. Guided by the Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (ESCT), the research investigates how social and cognitive factors shape students' decisions to pursue entrepreneurship. ESS includes emotional, informational, and financial support from family, friends, and peers, which enhances self-efficacy and reduces psychological barriers to entrepreneurship. BOI, the cognitive ability to recognise viable market opportunities, plays a crucial role in developing entrepreneurial intentions. Using purposive sampling, data were collected from 87 undergraduate students across various academic disciplines in Malaysia. Structural equation modelling showed that ESS and BOI significantly affect ECC, together explaining 58% of its variance. ESS helps students overcome challenges, while BOI enables them to identify and act on business opportunities. These findings underscore the need to incorporate both social support mechanisms and opportunity recognition training into entrepreneurship education. The study contributes to the literature on entrepreneurial intentions and provides practical recommendations for educators and policymakers. Future research should explore additional factors, such as personality traits and socioeconomic background, to further understand entrepreneurial career decisions.

Keywords:

Entrepreneurial social support;
Business opportunity identification;
Entrepreneurship career choice;
Tertiary students;
Entrepreneurial success components theory.

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in both personal and national development. It not only empowers individuals to raise their income and create businesses (Ratten, 2023; Sharma & Sharma, 2022) but also contributes significantly to economic and social progress. This includes enhancing job creation, boosting production, increasing revenue and foreign exchange, and addressing poverty through sustainable economic growth (Halizah & Darmawan, 2023; Wahyono et al., 2022; Yose, 2023; Zhakupov et al., 2023). Given these benefits, entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a desirable career path for youth and graduates (Lajqi et al., 2019; Liguori

et al., 2020). Moreover, those with strong entrepreneurial aspirations are more likely to succeed in launching ventures, which in turn helps address graduate unemployment and supports social and economic development (Lajqi et al., 2019; Santosa et al., 2020).

Despite this potential, many students hesitate to pursue entrepreneurship, often due to a lack of support from their immediate social environments. Entrepreneurial social support (ESS), which includes emotional, financial, and informational support from family and peers, is especially vital for young individuals aspiring to become entrepreneurs (Nielsen, 2020; Noerhartati et al., 2019). Support from one's social circle enhances self-confidence and nurtures entrepreneurial interest (Ernawati et al., 2022; Khayru et al., 2021), whereas perceived support improves entrepreneurial performance and intention (Seyoum et al., 2021; Wang & Huang, 2019). Studies have shown that students lacking such support are more likely to seek stable employment rather than take the risk of starting a business (Khalid et al., 2018; Lagdon et al., 2018; Seyoum et al., 2021). Thus, the role of the ESS in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions warrants further investigation, especially in the context of Malaysian tertiary students.

Another key determinant of entrepreneurship is the ability to identify and evaluate business opportunities. Cognitive processes, such as business opportunity identification (BOI), are critical for recognising unmet market needs and transforming ideas into viable ventures (Doan et al., 2021; Duong et al., 2022). These processes are foundational during the early stages of student entrepreneurship, enabling them to assess market demand, apply acquired knowledge, and develop innovative capabilities (Ghazali et al., 2021; Seyoum et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2019). Prior research has confirmed that BOI significantly influences entrepreneurial intentions (He et al., 2020; Seah et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding students' ability to identify opportunities is central to fostering entrepreneurship in them.

While ESS and BOI have been individually examined in various studies, there is limited research exploring their combined influence on entrepreneurship career choice (ECC) among Malaysian tertiary students. This study seeks to reinvestigate entrepreneurial social support within the Malaysian higher education context and integrate it with business opportunity identification to provide a broader understanding of its joint effect on ECC. The objective of this study is to examine the influence of entrepreneurial social support (ESS) and business opportunity identification (BOI) on entrepreneurship career choice (ECC) among tertiary students in Malaysia. Grounded in the Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982), this study focuses on the environmental and cognitive factors shaping students' entrepreneurial aspirations.

2. Entrepreneurial success

The study's conceptual framework was adapted from the entrepreneurial success components theory (ESCT) developed by (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982). This theory describes the critical determinants of successful business ventures (Chapagain, 2022; Kamall Khan et al., 2021). ESCT sees entrepreneurship as a social process whereby a person's ambition in entrepreneurship develops in a social situation (Kamall Khan et al., 2021; Wulandari et al., 2021). As such, factors such as job choice, job experience, present routines, social attachments, society class, social issues, family and friends' influences, and education could affect a person's intention to choose an entrepreneurship career despite their genetic factors (Chapagain, 2022; Kamall Khan et al., 2021). Therefore, this theory emphasises that environmental factors are essential in influencing an individual to create a successful business venture (Seun, 2017).

