

## **Social Entrepreneurship Intention: Examining Its Relationship with Awareness, Knowledge and Interest**

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**Abstract:** Social entrepreneurship can be a catalyst for social well-being and community life. Despite its importance, the development of social entrepreneurship is still new in Malaysia. In relation to that, this study aims to measure the level of social entrepreneurship intention and its correlation with related factors including awareness, knowledge, and interest among students. This study collects data quantitatively through a survey that covers the population including students of TVET higher education institutions in the state of Perlis. A total of 203 responses received were analyzed descriptively and correlationally. Descriptive analysis has shown a high level for all variables while the correlation test has shown a significant and positive relationship between social entrepreneurship intention with awareness, knowledge, and interest. The results of the study have enlightened towards understanding the development level and its intention to social entrepreneurship in Malaysia. Several recommendations have been made for future studies.

**Keywords:** *Social entrepreneurship, intention, awareness, knowledge, interest.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

The role of educational institutions in achieving the goal of producing graduates with entrepreneurial characteristics continues to be strengthened. This is in line with the ability of the education sector to be a driving force for the formation of a competitive advanced society (Salleh, Rani & Latief, 2016). In addition to the general public, the focus on entrepreneurial talent development is also given to students in higher education institutions (Chea, 2015). This has increased their inclination, awareness, and interest in the field of entrepreneurship (Keat, Selvarajah & Meyer, 2011; Mustapha & Selvaraju, 2015). As a result, the entrepreneurial activities that take place can have a positive impact on the country's economic development, especially by driving innovation (Musa & Musa, 2019; Van Vuuren & Alemayehu, 2018).

Nevertheless, behind the focus of the field of entrepreneurship, the sub-field of social entrepreneurship (SE) has become a new topic that is gaining popularity nowadays. In general, SE is important in improving the socio-economics of society. As defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), SE is a process by which a "social entrepreneur" creates and develops an organization that may be either a social enterprise or another type of organization. It also sets out a broad set of initiatives with social impact dimensions across the spectrum from profit to non-profit. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Center [MaGIC], (2015) initiated a Malaysian Social Enterprise Action Plan in 2015-2018. This plan has outlined an action that defines SE not only on value through the creation of economic wealth but also by creating beneficial impact on society and environmental aspects. This is due to SE's potential in radically changing capitalism by solving social or environmental issues neglected by the traditional sector.

SE is a global phenomenon that should be studied in developed and developing countries to examine similarities or differences in these different contexts. However, research on SE is still limited in Malaysia (Mohd Zulkifle, Ab. Aziz & Sarhan, 2021) in contrast to the rapid development in western

countries. In addition, there is a misunderstanding about the concept of SE in this country. Many parties misperceive the role of SE which is only seen as a purely welfare and social organization (Rahim, 2020). All these shortcomings need to be given serious attention due to the importance and impact of SE on the development of dynamic human capital, social change of society and the development of the country's economy (Noruzi, Westover & Rahimi, 2010). Previous studies have shown that the intention to take note in SE has been at a low level in recent years. This happens because the lack of understanding in the concept of entrepreneurship has led to other issues such as insufficient development of SE in student learning at higher education institutions (Roslan, Hamid, Ijab, Yusop & Norman, 2022).

In relation to that, this study aims to examine the intention of SE among students in higher education institutions. In particular, this study try to examine two key aspects including; a) the level of intention of SE, awareness, knowledge and interest, and b) whether there is a relationship between the variables of awareness, knowledge and interest toward the intention of SE. The results of this study can later contribute to additional literature on the intention towards SE and related factors including knowledge, awareness and interest. This study is also able to help Higher Education Institutions plan the suitable programs in increasing students' intention towards the field of SE.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has become an important focus as a result of the broad concept of entrepreneurship. Generally, social entrepreneurship does not look at material profit alone. It will provide social benefits to the surrounding community. According to Ishak, Rafliis and Abd Moen (2015), SE focuses on economic distribution in line with efforts to create a fairer and more equitable society in a country. Its aims is to address social problems that exist in society. According to Sakarya, Bodur, Yildirim-Oktem and Selekler-Goksen (2012), this kind of problem exists due to the backwardness of society in public and private mechanisms. Thus, an entrepreneur who is based on the welfare of the community tries to take any opportunity that arises from problems in the community to find new solutions and further improve the community system around them.

