

Multicultural Study of Entrepreneurial Competencies and SMEs Success in Malaysian Service Industry: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial competencies (E.C) play an important part in the existence and development of Enterprises. The vital role of E.C attract researchers, to comprehend the development of the fundamental capabilities of entrepreneurs. E.C diverges across regions due to cultures. This research Paper aspires to inspect the influence of ethnicity on E.C among Malaysian SMEs owners. This research paper presents a new theoretical framework to enhance the understanding and admit the role of ethnic behavior in the growth of E.C. The hypothesized framework will also, reflects the curbing position of environmental turbulence, government support and its connection of E.C with SMEs' business success. Besides this, a new conceptual model is envisioning the theoretical framework to inspect the impact of under considered variables on SMEs success. Consequently, the classified competencies will be helpful in SMEs successful growth. The progression of SMEs in Malaysia Will contribute in achievement of Transformational National 2050 (TN50) initiative in the accomplishment of a high-income nation status.

Keywords: Multi culture, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Malaysian SMEs Success.

1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship studies focus on Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) because they contribute to the economy of any country and play a leading role in economic vitality. SMEs are vigorous for employment as the statistics show that, an estimated 80% of new jobs in world economies are created by SMEs. Researchers trust that the growth and high performance of service sector, enable the governmental organizations to over come numerous social glitches, for instance, poverty (Ngoma & Ntale, 2014). The service sector is the largest sector of any country and it is composed of all types of services one can provide. Due to these qualities, development of SME is an important policy matter for government in developing countries where deficiencies and unavailability of jobs are the main fronts (Kengne, 2016).

A successful business has a profound influence on the GDP of a country hence it is most important to comprehend the prognosticators for the success of SME business. Only thriving businesses can contribute significantly towards the economy of the country. They can generate new jobs and improve the trade. There is still a lack of literature on key factors which contribute to business success, the impression of obtainable research work in this field is comparatively deprived (Heiss, 2017). There is a contradiction in views of researchers, some of them insist that success of a business is due to its influence on internal factors (Smigielska, 2016),

while other groups support the external environment for the success of the business (Mole, North & Baldock, 2017). There are several articles which highlight the contribution and aspiration of entrepreneurs towards the success of their business (Bulanova, Isaksen & Kolvereid, 2016), research work on the input of entrepreneurs is limited (Hyder & Lussier, 2016).

In the multicultural context of Malaysia, this research work will debate the role of external factors such as external environment and government support system as moderator, which are supposed to be influential factors for the success of business along with the internal factors such as entrepreneurial competencies, and network competence.

1.1. Problem Statement

Environmental variables have influence over SMEs success, but the importance of internal factors in contribution toward venture growth also exists and cannot deny. Reason, that despite government assistance to SMEs and an economic boom in Malaysia, mostly of small businesses fail to continue their journey. Data from Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (2001) explain that substantial numbers of firms enter and leave market every year; turnover rate is only 20% of these firms. The government allocates billions of dollars every year for SMEs, but the failure rate remains high (Tehseen, Sajilan, Adaha & Abadi, 2017; Ahmed, Halim & Zainal, 2010; Ahmad, 2007). Some researcher emphasized on the focus

on internal factors those related to people may resolve the issue (Higgs & Dulewicz, 2016a; 2016b).

SMEs in Malaysia are facing a genuine issue of the high failure rate and struggling for long-term survival. Though SMEs all over the world have the same issues, it is important to know why some SMEs are very successful while other faces failures within a few years in both developed and developing countries. Recent studies claim that the expected failure rate is 60 % in Malaysia (Nik, Yaakub, & Subhan, 2016; Rahman, Yaacob, & Radzi, 2016; Marn, Hin, & Bohari, 2016).