This theory comprises four essential components: ability and experience, motivation and determination, idea and market, and resources, as the critical success ingredients for a successful business startup. According to Gibb and Ritchie (1982), an idea is an individual's ability to think,

create, and establish a workable business idea and develop a competitive product compared to competitors. The market concept emphasises a person who is supposed to respond to the marketing and sales of products by understanding the marketplace and customer demand. Besides that, it also stresses the importance of creating a customer base through market research (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982; Seun, 2017; Wulandari et al., 2021). Ability is defined as the capability of individuals and their families to perform and operate a business venture, and experience refers to an entrepreneur's previous working experience, knowledge, skills, and technical and managerial experiences, which are associated with the entrepreneur performing their entrepreneurial task (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982).

Resources were described as the premises and plants, raw materials, labour, and financial resources needed and available to operate a business venture. In this theory, motivation and determination refer to the support of family members, friends, partners, and records of an individual to open a business, in addition to fostering personal and group objectives in operating a business venture. Furthermore, the 'plan' in this construct is defined as the application of the desired business, planned by an entrepreneur by acquiring the necessary finance, premises, and construct, which enables them to operate the business venture successfully. On the other hand, the term "organisation" describes a business's successful opening and operation with all the requirements. Therefore, this study examines entrepreneurial social support (ESS), business opportunity identification (BOI), and entrepreneurship career choice (ECC).

The ESS was employed from the motivation and determination construct of this theory because it indicates support from the students' social environment, such as parents, siblings, close friends, and teachers (Fan & Su, 2021; Gibb & Ritchie, 1982) to be entrepreneurs (Ben Amara et al., 2020; Mayanja et al., 2019). Besides, BOI was employed from the idea and market construct because it expresses students' cognitive process to identify business opportunities to establish an entrepreneurial venture (Kamall Khan et al., 2021). Moreover, ECC was employed based on a plan and organisation construct because it describes applying a desired business plan after a person has identified the relevant requirements for starting the business (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982).

2.1 Entrepreneurship career choice (ECC)

An entrepreneurial career is a form of thinking that focuses on opportunities rather than threats (Goran, 2021; Fernandes et al., 2022; Ghazy et al., 2022). This flow involves converting an ingenious idea into an entrepreneurial venture and creating value (Drobyazko et al., 2019; Secundo et al., 2017). ECC is a deliberate and specific decision to pursue entrepreneurship as a profession (Buang et al., 2016; Moriano et al., 2011; Nagarathanam et al., 2017; Nagarathanam & Buang, 2016). Thus, ECC is viewed as a mental process that guides an individual's decision to become an entrepreneur, and it is based on an individual's perception that engaging in the behaviour will produce a desirable outcome (Awang et al., 2014).

This study proposes a conceptual model in which entrepreneurial social support (ESS) and business opportunity identification (BOI) influence entrepreneurship career choice (ECC) among tertiary students in Malaysia. These constructs are theoretically grounded in the Entrepreneurial Success Components Theory (Gibb & Ritchie, 1982), which emphasizes the influence of environmental and cognitive factors on entrepreneurial outcomes. In this framework, ESS and BOI were treated as independent variables, and ECC served as the dependent variable. The model assumes that support from the social environment and the ability to recognise viable opportunities jointly contribute to students' decisions to pursue entrepreneurship. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model.

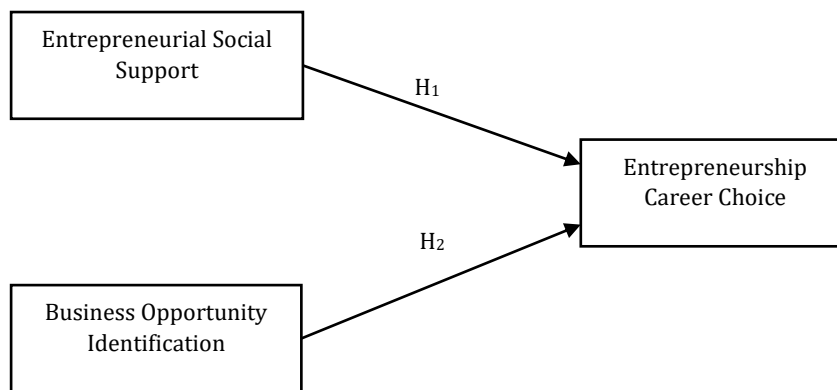


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

2.2 Entrepreneurial social support (ESS)

According to Asante et al. (2022), Martins et al. (2022), and Wang and Huang (2019), social support is a type of assistance given to a person by another person who plays a significant part in their life, such as family members, close friends, and their environment, to help them surmount obstacles in unfavourable circumstances. Social support is a crucial element in entrepreneurship because assistance and encouragement from family members, close friends, and the surroundings of a particular individual (a student) inspire them to become an entrepreneur (Noerhartati et al., 2019; Vesna et al., 2016). In addition, the perception of social support, such as family members with access to financial resources and knowledge, influences students to launch a new business (Badri & Hachicha, 2019; Neneh, 2020).