SE has been defined as a behavioral practice that includes proactivity, risk-taking and creativity in achieving objectives based on social aspects (Thompson, 2008). In other words, Thompson (2008) stated that these things become the main behavior practiced in taking opportunities and trying to solve social problems in the environment. Kostetska and Berezyak (2014) in their study however argued that SE as a social innovation has found its place in the new information and innovation, innovation economy and continues to gain momentum. In addition, the practice of social innovation behavior can develop methods of gathering and unifying resources as well as encouraging dialogue and interpersonal interaction among individuals to achieve the stated social objectives (Kostetska & Berezyak 2014). The behavior is expected to produce efficiency and effectiveness in achieving social goals, increasing the competitiveness and sustainability of social entities or intelligent and pro-active groups.

Greblikaite (2012) added that SE is also linked to the creation of social value that is intertwined as a result of the market and business that is carried out. In addition, SE is seen as an activity or process made to explore, research and take opportunities on new businesses or manage existing businesses innovatively with the aim of improving the social well-being of society (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubam & Shulman, 2009). A report by the OECD (2023) has also emphasized that the fundamental aim is to produce a positive impact on the wider society and on a continuous basis rather than to maximize profits for businesses alone. Its main role is to bring social, economic and environmental challenges towards growth and shared prosperity. Furthermore, SE contributes to job creation and improvements in welfare services (OECD, 2023).

Specifically, Doherty, Haugh and Lyon (2014) stated that SE needs to contain two core features which are the creation of social and economic value. The social mission is the main driver of SE behind the focus on profit is considered possible but not sufficient to motivate entrepreneurial actions unless supplemented with moral or social incentives (McMullen, 2011). However, the possibility of a conflict of focus between social aspects and economic activities (Pache & Santos, 2013) which is usually not

the case in commercial ventures, when social entrepreneurs strive for the creation of social value while making a profit.

#### *Social Entrepreneurship Intention*

Generally, an intention is something that is planned (or intended) to be carried out. In the entrepreneurship literature, attitude towards behavior is considered as an influential element which in turn affects intention directly (Kocoglu & Hassan, 2013). Bird (1988) has defined entrepreneurial intention as a state of mind that directs and guides the actions of entrepreneurs towards the development and implementation of new business concepts. Someone who has entrepreneurial intentions is those who are mentally oriented such as desire and hope that influence their entrepreneurial choice (Peng, Lu & Kang, 2012). On the other hand, Thompson (2009) has referred to entrepreneurial intention as the belief that they intend to create a new venture and plan to do so in the future. Similarly, in the context of SE, it can be understood as a person's belief, desire and determination to establish a new social enterprise.

Intention and behaviour factors has been raised as the vital constructs related to the study in SE. The intention of SE is the stepping stone for efforts to develop and promote SE in society. A study conducted on students at public universities in Malaysia has shown a moderate level of entrepreneurial intention despite a higher level of SE activity (Radin A Rahman, Othman, Lope Pihie & Ab Wahid, 2016). The results of the study give an impression that the youth have shown the intention of SE even at a moderate level. With that, the question arises whether the results of public university students can be concluded for students in TVET educational institutions?

From a theoretical point of view, the theory of planned behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1991) has been widely tested in entrepreneurship research. TPB has been found to be a strong predictor of entrepreneurial intentions. This has been proven through previous studies that have found attitude plays a role as a strong determining variable in influencing entrepreneurial intentions (Carsrud & Brannback, 2011; Zhang et al., 2021). Specifically, there is an affirmative relationship between attitude and intention in SE (Ernst, 2011). Several factors have been identified as determinants of a person's intention to engage in SE. As found by Mohd Wahid, Wan Hussain and Ayob (2018), factors that have a significant positive relationship include self-efficacy, perceived social support, attitude towards SE, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

#### *Awareness and Social Entrepreneurship Intention*

Awareness is related to a person's level of knowledge about something. The level of awareness is able to help a person to be sensitive to changes during an issue. Wan Omar and Mohamed (2002) in their book, "Empowering Entrepreneurs" emphasized the importance of individuals having a foundation in social work before receiving formal education and training in the field. The dominant feature that raises students' awareness of entrepreneurship is quick action in changing strategies as well as being confident and optimistic (Wan Abdul Majid & Ahmad, 2021).