1.2 Research Gaps in Studies

Previous research depicts that most of the studies are done on Chinese and Malays. Evidence depicts that there are very rare studies on Indian entrepreneurs in Malaysian context (Krishnasamy, 2012). Hence, these three ethnic groups have diverse cultural values and these values influence their entrepreneurial behaviors (Tehseen & Ramayah, 2015). Numerous researchers identified these factors and strongly recommended to focus on intra-cultural differences among these three ethnicities (Ahmad, Wilson & Kummerow, 2011). In assorted research studies network competence tested as moderator (Zhang & Zhang, 2012; Parida, Westerberg, & Frishammar, 2010) but it needs more exposure to be studied as independent variable (Tehseen, 2017). Similarly, environmental turbulence is also proven moderator in various entrepreneurial studies (Chi & Sun, 2013; Wang & Fang, 2012) yet it needs exposure to prove the moderating role between E.C and venture performance (Ahmad & Seet, 2009; Ahmad, 2007). Moreover, firm success or performance as dependent variable needs more exposure in entrepreneurship. Jalili, Jaafar & Ramayah (2014).

Hossain, Ibrahim and Uddinn (2016) concluded that literature is lacking in theory or model, which can perfectly demonstrate the performance of SMEs. Hence, researchers concluded that existing theory for SMEs growth is conflicting and fragmented. New theoretical viewpoint to understand business growth and multiple growth measures are highly recommended by the authors.

This research work claims that E.C are depending on numerous other features such as environmental turmoil and government support. Consequently, government support must be tested for its moderating influence on business success (Imam et al., 2017).

1.3 Beneficance of the Study

This study will endeavor to seal the gaps in previous research in following Way.

1. Present research work will examine the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the ethnic entrepreneurs in the Malaysian context.
2. This study will inspect the accuracy of competency model in different ethnic groups Malaysian context.
3. It will investigate the generalizability of entrepreneurial competency framework to businesses of SMEs in the service sector of Malaysia.
4. Current research work intends to explore the moderating aspect of turbulent environment and government support and its relation between SMEs business success and entrepreneurial competencies.

1.4 Specific Objectives of the Research Study

This study’s specific research objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the influence of entrepreneurial competencies and network competence on SME’s business success for Malaysian entrepreneurs.
2. To assess the moderating impact of environmental turbulence on entrepreneurial competencies, and network competence -business success relationship on Malaysian entrepreneurs.
3. To investigate the moderating impact of government support on entrepreneurial competencies and network competencies-business success relationship on Malaysian entrepreneurs.

1.5 Research Questions

This study’s specific research questions are as follows:

1. What is the influence of E.C and N.C on SMEs venture’s performance on entrepreneurs in Malaysia?
2. What is the moderating influence of the turbulent environment on entrepreneurial competencies and network competence -business achievements relationship on Malaysian entrepreneurs.
3. What is the moderating impact of government support on entrepreneurial competencies, and network competence-business success relationship on Malaysian entrepreneurs.

1.6 Significance of the Study

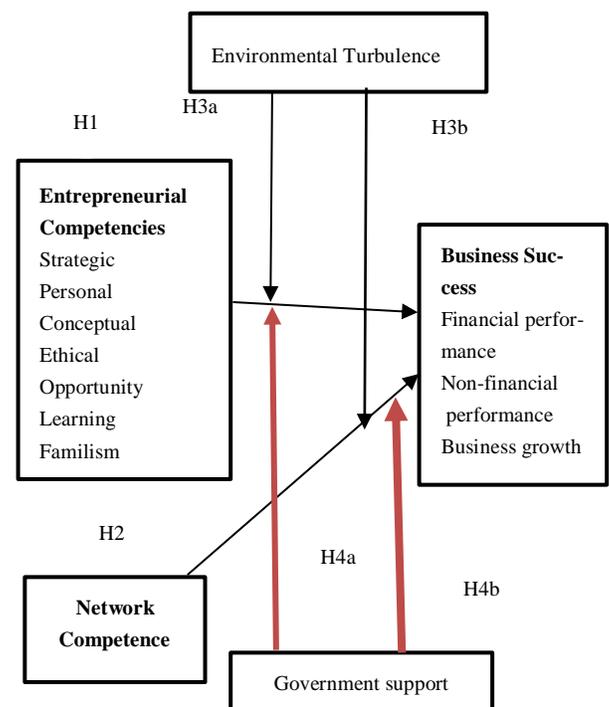
This research work is beneficial in numerous ways. For instance, this work will enhance the grasp of entrepreneurs, researchers and educationists concerning the most valuable entrepreneurial competencies required for achievement in SMEs venture specific with Malaysian service industry. This work will contribute to the understanding that how cultures influence on the behaviors and values. What is its role in the growth of E.C. Consequence of current research work is supposed to expose the resemblance and dissimilarities in the capabilities of ethnic entrepreneurs. This study will relieve entrepreneurs to comprehend the significance of network competence, turbulent environment, and government support in business performance. It will deliver useful intuitions to attain vision 2050 by;