Research indicates that family and friends' support is crucial for students pursuing an entrepreneurial career (Ismail et al., 2013; Sahban et al., 2014). The family provides an essential support system throughout a person's life, encouraging them to pursue demanding professions and become independent (Buang & Mohd Yusof, 2006; Ohutso Imbaya, 2012). Family members contribute significantly to businesses through paid and unpaid labour, helping entrepreneurs start their businesses with seed money and connecting them with outside sources of youth finance (Matzek et al., 2010; Welsh et al., 2014). Family connections also serve as solid business networks, providing resources that positively affect new venture creation (Sahban et al., 2014). On the other hand, friends' support is crucial for achieving business goals, as it fosters a supportive work environment, boosts confidence, and promotes competition (Agarwal et al., 2020; Klyver et al., 2020; Nielsen, 2020; Yoga et al., 2023). This social network can be enhanced by friends' financial assistance, information, and ongoing encouragement, which can lead to better business results and a more robust social network for students after establishing their business ventures (Agarwal et al., 2020; Klyver et al., 2020; Nielsen, 2020; Yoga et al., 2023).

Several studies have reported that social support is significantly related to entrepreneurship career choice (Ben Amara et al., 2020; Fan & Su, 2021; Wang & Huang, 2019). For instance, studies of Indian women entrepreneurs (Sinha, 2003), Italian entrepreneurs (Molino et al., 2018), and Malaysian and Indonesian university students (Mahadi et al., 2015; Ernawati et al., 2022) indicate that ESS has a significant impact on individuals' intention to be entrepreneurs. On the other hand, social support has also been insignificant in forming entrepreneurship career intention among students in Saharan Africa, which proposes to policymakers to establish appropriate entrepreneurship events to create entrepreneurial intention among students (Muhammed & Kura, 2020). However, many studies indicate that students with more social support also have greater entrepreneurial aspirations (Khayru et al., 2021; Muhammed & Kura, 2020; Nielsen, 2020) because social support can alter expectations of entrepreneurial goals and encourage students to participate in entrepreneurship (Shiri & Mohammadi, 2012). Perceived support,

encouragement, and motivation from family members, friends, educators, and institutions enhance students' entrepreneurial intentions. Therefore, this will lead them to become entrepreneurs and work towards establishing their startups. The relevant hypothesis was developed as follows:

H1: Entrepreneurial social support has a significant effect on entrepreneurship career choice among tertiary students in Malaysia.

2.3 Business opportunity identification (BOI)

Baron and Shane (2007) defined opportunity as an alleged method of making money (profit) that has not been used before and is not used by anyone else. Opportunity recognition is a mental process by which people conclude that they have found a chance. As a result, explaining how opportunities are discovered and developed is an essential aspect of entrepreneurship studies. Furthermore, Shane (2000) stated that the discipline entails the investigation of opportunity sources, the processes of opportunity discovery, evaluation, and exploitation, and the individuals who discover, evaluate and exploit them. According to Ma and Huang (2019) and He et al. (2020), the creation and recognition of chances is at the heart of the process, followed by the will and initiative to seize these opportunities. It necessitates a willingness to take risks in personal and financial order to constantly shift the chances of success and balance the risk with the potential reward. Due to its significance, identifying opportunities has become a required component of scholarly studies and those devoted to entrepreneurship. As a result, there has been considerable interest in understanding its drivers (Abuzuhri, 2019; Shepherd & DeTienne, 2005). Furthermore, researchers have emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship in promoting new company growth and identifying and pursuing novel entrepreneurial opportunities (Tajeddini et al., 2020).

Past research has urged that BOI is a significant part of the entrepreneurial journey and highly influences the decision to pursue an entrepreneurial career (Ardichvili et al., 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Studies conducted among Chinese suppliers and entrepreneurs in China and the Berkah community in Indonesia highlighted that BOI positively and significantly affects respondents' participation in entrepreneurial activity and choice to pursue an entrepreneurship career (Bao et al., 2017; Ma & Huang, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2021). Meanwhile, a study conducted among Indian university students showed that BOI has a significant positive impact on the entrepreneurial intention of these students to pursue their careers in entrepreneurship (Hassan et al., 2020). The study's findings also align with those of a study among Vietnamese university students, indicating that BOI was significantly correlated with the entrepreneurial behavior of students to be entrepreneurs (Thi Loan et al., 2021). The consistency in the findings of these studies suggests that BOI is an essential element for a person to be an entrepreneur. BOI enables a person to identify workable business ideas and uncover market gaps to develop new ventures (Mota et al., 2019; Yasir et al., 2020). Thus, it enables a person to develop innovative products and services. As such, by doing so, the person will be able to understand and identify market needs and new market trends, which will boost their confidence in opening a business venture (Amjad et al., 2020; Anwar et al., 2022). The BOI hypothesis was constructed as follows:

H2: Business opportunity identification has a significant effect on entrepreneurship career choice among tertiary students in Malaysia.