Several studies have provided clues about the relationship between awareness and SE intention. The results of Oksuzoglu and Coban's (2021) study found that awareness arises indirectly due to the information learned by students in entrepreneurial activities that affect SE. In addition, it was also found that the increase in students' knowledge about SE also has a positive linear relationship with their awareness to engage in SE (Mustapha & Selvaraju, 2015).

Therefore, it can be suggested that the hypothesis to be studied is as follows;

*H1: There is a positive relationship between awareness and social entrepreneurship intention.*

#### *Knowledge and Social Entrepreneurship Intention*

Knowledge can be understood as human understanding of something. Knowledge is an understanding that arises systematically and is worked on consciously. In general, knowledge has the potential to be used for the good of mankind. Knowledge follows something that reaches into human beings and gives meaning in life (Al-Attas, 2011). An individual who is inclined in the field of SE, is because they have

knowledge based on previous experience. Knowledge can also be acquired through the learning process. Brown (1999) stated that the process of imparting entrepreneurial knowledge should be done informally with hands-on emphasis.

Brown (1999) has outlined a core learning structure that includes aspects of critical thinking, relying on experience, thinking about entrepreneurship as a career and using experienced entrepreneurs as guest speakers. The main goal of the learning process related to entrepreneurship is to stimulate entrepreneurship knowledge among students and further increase their intention in SE. Furthermore, knowledge was found to have a positive relationship in increasing students' intention towards SE (Oksuzoglu & Coban, 2021). Hassan (2020) also asserted that the knowledge gained by students in entrepreneurship education is the main determinant that encourages them to venture into the field of social entrepreneurship.

Therefore, it can be suggested that the hypothesis to be studied is as follows:

*H2: There is a positive relationship between knowledge and social entrepreneurship intention.*

#### *Interest and Social Entrepreneurship Intention*

Interests are synonymous with likes, intentions, passions, and hobbies. It can lead to behavior that is inclined or strongly desired for something. Interest is the spirit that gives persistence, dedication and commitment to be fully involved in actions to achieve the targeted entrepreneurial results (Cardon, Glauser & Murnieks, 2017). Interest can also increase the creativity and ability of entrepreneurs to identify opportunities (Baron, 2008) and their persistence and involvement in pursuing goals (Cardon et al., 2017). In addition, O'Keefe, Dweck and Walton (2018) stated that finding and pursuing one's own interests is the right thing to do because it brings out the best in them and helps turn their interests into action.

Previous studies have found that interest can play a role in leading to productive achievement (Li et al, 2021) and predict success in SE (Saebi, Foss & Linder, 2018). However, the relationship between interest and SE is still in the early stages of forming a framework based on traditional entrepreneurship theory (Mohd Wahid, Mohd Noor, Fareed, Wan Hussain & Ayob, 2021). Despite several studies conducted on students of higher education institutions, especially in universities, the question of the relationship between the interests and intentions of SE is interesting to understand for students of higher education institutions based on TVET.

Therefore, it can be suggested that the hypothesis to be studied is as follows:

*H3: There is a positive relationship between interest and social entrepreneurship intention.*

#### *Research Framework*

The discussion in the literature related to variables has provided understanding in the development of the research framework. Accordingly, the research framework is summarized as figure 1 below.