1. Refining contribution of SMEs’ in the country’s economy, GDP, employability, and exports.
2. Contributing actively in the international market.

1.7 Hypothesized Frame Work

In this hypothesized framework, the E.C and network competence are independent variable and business success is considered self-reported dependent variable. Hence, this research work insists that N.C may influence the business performance and can improve the relationship among the entrepreneurial competencies, network competence and venture performance. In addition, this framework will gauge the moderating impact of environmental turbulence and government support. Previous literature implied that SMEs are influenced by the perception of the person regarding external challenges (Shane & Kolvereid, 1995; Chandler & Hanks, 1994). Conceptual framework has been shown in Fig.1 to explain the hypothesized model.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



2. Entrepreneurial Competencies and its Influence on SMEs' Venture Performance

Positive impact of entrepreneurial competencies on venture success has been discussed widely in literature, for instance (Tehseen, 2017; Farooq & Abideen, 2015). Several studies done in developed countries admits the positive impact of entrepreneurial competencies on venture success. Study done by Tanoira and Valencia (2014) in Mexico, declared positive impact of entrepreneurial competencies on venture performance. Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) conducted study in England and Wales. They targeted women entrepreneurs and revealed that strong entrepreneurial competencies positively impact business success.

There are assorted studies who provided empirical evidence on the positive impacts of E.C on venture success in developing countries (Tehseen, 2017; Nasureedin, Halipah, & Shamsuddin, 2016; Rahman, Amran, & Ahmad, 2015). Qureshi, Aziz and Mian, (2017) found that personal competencies have prominent positions in venture success and development of entrepreneurial competencies. Similarly, Jiang, Yang and Wang, (2016) performed six month survey on ethical competencies and concluded that they play a leading role in business success. Rahman (2015) survey of 213 Bangladeshi entrepreneurs found opportunity competencies, improve financial and non-financial performance of the firm. Some studies claimed inconsistency findings on the relationship of entrepreneurial competencies and venture success. For evidence Al Mamun et al., (2015) concluded a positive influence of only two entrepreneurial competencies on firm achievements. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2014) revealed a positive influence of strategic competency on both financial and non-financial performance, while technical competency was found significantly related to only financial performance of the company in Malaysia. On the other side opportunity and conceptual competencies did not prove any relation with firm performance. Another study done by Rahman et al. (2015a) claimed noteworthy influence of opportunity and innovative competencies on firm performance. Similarly, Nasureedin et al. (2016) reported a positive impact of strategic and opportunity competencies on firm success while conceptual, relationship competencies and commitment have no strong influence on business success in Malaysian context. Mohsin (2015) did a mail survey of 167 entrepreneurs and reported that strategic, opportunity and conceptual competencies are positively related to business success. While on the contrary, technical and relationship competencies are not confirmed for successful business.

Numerous studies have proven the positive impact of E.C on small and medium enterprise's success. Thus, we may expect the significant impact of entrepreneurial competencies on Malaysian SMEs business success. Following hypothesis is developed since above evidence.

H1a: The entrepreneurial competencies (Strategic, opportunity, learning, personal, ethical, conceptual and familism) have a positive relationship with SMEs business success among Chinese, Malay and Indian entrepreneurs.