3. Methods

An online survey was conducted targeting undergraduate students enrolled in various bachelor's degree programs at tertiary education institutions in Malaysia. A non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, was employed. Participants were selected based on the criteria that they were currently in their second year or beyond in their bachelor's degree and had successfully completed at least one entrepreneurship-related course during their studies. This study focuses on the education sector as a key determinant influencing career choices in entrepreneurship.

The constructs in this study were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measurement items for the three variables were adapted from previous studies (Table 1).

Table 1: Measurement Items

Variable	Items	Source
Entrepreneurship Career Choice	I can take deliberate decisions to be an entrepreneur.	Krueger et al. (2000)
	My mind always tells me that I will become a successful entrepreneur.	Boyd & Vozikis (1994)
	I can make a conscious decision to start a new business venture.	Gupta & Bhawe (2007)
	I have a high intention to become an entrepreneur.	Drennan et al. (2005)
	I prefer to work under someone else compared to be self-employed*	Krueger & Carsrud (2010)
	I prefer entrepreneurial career to meet business challenges.	Souitaris et al. (2007)
	I prefer entrepreneurial career to develop new ideas.	Shook et al. (2003)
Entrepreneurial Social Support	Support from my family enhance my behaviour towards entrepreneurship.	Abuzuhri (2019)
	Support from my friends enhance my behaviour towards entrepreneurship.	Abdullahi Yarima & Bello (2017)
	My family member will not support me financially to start my business.*	
	My friends will support me financially to start my business.	
	My family members will assist me to operate my business.	
	My friends will assist me to operate my business.	
	My family members always encourage me to become an entrepreneur.	
	My friends always encourage me to become an entrepreneur.	
	My family members' business networks will enable me to identify new resources to start my business.	
	My friends' business networks will enable me to identify new resources to start my business.	
Business Opportunity Identification	I can come-up with a realistic business idea.	Omidi Najafabadi et al. (2016)
	I frequently identify opportunities to start a new business venture (although I might not pursue them).	Tsai et al. (2016)
	I always worry that my ideas cannot be a profitable business venture*	León et al. (2007)
	I enjoy thinking about new ways of doing things.	Welsh et al. (2014)
	I frequently identify ideas that can be transformed into new products or services (although I might not pursue them).	Al-Kwafi et al. (2019)
	I can evaluate business opportunities.	Badri & Hachicha (2019)
	I understand the market demand of the local community.	Noerhartati et al. (2019)
		Neneh (2020)
		Vesna et al. (2016)
		Powell (2009)
		Burtson & Stichler (2010)
		Sahban et al. (2014)
		Agarwal et al. (2020)
		Klyver et al. (2020)
		Yoga et al. (2023)

Prior to survey distribution, a pre-test was conducted with five undergraduate students to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. In addition, expert validation was sought from five academicians with expertise in research methodology and entrepreneurship, as well as two entrepreneurs who reviewed the survey for content validity. Following the pre-test, minor adjustments were made to improve the clarity and understanding of the questionnaire. The finalised version of the questionnaire, along with a cover letter, was distributed via Google Form to selected institutions, with prospective respondents invited to participate in the study. As this was a preliminary study, 87 participants were included. The minimum sample size was 68, which was determined using the G* Power software version 3.1.9.7 ($f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power size = 0.8, number of predictors = 2) following Harris's (2001) rule-of-thumb. Surprisingly, the number of respondents who participated in the study exceeded the minimum sample size of 68. Moreover, the data were gathered over two months, reflecting the effectiveness of the survey design and follow-up process with participants.

The demographic analysis of the respondents is presented in Table 2. The study sample comprised 87 respondents, with the majority being female (66.7%) and 33.3% male, indicating higher female participation. Participants represented a range of academic disciplines, with the largest groups from Business and Management (24.1%) and Science and Technology (20.7%), followed by Law and Legal Studies (13.8%), Social Sciences (17.2%), Arts and Humanities (12.6%), Engineering and Architecture (6.9%), and Education (4.6%). In terms of prior working experience, 50.6% of respondents had been employed, 44.8% were unemployed, and 4.6% were self-employed, suggesting that over half of the participants had some level of professional exposure that could influence their career perceptions and entrepreneurial orientation.