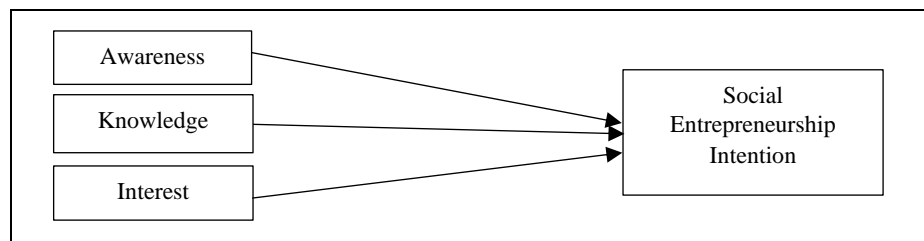


Figure 1: Research Framework

The research framework acts as a guide and structure that supports the study. The formation of a research framework and hypothesis is very important in determining the variables that have a relationship between the intention of social entrepreneurship. Based on the research framework above, this study was conducted to examine the existence of a direct relationship between the variables of awareness, knowledge and interest in the social entrepreneurship intention.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

This study uses a survey design with data collection through a set of structured questionnaires. Data was collected using cross-sectional during the study period. The total population of 5,326 students of TVET institutions covers the entire state of Perlis. The institutions involved consist of Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS), Kolej Komuniti Arau, Kolej Vokasional Arau, Giat MARA Arau, Institut Latihan Perindustrian (ILP) Kangar, Institut Kemahiran MARA (IKM) Beseri and Institut Kemahiran Belia Negara (IKBN) Kuala Perlis. A multi-stage sampling method was used with a sample size of 357 as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

Research measurements have been made on the dependent variable which is SE intention while the three independent variables include awareness, knowledge and interest. The items measured for all variables were taken and adapted from previous studies. While the items to measure the respondents' demographics have been self-developed. The items include gender and ethnicity of respondent.

### 4.0 Data Analysis and Results

#### *Background of Response Rate*

A total of 357 sets of questionnaires were distributed directly and face-to-face to respondents involving students at TVET institutions in the state of Perlis. However, only 280 questionnaires were returned while only 203 could be used for analysis after rejecting outliers. Therefore, the response rate from the respondents was 78.4 percent while the rate of questionnaires that can be used is as much as 56.9 percent.

#### *Demographic of Respondents*

The demographic of respondents was presented into two categorised, including gender and ethnicity. Table 1 below has shown the respondent's data based on the three categories.

Table 1: Demographic of Respondents

Category	Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	137	67.5
	Female	66	32.5
Ethnicity	Malay	183	90.1
	Non Malay	20	9.9

The table above contains demographic details of respondents including gender and ethnicity. Based on the table, it has shown that the gender percentage is 67.5 percent of male and 32.5 percent of female. Furthermore, in the ethnic category, it has shown that 90.1 percent are Malays and 9.9 percent are non-Malays consisting of Chinese, Indians and Siamese.

#### *Reliability Testing*

Reliability tests are conducted to show the level of reliability of all items and constructs used as a measurement tool in a study. In relation to that, the level of reliability of the items and constructs used has been shown through two tests that have been carried out, namely during the pilot test and also on actual study. Table 2 below has shown the results of the reliability test through Alpha Cronbach analysis.

Table 2: Alpha Cronbach Value for Reliability Test

Variables	Value of Alpha Cronbach (Pilot Test, n=30))	Value of Alpha Cronbach (Actual Study, n=203)
SE Intention	0.717	0.626
Awareness	0.834	0.751
Knowledge	0.771	0.689
Interest	0.711	0.817

In the pilot test, the Alpha Cronbach value for the reliability test of the dependent variable, SE intention was at 0.717. While for the independent variables; level of awareness with a value of 0.834, knowledge of 0.771 and interest of 0.711. Further, in the actual data study test, the alpha value for SE intention was at 0.626 followed by awareness (0.751), knowledge (0.689) and interest (0.817). It can be concluded that all the items used as measurement tools are at a good level of reliability with the lowest value exceeding 0.60 as suggested by Pallant (2007).

### *Descriptive Analysis*

Table 3 below has shown the results of the descriptive analysis through the mean value and standard deviation (SD) of the related variables.