3. Network Competence and its Influence on SMEs' Venture Performance

Assorted studies in earlier literature stipulated support for the committed relationship between network competence and business success. Network competence is also conceptualized at organizational firm-level (Walter, Auer, & Ritter, 2006) which has the caliber to assist market and partner-oriented behavior (Walter et al., 2006). Furthermore, firm with more developed intangible resources, experience constant business growth as compared to the firms lacking in intangible assets (Anderson & Eshima, 2013). Thus, valuable network can be assumed as intangible assets, it will also improve goodwill of the company. Meanwhile, this competency is helpful in creating a strong web of communication inside and outside the firm (Walter et al., 2006). The firm with high network will more likely to achieve superior performance because of new updated knowledge regarding product innovation and market demand (Tehseen & Sajilan, 2016). Xu, Frankwick, and Ramirez, (2016) stated that social ties play crucial role in business success. The ventures with high network competence are aware regarding customer and market preferences. This competence also

keeps them updated on rival companies' intentions and it, foster innovativeness (Walter et al., 2006). Development in venture comes due to proper marketing, customer's satisfaction from the services and products of the company. It can be possible through networking. Thus, interaction with customers has been recognized as a crucial resource for business success (Gu, Jiang, & Wang, 2016). Similarly, Li, Chen and Schott (2016), reported moderating influence of network competence between innovation and export. The results show that networking encourages innovativeness and innovation leads to a firm's expansion.

Consequently, in line with the above-stated arguments about the direct impact of network competence on business success in entrepreneurship, this study assumes that network competence may be beneficial for ethnic entrepreneurs in Malaysian context. Therefore, we hypothesized that high and strong network communication may enhance the relationship bond between SMEs growth, success, and its survival.

H1b: The network competence has a positive impact on small and medium venture success among Malaysian ethnic entrepreneurs

4. Environmental Turbulence and its Moderating Influence on entrepreneurial competencies

Literature on entrepreneurship is well documented on the moderating influence of environmental turbulence and its relation between performance and strategies (Westerberg, Singh & Hackner, 1997). Literature also shows the evidence of the influential moderating image of the external environment and its relationship with organizational variables and business success. Gilley and Rasheed (2000) reported the positive influence of environmental turbulence on the relationship of outsourcing and firm performance. Ahmad (2007) proved empirically the convincing bonding of entrepreneurial competencies and venture success in a high turbulent environment in Australia and Malaysia. Hazlina Ahmad et al (2010) and Tehseen (2017) tested, external business environment as moderator for entrepreneurial competencies and business success in Malaysian context. Similarly, Sajilan and Tehseen (2015) found a strong association between entrepreneurial competencies and venture achievements with the moderating impact of the turbulent environment in Malaysian context.

Hazlina Ahmad (2010) and Ahmad (2007) stated that venture performance and E.C are subtle to external environment and environmental factors may affect the impact of entrepreneurial competencies on SMEs business success. External environment can be categorized into two groups on the base of source of impact. First one is task environment, which deals with customer, supplier, competitors, and technology providers and second is the environment inside institution which contracts with culture, external regulations, and social norms. These two groups of business environment can produce dissimilar impacts on the firm (Oliver, 1997). Thus, this study will focus on task environment which involves competitors, customer, and technologies as well as on institutional environment, in which we will consider government support.

Environmental uncertainty is a regular factor of business environment, especially for SMEs and it demands specific entrepreneurial competencies to deal with such turbulent settings (Lindelöf, & Löfsten, 2006). Besides these studies, some researchers reported no effect of environmental turbulence as moderator (González-Benito, González-Benito, & Muñoz-Gallego, 2014; Gaur, Vasudevan, & Gaur, 2011). While Ha, Lo and Ramayah (2016) experienced the negative moderating impact of environmental turbulence.

Thus, we may assume that entrepreneurs must develop crucial entrepreneurial competencies to deal turbulent and dynamic business. Turbulent business environment pressurizes entrepreneur to adopt latest and most suitable competencies to face uncertain conditions.