Table 2: Respondents' demographics

	Descriptions	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Gender	Male	29	33.3
	Female	58	66.7
Programme of study	Arts and Humanities	11	12.6
	Business and Management	21	24.1
	Education	4	4.6
	Engineering and Architecture	6	6.9
	Law and Legal Studies	12	13.8
	Science and Technology	18	20.7
	Social Sciences	15	17.2
Respondents' previous working experience	Employed	44	50.6
	Unemployed	39	44.8
	Self-employed	4	4.6

4. Data analysis and results

The data were analysed using SmartPLS version 4.1.1.2 (Ringle et al., 2024), which is well suited for analysing complex structural equation models with formative or reflective constructs. A two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was followed: first, the measurement model was assessed for validity and reliability, and then, the structural model was tested to examine the proposed relationships among the study constructs.

Given that all data were collected from a single source, common method bias (CMB) was assessed using a full collinearity test (Kock & Lynn, 2012). The variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all constructs were below the threshold of 3.3, indicating that common method bias was not a serious concern in this study (BOI: 2.161; ECC: 2.381; ESS: 1.85).

4.1 Descriptive statistics and spread

Descriptive statistics for entrepreneurial social support (ESS), business opportunity identification (BOI), and entrepreneurship career choice (ECC) were evaluated. As shown in Table 3, the skewness and kurtosis values for all variables fell within acceptable ranges (skewness ± 2 , kurtosis ± 7), indicating a reasonably normal distribution suitable for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2022). Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables included in this study.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
BOI	3.629	0.891	0.01	-0.517
ECC	3.567	0.878	-0.069	-0.366
ESS	3.574	0.835	-0.138	-0.452

Note: ECC = Entrepreneurship career choice, ESS = Entrepreneurial Social Support, BOI = Business Opportunity Identification

4.2 Measurement model

The measurement model was assessed based on indicator, convergent, and discriminant validity. Item loadings were mostly above the recommended 0.70 threshold, with minor exceptions noted and justified (Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 4, all composite reliability (CR) values exceeded 0.70, and all average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming that the constructs were empirically distinct.

Table 4: Measurement model

Variable	Items	Loading	CR	AVE	Discriminant Validity (HTMT ratio)	
					ECC	ESS
Business Opportunity Identification (BOI)	BOI1	0.820	0.940	0.694	0.754	0.637
	BOI2	0.835				
	BOI3	0.598				
	BOI4	0.888				
	BOI5	0.901				
	BOI6	0.894				
	BOI7	0.854				
Entrepreneurship Career Choice (ECC)	ECC1	0.787	0.927	0.679	-	0.637
	ECC2	0.847				
	ECC3	0.815				
	ECC4	0.851				
	ECC6	0.760				
	ECC7	0.879				
	ECC8	0.815				
Entrepreneurial Social Support (ESS)	ESS1	0.708	0.920	0.564	-	-
	ESS10	0.682				
	ESS3	0.769				
	ESS4	0.835				
	ESS5	0.844				
	ESS6	0.807				
	ESS7	0.649				
	ESS8	0.685				
	ESS9	0.750				

Note: ECC5, and ESS2 were deleted due to low loadings

4.3 Structural model

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the data were examined for multivariate normality using Mardia's tests. The results indicated non-normality, justifying the use of bootstrapping procedures. A 10,000-sample bootstrapping technique was applied to evaluate the path coefficients, t-values, and confidence intervals. The model explained 58.0% of the variance in ECC ($R^2 = 0.580$), suggesting a substantial explanatory power. Both hypotheses were supported (H1: ESS $\rightarrow$ ECC was significant with $\beta = 0.347$, $p = 0.011$, $f^2 = 0.183$; H2: BOI $\rightarrow$ ECC was also significant, with $\beta = 0.501$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 0.382$). The full results are presented in Table 5 and Figure 2.

Table 5: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	PCI LL	PCI UL	f^2	Decision
H1	ESS $\rightarrow$ ECC	0.347	0.151	2.297	0.011	0.100	0.587	0.183	Supported
H2	BOI $\rightarrow$ ECC	0.501	0.146	3.428	$p < .001$	0.248	0.724	0.382	Supported