*Table 3: Result of Descriptive Analysis*

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
SE Intention	2	5	4.38	.545
Awareness	3	5	4.43	.531
Knowledge	3	5	4.50	.513
Interest	3	5	4.43	.552

*Note: Used of 5-points Likert scale*

For the dependent variable which is SE intention, the mean value was 4.38 where the respondents has agreed that they are intended towards SE. While the independent variable that has the highest mean value was knowledge (4.50) followed by awareness (4.43) and interest (4.43). Knowledge can be seen to reach the highest level of agreement compared to awareness and interest. Finally, the standard deviation (SD) value in the highest order includes interest (.552), SE intention (.545), awareness (.531), and knowledge (.513).

### *Correlation Analysis*

Table 4 below shows the results of the Pearson correlation analysis that has been carried out. An analysis was made to examine the relationship between SE intention with the variables of awareness, knowledge and interest.

*Table 4: Result of Correlation Analysis*

Variables	SEI	AWR	KNW	INT
SEI - SE Intention	1			
AWR – Awareness	.662**	1		
KNW – Knowledge	.692**	.720**	1	
INT - Interest	.698**	.720**	.696**	1

*Note: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 (2-tailed)*

In this study, the significance level of Pearson's correlation (r) as suggested by Pallant (2007) was used to determine the correlation and linear strength of the relationship between the variables involved. Pallant (2007) stated that the strength of the positive relationship at a value of 0.10 to 0.29 is considered low, 0.30 to 0.49 is moderate while 0.50 to 1.0 is high. In relation to that, the results of the obtained correlation analysis have indicated that the three independent variables have a significant and positive relationship with SE intention. The correlation value of the relationship between SE intention and the variables involved is at a high level, namely interest ( $r=.698$ ), knowledge ( $r=.692$ ) and awareness ( $r=.662$ ).

## **5.0 Conclusion and Future Direction**

This study was conducted with two main objectives. The first objective of the study was achieved through descriptive analysis. Through the analysis, it was found that the level of social entrepreneurship intention among students of TVET Higher Education Institutions in Perlis is at a moderately high level. In addition, the level of awareness, knowledge, and interest in social entrepreneurship is also at a moderately high level. Nevertheless, students' knowledge about social entrepreneurship is at the highest

level compared to all the constructs that have been studied. This gives a clear indication that social entrepreneurship has been at an increasing level in terms of intention, awareness, knowledge and also the interest of the students involved. Furthermore, the second objective of the study was achieved through correlation analysis. Through the analysis, it was found that there is a significant and positive relationship at a high level for all the hypotheses that have been tested. The relationship between interest and social entrepreneurship intention has shown the highest level compared to the relationship between knowledge and awareness toward social entrepreneurship intention. It can be concluded that issues related to social entrepreneurship such as awareness, knowledge, interest and intention among students in TVET educational institutions are at a high level. In addition, the students also have an intention for social entrepreneurship if it is related to their awareness, knowledge and interests.

There are several implications resulting from this study. From a theoretical point of view, this study has provided a better empirical understanding of the social entrepreneurship intention. The findings of this study support the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991) in identifying the social entrepreneurship intention and its relationship with several related constructs. Clearly, this study has shown the existence of a significant direct relationship between students' interest, knowledge and awareness with the social entrepreneurship intention. From a practical point of view, this study has implications for educational institutions in improving students' understanding of social entrepreneurship. Educational institutions can provide appropriate training or programs towards strengthening the culture and inclination of social entrepreneurship among their students. The drive to interest students in the field of social entrepreneurship needs to be planted from the beginning. Students' self-development efforts need to be sown through programs and activities that have a social entrepreneurship pattern in the field.

Despite the existence of a significant relationship between all research constructs with social entrepreneurship intention, the use of the Theory of Planned Behavior is still limited. Further research should focus on behavior as a complement to research related to one's intentions. This provides guidance for future research in understanding actual behavior related to social entrepreneurship intentions. In addition, longitudinal studies should also be considered in the future to see the impact of social entrepreneurship intentions on actual practice. Other than that, some independent constructs such as role models and the influence of family and peers can also be tested to further strengthen understanding in the future.

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