Consequently, turbulent environment may improve the connotation between venture success and E.C.

Therefore, following hypothesis developed for this study.

H3a: The influence of entrepreneurial competencies on venture success is stronger when the turbulence in the environment is higher among Malaysian ethnic entrepreneurs.

5. Environmental Turbulence and its Moderating Influence on Network Competence

The literature on entrepreneurship accepted the significance of organizational factors, for example, organizational culture, structure, characteristics of top management team members and a firm's resources to understand the bonding between entrepreneurship and firm growth (Walter, Auer & Ritter, 2006). According to the entrepreneurship theory, the entrepreneur's capability to identify, explore and to avail the available opportunities in the market is very crucial for business success (Oviatt & Mc Dougall, 2005). All entrepreneurs may not have these kinds of market opportunity. Thus, these entrepreneurs need to collaborate with external parties to get access to market openings (Zain & Ng, 2006). Therefore, entrepreneurs must establish strong networking to learn the latest techniques, gain knowledge and exploit new business opportunities (Chetty & Holm, 2000). Network competence is the most influential property of any company (Sajilan & Tehseen, 2015). This competency enables entrepreneurs to grab resources, strategic opportunities, it also aids analyses of threats from the external environment and improves the capability to transmute the venture (Ng & Knee, 2018).

Literature emphasized the straight impact of network competencies on the firm's performance (Brand, Croonen, & Leenders, 2018). Based on the previous research, we may assume that entrepreneurs with strong networking have a successful business in Malaysian context. Furthermore, Brand et al. (2018) claimed that high network competence is very beneficial for SMEs for the growth of their business at any level. Network competency is a unique resource for the development of firm's abilities (Song, Augustine, & Yang, 2016).

The high turbulent environment needs more strong and useful communication to understand the customer demand, requirements, satisfaction, innovation, employee, and market demand (Hoque, 2004). Effective communication among buyers and suppliers encourage the flow of information and enhances entrepreneur's response in an uncertain business environment. Thus, the established network relationship enables new firms to avail opportunities for required time and access to updated market information (Song et al., 2016). We assume that in a higher turbulent environment the impact of network competency is stronger on business for its growth, survival, and success. In other words, the success rate of business will be higher in turbulent environment when there is strong networking. Hypothesis related to this phenomenon is as follows.

H3b: The influence of network competence on venture success is stronger when the turbulence in the environment is higher among Malaysian ethnic entrepreneurs.

6. Government Support and its Moderating Influence on Entrepreneurial Competencies

Entrepreneurial competencies enable entrepreneurs additional proficient of perceiving latent market openings and to deliver information which can be implemented by entrepreneurs to acquire new venture possibilities (Pinho & Thompson, 2017). Numerous researchers stressed on the importance of training and entrepreneurial education. Training play an effective role to promote the capabilities and information (Verheul, Wennekers, Audretsch, & Thurik, 2001). These trainings exercise a major influence on entrepreneurial attitudes.

Thus, government support may play a significant role for entrepreneurial trainings to enhance entrepreneurial competencies. Paço et al. (2011) stressed to work on personal competencies. The researcher stated that personal competencies are crucial to demonstrate the intention of entrepreneurs. Moreover, entrepreneurial training and education must pay attention to personal attributes and behaviors to stimulate these competencies.

An unfavorable business environment can restrain investment opportunities and may reduce the entrepreneur's tendency, that are the characteristics of particular marketplace and civilizations (Bruton, Filatotchev, Chahine, & Wright, 2010). Comparative study between Australia and Malaysia done on 20 SMEs's owners by Ahmad and Seet (2009). This study concluded that ineffective behaviors and weak competencies are strongly associated with failures in ventures while it can be compensated with the government support process. Another Study by

Bahari, Yunus and Jabar (2017) confirmed the meaningful relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and entrepreneurial orientation toward venture success influenced by government support. According to Jacob, Johan, Schweizer, & Zhan. (2016) studies on government support for SMEs declared that, data concluded from their research study strongly support the idea that entrepreneurs who suddenly evade support from government, encounter considerable fiscal budget problems (Jacob et al., 2016)

Similarly, Shamsuddin, Sarkawi, Jaafar, & Abd Rahim. (2017) confirmed that financial and non-financial support from the government positively related to SMEs Performance and there is an interaction of absorptive capacity as a moderator on Government business support service and SMEs Performance. Thus, we formulated following hypothesis for current research work.