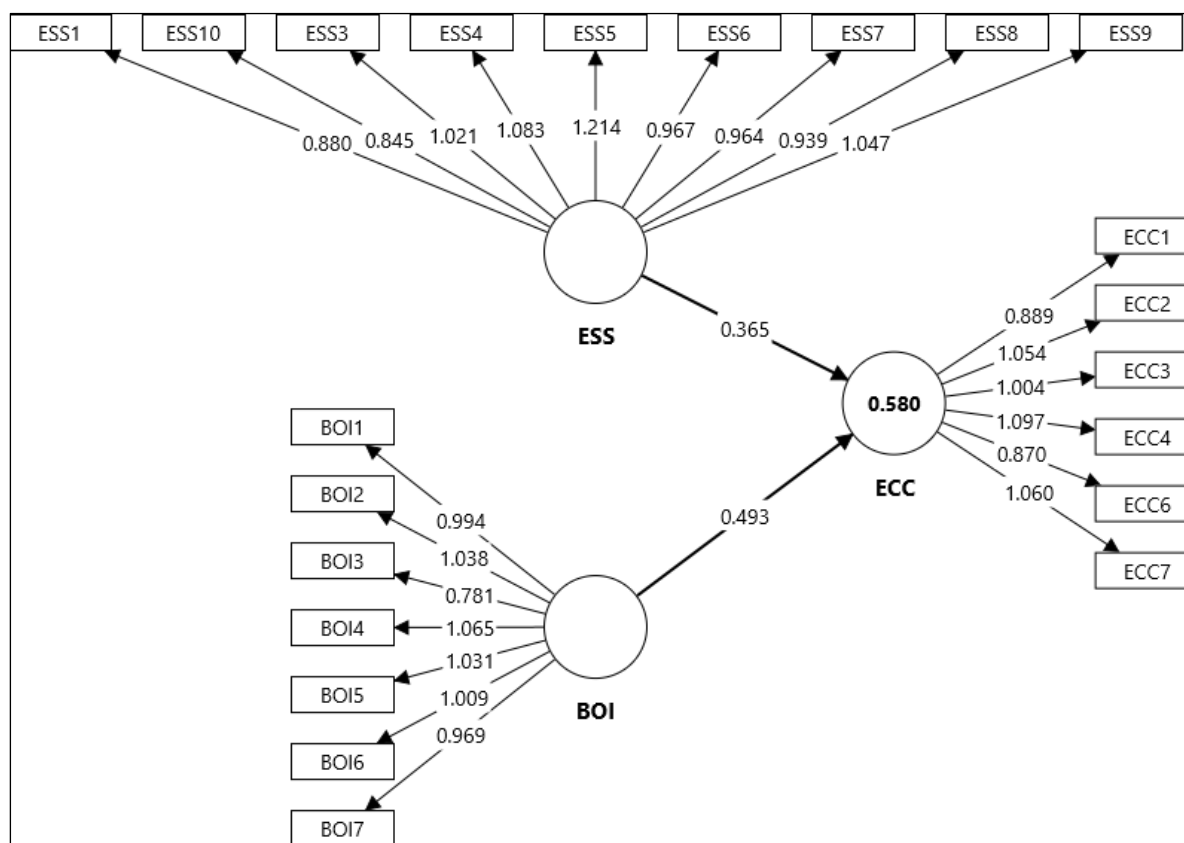


Figure 2: Hypothesis Testing

4.4 Predictive relevance (PLSpredict)

To assess the model's predictive power, the PLSpredict procedure with a 4-fold cross-validation approach was applied (Shmueli et al., 2019). The root mean squared errors (RMSE) for all indicators were lower in the PLS model than in the linear model (LM) and indicator-average model (IA), indicating strong predictive power. The results are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: PLS-Predict

Item	Q ² _predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE	IA_RMSE	PLS - LM	PLS - IA
ECC1	0.268	0.860	1.024	1.005	-0.164	-0.145
ECC2	0.316	0.917	1.063	1.108	-0.146	-0.191
ECC3	0.267	0.948	1.081	1.108	-0.133	-0.160
ECC4	0.501	0.817	0.933	1.156	-0.116	-0.339
ECC6	0.231	0.892	0.994	1.017	-0.102	-0.125
ECC7	0.410	0.832	0.996	1.083	-0.164	-0.251

5. Discussion

The study's findings indicate a significant effect of ESS on ECC among tertiary students. These findings are consistent with those of Asante et al. (2022), Martins et al. (2022), and Wang and Huang (2019), who emphasised the critical role of social support in cultivating entrepreneurial intentions and helping individuals overcome numerous obstacles to their entrepreneurial journey. Social support is the emotional, informational, and practical support provided by family members, friends, mentors, and other vital individuals in an individual's social network (Seyoum et al., 2021). This support is crucial in encouraging entrepreneurial activities for reasons such as emotional support, practical resources, confidence, and self-efficacy. Emotional support from family members and friends can significantly reduce the psychological stress associated with starting a new venture (Asante et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs often face overwhelming situations associated with high levels of risk and uncertainty. Emotional support can assist them in maintaining a positive mindset and spirit when facing obstacles (Noerhartati et al., 2019).

