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A Conceptual Framework for the Impact of Junior Achievement-Company Program on School Students' Entrepreneurial Intention in Oman

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental purpose of this research is to provide a conceptual framework on the impact of the Company Program on students' entrepreneurial intention as it has been intended to stimulate students' motivation to be engaged in self-employment in the future. This research was motivated by the significance of effective entrepreneurship education in fostering students' intention into the world of business. Thus, entrepreneurship education in the school system is becoming a necessity. The Company Program is an entrepreneurship education initiative designed by Junior Achievement Worldwide to provide students an opportunity for experiential learning to start and manage their own mini companies. The present literature reveals that reliable entrepreneurship education has a vivid role on fostering students' intention towards entrepreneurship. This paper adopts Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior which approves three antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control to determine individuals' intentions. Therefore, this research proposes that the Company Program has a positive impact on students' entrepreneurial intention in the Omani schools including the three determinants of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial intention, Junior Achievement-Company Program, school students, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has been essential for countries to boost their economies and the related social development [1]. It assists countries in finding new jobs for the youth which is undoubtedly contributes in nations' economic growth [2]. This growth is also supported by the attempt of entrepreneurs to turn inventions and new combinations into market [3].

Efforts to enhance the role of entrepreneurship in the community will remain incomplete without having proper entrepreneurial education in the whole system. This education works to prepare young people to enter the world of work successfully, and before that it arouses their enthusiasm for entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is a necessity to include entrepreneurial education in school curricula [4]. Based on literature, a number of studies have found that

entrepreneurship education has got a positive influence on students' preference to become entrepreneurs [2].

Considering its importance, policy makers in different countries seek to insert entrepreneurship education at universities [5] as well as at an earlier age of high schools [6]. The European Union, for instance, recommended the inclusion of entrepreneurship as a part of lifelong learning. The Sultanate of Oman took a similar step when it introduced career guidance activities, including entrepreneurial education, at its schools in 2006 [6].

Through its strategic Vision 2040, the Omani government has given entrepreneurship a priority through the provision of appropriate infrastructure and educational system that encourages entrepreneurship. The Omani Ministry of Education introduced Career Guidance services at schools in 2006 and employed teachers (Career Guidance Specialists) to provide necessary counseling for students regarding their potential career pathways including self-employment. Students, more intensively in higher grades, are engaged in different entrepreneurial activities inside and outside the classroom. The company Program is one of the significant practical programs that target students in schools. It is implemented by the Junior Achievement (Injaz Oman) and it is intended for students in grades 10-12 in some selected schools. This program lasts with students for almost the entire school year with an attendance of twelve sessions. It provides students with both theoretical and practical learning. Students form a team and then collaborate in the whole process of building their own company. The CP activities are conducted in-school and out-of-school based on the type of learning content [7]. The CP starts with the students' initiation of their own business and ends up with the liquidation of their company.

Generally, Junior Achievement Company Program is one of the practical programs that intends to assist students promote their entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, networking, and intention. However, the impact of this program on students' entrepreneurial intentions remains unclear. Thus, its influence on students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control is unknown too.

For clearer understanding, this paper uses Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which has been largely used and validated in various fields [8]. It is effective in understanding individuals' behavioral intentions taking into account personal and social aspects [9]. This theory emphasizes that individuals' behaviors are the outcomes of their intentions to do those behaviors [10-12]. This means when entrepreneurial intention is higher, the resulting entrepreneurial behavior is more probable. The TPB has been widely handled in entrepreneurship research. It identifies three factors that motivate behavior:

- Attitudes towards behavior, which explains the degree how an individual keeps a positive or negative evaluation about entrepreneurship [13, 14].
- Subjective norms, which indicates the support that an individual receives from family and other important people regarding his/her decision [13] to be an entrepreneur.
- Perceived Behavioral Control, which refers to individuals' perception about their capabilities to go over the behavior [13] and therefore can start their own firms.

Despite of its vast implementation globally, little is known about the effect of the Company Program (CP) on learners' entrepreneurial intention [15]. In their research, Oosterbeek, van

Praag [15] found surprisingly that the CP had a negative significant impact on students' entrepreneurial intention. Differently, Makoka [16] research results showed positive significant influence of the CP on entrepreneurial intention in his South Africa sample. These contradictory findings call for further research and this is the gap that this paper attempts to fill.