H4a: The impact of E.C on venture success is more strong when the government support is high among Malaysian ethnic entrepreneurs.

7. Government Support and its Moderating Influence on Network Competence

Government support programs for SMEs success is very important. Authorities can enhance and improve activities of entrepreneurs by tackling disparities in the available resources and the required competence with the help of entrepreneurship support program (Pinho, 2017). The basic research point in literature is what is the pattern to find most suitable openings, evaluate it well and utilize it, while some can do it and others cannot (Davidsson, 2015; Landstrom & Lohrke, 2010). The previous literature review indicates that this can be facilitated with strong networking (Akhar, Khan, Frynas, Tse, & Rao-Nicholson, 2018). Consensus of scholars has been reached to the point that the entrepreneurship examination should consider individual connections for seeking opportunity.

Communication is crucial for venture success and it is the way through which entrepreneur can interact with the external environment. Marti, Courpasson, and Barbosa (2013) explained that, how in Argentina common individuals created a business environment through networking and interacting with local community folks and external peoples. Thus, persuasive communication leads to venture success and moderating role of government support cannot be neglected. It is assumed that government support moderates the networking for business success. Further, the fundamental question of entrepreneurship research is how and why some individuals (or teams) identify opportunities, evaluate them as viable, and then decide to exploit them, whereas others do not, and, in turn, how these opportunities result in wealth creation (Davidsson, 2015; Landstrom & Lohrke, 2010). Hung and Effendi, (2011) interviewed 11 top SMEs winners of Malaysia Enterprise Award 2004-2008. They revealed six most important skills of successful entrepreneurs. These are product, communication skills, opportunity recognition, customer, management and leadership qualities

Consequently, we derived the following hypothesis from the review of discussed literature.

H4b: The influence of network competency on business success is stronger when the government support is higher among Chinese, Malay, and Indian entrepreneurs.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The existing studies are evident regarding the important role of entrepreneurial competencies towards business success of SMEs in developed as well as developing countries (Solevik, 2012; Rasmussen, Mosey, & Wright, 2011; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2010; Man Slau, & Snape, 2008; Hayton & Kelly, 2006; Ahmad, 2007; Colombo & Grilli, 2005).

The successful SMEs are crucial for the progress of every country's economy and thus it is important to consider all factors both internal as well as external that could impact on SMEs business success (Ahmad et al.,

2009; Ahmad, 2007). Therefore, the proposed conceptual model will consider the moderating impacts of environmental turbulence and government support on the strength of the relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and SMEs business success. A new theoretical framework has been suggested and hypotheses have been developed as well after reviewing the existing literature. Thus, an empirical study is further recommended to test the validity of these hypotheses in the context of service industry of Malaysia. Also, a comparative study can be conducted by examining the specific competencies need for SMEs success across different industries of Malaysia.

The outcomes of this study will have many practical implications, for instance, entrepreneurs will improve their knowledge regarding the most specific competencies needed by them for the success of the SMEs' businesses. The role of government support and environmental turbulence will be revealed as moderating variables between the entrepreneurial competencies, network competence and SMEs business success. Moreover, by investigating the impact of entrepreneurial behaviors on the development of entrepreneurial competencies will also improve understanding that how different cultures of Malays, Indians and Chinese influence on the development of entrepreneurial behaviors and competencies among Malaysian entrepreneurs. Thus, this study will provide useful insights regarding the factors that can improve the performances of SMEs because only successful SMEs contribute more towards the country's GDP, employment, and exports and will help Malaysia to achieve vision 2050 of becoming an advanced nation.

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