Social support typically includes practical resources such as funding, business advice and consultation, and networking opportunities (Ernawati et al., 2022; Martins et al., 2022; Sinha, 2003). Family and friends can support entrepreneurs by providing initial capital, sharing experiences and advice, and introducing them to potential clients and business partners. As such, practical support can determine the success or failure of a new business venture (Matzek et al., 2010). However, social support can also boost a person's self-efficacy (Elnadi & Gheith, 2021; Maria, 2021; Wang & Huang, 2019). The higher a person's self-efficacy, the higher their entrepreneurial intention. As such, entrepreneurs are willing to take risks to engage in entrepreneurial activities when they feel supported and have a reliable safeguard (Neneh, 2020).

The key elements comprise the cognitive process of recognising opportunities, the importance of starting new ventures, and empirical support for these propositions. Opportunity recognition entails identifying and evaluating potential business ideas that others may ignore. Successfully navigating this market requires combining creative thinking, knowledge of how markets work, and the ability to predict future developments (He et al., 2020; Seah et al., 2021). Successful entrepreneurs can find opportunities in the market where they are unavailable and provide unique solutions to meet these needs. Opportunity recognition is often the first step in entrepreneurial ventures. A new enterprise can only be created by finding a viable business opportunity; however, this process is essential because it sets the direction a company takes and its potential for success (Shepherd & DeTienne, 2005). Entrepreneurs who can see clearly and exploit opportunities are more likely to establish thriving organisations with long lives. This study shows a noteworthy influence of BOI on ECC, consistent with Tajeddini et al. (2020), who emphasised that finding and pursuing new business opportunities are fundamental elements of entrepreneurial activities. The ability to perceive possibilities separates thriving entrepreneurs from those who find it difficult to establish themselves in the market.

The interaction between ESS and BOI significantly impacts ECC, providing an understanding of how social and cognitive factors shape entrepreneurial aspirations. This research shows that both these factors can explain the difference in ECC, meaning that any attempts at cultivating

entrepreneurship among students should involve them both (Ghazali et al., 2021). Social assistance, presented through an integrated support system, enables individuals to explore entrepreneurial opportunities more confidently and practically. This supportive structure mitigates risks and provides a safety net to encourage people to start businesses (Bertelsen, 2017; Drobyazko et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Thus, BOI is a cognitive competence in detecting opportunities within individuals' personalities and can be developed and refined through formal learning and practical knowledge (Al Mamun et al., 2019; Hassan et al., 2020; Shane, 2000). Learners with strong social networks can identify business opportunities more efficiently, thereby increasing entrepreneurial motivation and success rates. Furthermore, the findings indicate that an all-inclusive approach that includes social support systems and opportunity identification training can significantly enhance entrepreneurial aspirations among students (Kusumojanto et al., 2021; Liguori et al., 2020; Moriano et al., 2011). Educational institutions and governments should capitalise on this understanding to develop programs designed for both characteristics, thereby enhancing an entrepreneurial society.

The results of this study also confirm the ESCT, which suggests that entrepreneurship is influenced by individual competencies combined with external factors. Gibb and Ritchie (1982) maintained that the ESCT identifies several critical elements for business achievement, such as interpersonal relationships and family support. According to this view, social bonds, such as kinship ties, friendships, mentors, and broader social relations, bolster or extend entrepreneurship. This claim explains that social bonds provide emotional support, lessen failure anxiety, and improve one's ability to handle an entrepreneur's problems (Seyoum et al., 2021). Familial backing is often crucial to entrepreneurship, encompassing emotional and practical support. Moral encouragement includes words such as "You can do it". At the same time, practical assistance involves various forms of support, including financial help, physical labour, and specific advice on business matters. ESCT underscores how a nurturing family atmosphere forms the foundation for a person's predisposition and capability to participate effectively and succeed in entrepreneurship (Sinha, 2003).

5.1 Implications and recommendations

Educational institutions play an essential role in promoting entrepreneurial skills in students. Incorporating a comprehensive support system into the entrepreneurship curriculum could significantly enrich students' entrepreneurial journeys. Comprehensive support includes organising mentorship programs, such as guidance from experienced entrepreneurs, organising networking events to link students with industry professionals, and providing hands-on experience by organising practical skill development workshops. Moreover, family-oriented workshops and events can provide practical support to students from their families. This initiative is crucial for entrepreneurial success because it helps students develop and enhance the confidence and skills needed to pursue entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile, educational institutions should incorporate entrepreneurship courses focusing on business opportunity recognition and market analysis to provide more insights into market understanding and create opportunities for students. On the other hand, practical exercises, such as market research and business plan projects, could also assist students in developing the necessary skills to identify feasible business ideas. Innovation labs and business incubators allow students to experiment with new ideas and obtain guidance on identifying and exploiting business opportunities. These initiatives help build an innovation and entrepreneurial culture within educational institutions, impacting the students' cognitive skills needed for entrepreneurial success.