The main objective of this research is to investigate the impact of the Company Program on students' entrepreneurial intention in the Omani schools. Besides the intention, this paper attempts to explore the extent to which participation in the Company Program influences its antecedents as proposed by Ajzen: attitudes towards entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

This paper will cover the literature on entrepreneurship education, Junior Achievement Company Program, the three Ajzen's antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as well as entrepreneurial intention. Then, a conceptual framework will be proposed to demonstrate the relationships and hypotheses between the Company Program (entrepreneurship education) and students' entrepreneurial intention as well as the role of Ajzen's three determinants on this relationship. This paper will end up with a conclusion recommending some managerial implications and suggesting topics for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship Education

Education has been always an essential motive for the development of nations. Knowing this evident fact, countries are competing to provide best education for their people including entrepreneurship one which is closely related to economic development especially in reducing unemployment and poverty in communities [17-19]. These efforts have included the provision of entrepreneurship education at high school level [6]. Through entrepreneurial education, students gain entrepreneurial awareness [4], skills and networking necessary to start a business, and entrepreneurial intention [20], which has a prominent role in reaping the fruits of entrepreneurial education through students' future orientation towards self-employment. Skills of innovation and creativity are also enhanced through this type of education [21-23]. Generally, entrepreneurial education is mainly concerned with the contribution of business creation.

The Company Program (CP)

Entrepreneurial education programs have been varied and also differed in their precise goals. Amongst these programs is the Company Program which is one of the educational initiatives implemented by the Junior Achievement Worldwide as a nonprofit organization founded in America in 1919. This organization spreads over 114 countries and offers various programs on entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial literacy for more than 15 million students all over the world [7]. It operates in Oman through Injaz Oman, which is a part of Injaz Al-Arab JA MENA.

The Company Program is globally implemented at both university and school levels. The CP teaches students how to shift the theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship into practice. Studies found that entrepreneurship is more affected by experience rather than formal education [24]. Studies also show that skills necessary for entrepreneurship are more influential than an

education or degree itself [25]. This practical learning helps students to be more accustomed to the daily demands of their company and this results in more probability of company success [26]. Students participating in the CP work to develop an innovative product or service, finance their startup, and market it [7]. There are also advisers from actual business bodies who meet students regularly and assist them throughout the journey of their mini companies.

Entrepreneurial Intention

Intention has been seen in literature as a predictor for an actual behavior [27]. It is simply the willingness of an individual to perform a specific behavior. Many theories have emerged to study the terms of behavioral intention such as Social Cognitive Theory, Shapero's Entrepreneurial Event (SEE) Model, and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Each theory addressed different factors that directly or indirectly influence the intended behavior. For example, intention is influenced by the factors of environment, people and behaviors which interact altogether to change a certain behavior [28].

Entrepreneurial intention is individual's clear awareness and conviction to start own business in the future [29]. Therefore, they take their first step in establishing their firm with all their willing and prior intent and planning [30]. Knowing the fact that starting a business is not an easy process, many researchers shed the light on the importance of considering the entrepreneurial intentions as a significant cognitive factor when studying about entrepreneurship and business formation [31-33]. This entrepreneurial intention is definitely affected by different factors. For instance, Shapero and Sokol [34] using their Entrepreneurial Event Model identified the two factors of perceived desirability and perceived feasibility to determine a particular behavior including entrepreneurship. That is, the perceptions of the attractiveness of entrepreneurship and the capability to be an entrepreneur are the factors that lead to decision to proceed in that direction [35-38].

Ajzen's Antecedents of Behavioral Intention

For a broader understanding of intentions, Ajzen [39] proposed the well-known Theory of Planned Behavior, which has been widely used in different areas [8] including entrepreneurship [40]. It suggests that individuals' intentions drive them to perform their resulting behaviors and that those intentions are determined by the three antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [13].

Attitudes Towards Behavior:

This motivational factor refers to the individual's attraction towards a certain behavior(e.g. entrepreneurship) and that it will bring him/her favorable rewards [41]. These attitudes are affected by individual's beliefs about that behavior and how they view the possible positive or negative consequences if involved in that particular behavior. It is simply, the more desirable the behavior is, the greater the intention.

Subjective Norms:

This is the second determinant suggested by Ajzen which refers to the degree of the support of family, friends and those close to an individual regarding a certain behavior, and here in this research it concerns entrepreneurship and establishing own businesses [41]. In other words, it is the "social pressure exerted to engage in a particular behavior" [42]. This determinant simply

answers the question "Is the individual's intention towards a behavior influenced by the positive or negative opinions of his/her reference people?"

Perceived Behavioral Control:
This factor concerns the individual's perception of the difficulty or ease of the behavior that he/she intends to perform including becoming an entrepreneur [41]. It concerns about the individual's perception of his/her ability to execute a particular behavior such as becoming an entrepreneur. It is closer to the term 'self-efficacy' used by different authors [43]. It is hypothesized that the more positive the perception, the greater the intention.

Mediating Role of Ajzen's Antecedents on Entrepreneurial Intention
A good portion of literature has presented that the greater students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship, the greater their intention is. Such results have been proven by different researchers such as Tshikovhi and Shambare [44], Mokoko and and Marishane [45] who targeted South African students. Surveying academics in Spain, Miranda, Chamorro-Mera [46] concluded that attitudes were the main mediating antecedent in entrepreneurial intention.

Different studies have shown that subjective norms (Ajzen's antecedent on entrepreneurial intention) have a positive influence on student's intention towards entrepreneurship [47]. Mokoko and and Marishane [45], for example, brought up high significant results in the relationship between subjective norms and student's intention towards entrepreneurship. Despite that, other studies have resulted in insignificant relationship between student's intention and their subjective norms [48].

The antecedent of perceived behavioral control has also resulted positively with student's entrepreneurial intention [49]. This is evident in a study conducted by Padilla-Angulo, Díaz-Pichardo [50] where their results showed a strong influence of perceived behavioral control on entrepreneurial intention. In a study conducted by André, Maulana [51] in Germany and Netherlands, they found a positive influence of this antecedent on students' intention to become potential entrepreneurs.

Impact of Junior Achievement-Company Program on Entrepreneurial Intention
Researchers found that entrepreneurship education strengthened students' entrepreneurial intentions [52, 53] and this has increased the chance for these students to be potential entrepreneurs [54]. Yet, other researchers have come up with no impact of entrepreneurship on students' intention towards entrepreneurship [55] and even surprisingly a negative impact in another research [15]. Overall, literature has largely proved the positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and students' entrepreneurial intention. In other words, students who have received entrepreneurship education including the company program have overcome their peers in their intention for business rather than those who have not been exposed to such learning. For instance, the Junior Achievement-Company program stimulated start-up intentions in the Norwegian upper secondary schools [56]. In another Norwegian pilot study, the company program even exceeded its impact the students' entrepreneurial intention to show a positive correlation with their start-up activity [57-59]. A South-African study also shared similar results where the participants in the Company Program were positively influenced on their intent to become entrepreneurs [60]. Involving Swedish high school

students, the researchers stated that the company program increased students' long-term probability to start their own businesses [26, 61, 62].

Impact of Junior Achievement-Company Program on Ajzen's Antecedents

As a practical entrepreneurship education, Junior Achievement-Company Program emphasized its positive correlation with the three determinants suggested by Ajzen (attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control). This emphasis was clearly proven through a study conducted by Mokoko and and Marishane [45] on South African students in high school where he found the program's strong impact on all the three Ajzen's antecedents.

Entrepreneurship education enhances students' attitudes toward entrepreneurship [63] and high school students are no exception [54]. In a study conducted in secondary schools in London, for example, found that the participants in the Company Program were more likely than the non-participants to have the attitude and desire for self-employment and therefore establish their own business in the future [64]. Earlier research by Kelly [65], emphasized the significant contribution of the Company Program on the students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship in some American schools in Pittsburgh.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on literature and prepositions discussed, the researcher has developed the following conceptual framework. In this framework, the Company Program (entrepreneurship education) is considered as an independent variable while the entrepreneurial intention is considered as a dependent variable. This study relies on the Theory of Planned Behavior and therefore the three antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control play the mediating role between the Company and the entrepreneurial intention. The researcher also raised the following hypotheses on the relationship between the variables