In addition, policymakers must play a significant role in supplying essential infrastructure and resources to young entrepreneurs. Developing policies that offer financial resources and funding, such as grants, loans, and financial assistance programs, can reduce the financial burden of these young entrepreneurs from hindering them from starting an entrepreneurial venture. Launching community-based support programs can provide practical assistance in terms of business consultations, market access consultations, and legal assistance. These programs reduce the gap between students' entrepreneurial aspirations and the practical resources required to realise those aspirations. By establishing a supportive policy environment, policymakers can improve the practical support provided to aspiring entrepreneurs, encouraging more students to consider entrepreneurship as a feasible career path.

Conversely, policymakers can support opportunity recognition among young entrepreneurs by implementing policies that encourage creativity and innovation, such as tax incentives for startup ventures, research and development funding, and innovation grants. Providing a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem can foster and support the identification and development of business opportunities. Improved access to information, technology, and markets can assist young entrepreneurs in accessing information on current market trends and emerging opportunities. By establishing a policy environment that supports innovation and opportunity identification, policymakers can help young entrepreneurs develop the skills required to succeed in a competitive business landscape.

Students can also take the initiative to utilise social networks for practical support. Obtaining advice, mentorship, and financial support from family and friends can provide the necessary practical support for entrepreneurial success. Practical support from social networks can also enhance students' confidence and self-efficacy by reinforcing their willingness to take risks in entrepreneurial pursuits. Many obstacles associated with starting a new business can be overcome by students through strong support networks and by actively seeking practical help. Furthermore, students can improve their ability to identify opportunities by developing cognitive skills related to opportunity recognition. Staying updated on market trends, engaging in continuous learning, and obtaining various experiences can provide new perceptions and perspectives on potential business opportunities. Cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset focused on experimentation and risk-taking is vital to entrepreneurship. Understanding that failure is a part of the learning process enables students to work hard and be resilient in their intentions to identify and exploit business opportunities. Thus, students can improve their chances of entrepreneurial success by actively searching for business growth and development opportunities.

5.2 Limitations

This study used a cross-sectional design, which depicted data at a single point in time. This design limits the ability to infer causality and understand the long-term effects of ESS and BOI on ECC. Furthermore, the study depended on self-reported data collected through questionnaires, which could be subject to biases such as social desirability bias, recall bias, and respondent misinterpretation, which may affect the accuracy and reliability of the data. This could be a potential limitation of the study. In addition, the main focus of the study is Malaysian students at the tertiary education level, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to other cultural contexts because entrepreneurial intentions and the effectiveness of social support systems can differ significantly across cultures.

ESS and BOI were the primary predictors of ECC in this study, and other significant factors could play an essential role in influencing entrepreneurial intention. Meanwhile, the main target of this study is tertiary students who have completed at least one entrepreneurship course, which excludes other potential entrepreneurs, such as students from different educational backgrounds and individuals who have yet to pursue higher education. A more comprehensive insight could be obtained by broadening the scope to include a more diverse range of potential entrepreneurs.

5.3 Future research recommendations and conclusion

The limitations of the current study should be addressed in future research to enhance our understanding of students' career choices in entrepreneurship. Incorporating a more extensive and diverse sample can enhance the generalisability of the current study's findings. Moreover, a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing entrepreneurial career choices can be obtained by integrating students from various academic disciplines and levels of entrepreneurial exposure into the study.

Comparative cross-cultural studies are highly recommended to highlight the cultural specificity of the current study. Valuable insights can be obtained by discovering the influence of cultural factors on ESS and BOI for the global applicability of the findings. Researchers can identify cultural distinctions by conducting studies in different cultural contexts and then modifying support systems to better match diverse settings. This effort can enhance more effective and culturally sensitive approaches to promoting entrepreneurship.

Future research should consider incorporating and investigating more variables that may influence ECC. In addition to ESS and BOI, personality traits, economic conditions, motivational factors, access to financial resources, and educational background could also play significant roles. Thus, examining a broader range of variables can help researchers develop a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of entrepreneurial intentions and success.

Finally, practical implementation studies are essential practical implementation studies are essential to evaluate the impact of particular entrepreneurial support programmes. Future studies can provide evidence-based recommendations for educational institutions and policymakers by examining the effectiveness of networking events, mentorship initiatives and practical skills workshops. Thus, these studies can assist in identifying the most effective programs that promote entrepreneurial intentions and success among students, steering them toward better-designed support systems and policies.

Therefore, by addressing these future research suggestions, scholars can deepen their understanding of how ESS influences career choices and further enhances entrepreneurial development. This knowledge would be utilised in all the premed strategic initiatives to build new generations of entrepreneurs who will transform the world through innovation, economic growth and increased societal impact.

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