- **H1:** There is a positive influence of the Company Program on students' entrepreneurial intention.
- **H2a:** There is a positive influence of the Company Program on students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship.
- **H2b:** There is a positive influence of the Company Program on subjective norms.
- **H2c:** There is a positive influence of the Company Program on students' perceived entrepreneurial control.
- **H3a:** There is a positive influence of students' attitudes towards entrepreneurship on their entrepreneurial intentions.
- **H3b:** There is a positive influence of subjective norms on their entrepreneurial intentions.
- **H3c:** There is a positive influence of students' perceived entrepreneurial control on their entrepreneurial intentions.

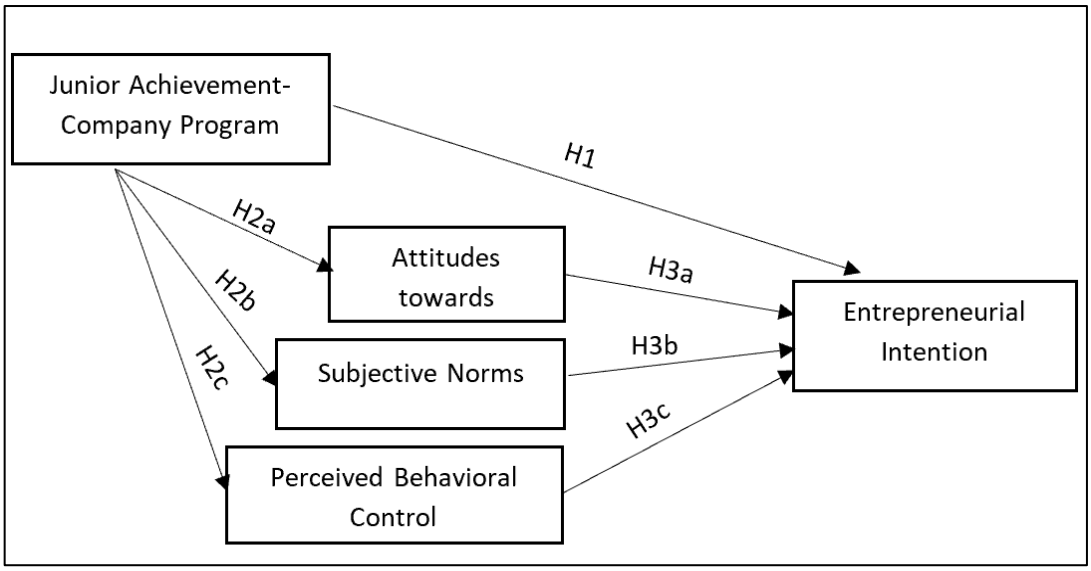

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in the economic and social development of countries. Entrepreneurship education is an essential part in the whole process of entrepreneurship. This type of education should not neglect fostering entrepreneurial intention with students as one of its main goals. An example of globally widespread programs is the Company Program administered by the Junior Achievement Organization. This paper attempts to investigate the impact of this program on entrepreneurial intention of high school students. It also seeks to check if there are any influences of this program on the three antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control proposed by Ajzen in his Theory of Planned behavior. The concerned literature shows that there is a significant positive impact of the Company Program on the students' entrepreneurial intention and the Ajzen's three determinants.

This research adds value to the current literature in that it checks the influence of the Company Program on students' entrepreneurial intention at school level. It contributes also in examining the mediating role of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control between the Company Program and the entrepreneurial intention.

Since the Company Program has positively influenced the intention of students towards entrepreneurship, this paper has significant practical implications. Firstly, policy makers in ministries of education should support providing the Company Program and other similar programs into their schools. Secondly, developers of entrepreneurship education should focus on entrepreneurial intention as one of the main outcomes of their content. Moreover, practical activities should be a prominent part of the content of these programs.

For future studies, the researcher suggests choosing other entrepreneurial programs to be examined. Other intention theories like the Entrepreneurial Event Model by Shapero are recommended to be researched. Additionally, the influence of students' actual exposure to business is worthwhile testing whether individuals have positive or negative experiences.

Further research is also required to examine the long-term effect of entrepreneurship programs on students' entrepreneurial intentions.

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