

THE INFLUENCE OF UNIVERSITY SUPPORT ON STUDENT SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract: *Sustainable entrepreneurship has become an important approach for addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges while supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Malaysia, the government has introduced various initiatives and programmes to encourage entrepreneurial involvement among graduates and young people. However, despite these efforts, the level of sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students remains relatively low. Previous studies have widely examined entrepreneurial intention using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which mainly focuses on psychological determinants such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Nevertheless, studies on sustainable entrepreneurial intention in the Malaysian context remain limited, particularly in understanding the role of environmental and institutional support. Therefore, this conceptual paper adopts the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to examine the influence of university support on students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. Specifically, university support is conceptualized into three dimensions, namely perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS), and perceived business development support (PBDS). This study aims to understand the importance of university support in influencing students' intention to become sustainable entrepreneurs. The proposed framework provide useful insights for universities and policymakers in developing effective and efficient mechanisms to encourage greater student involvement in sustainable entrepreneurship.*

Keywords: *Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intention, Perceived Educational Support, Perceived Concept Development Support, Perceived Business Development Support, Social Cognitive Theory*

Introduction

Sustainable entrepreneurship has emerged as an important mechanism for addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges faced by modern societies. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, sustainable entrepreneurship emphasizes the creation of economic value while simultaneously contributing to environmental protection and social well-being (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). As concerns regarding climate change, sustainability, and resource scarcity continue to intensify, sustainable entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of sustainable economic development.

Given the growing importance of sustainable entrepreneurship in addressing these global challenges, Malaysia has increasingly emphasized the need to promote sustainable entrepreneurial activities as part of the national development agenda. One of the major government initiatives to strengthen entrepreneurship development in higher education is the Entrepreneurship Action Plan for Higher Education Institutions (EAP-HEIs) 2021–2025 introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education (2021). Entrepreneurship has been prioritised under Shift 1, which aims to develop holistic, entrepreneurial, and balanced graduates who are capable of contributing to society and adapting to the global economy. In line with the sustainable development agenda, the EAP-HEIs 2021–2025 also emphasises the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17) in educating graduates and future entrepreneurs through collaborative partnerships and sustainable entrepreneurial practices. The government recognizes that sustainable entrepreneurship can contribute not only to economic growth but also to environmental sustainability and social well-being (Ashari et al., 2022).

In Malaysia, universities are expected to play a major role in nurturing future sustainable entrepreneurs. Universities are no longer viewed solely as institutions for academic learning but also as important platforms for developing entrepreneurial competencies, creativity, innovation capabilities, and sustainability awareness among students. Through entrepreneurship courses, business incubation programs, mentoring activities, innovation competitions, and industry collaborations, universities has potential to help students develop entrepreneurial mindsets and strengthen their intention to pursue entrepreneurial careers (Tehseen & Haider, 2021).

Entrepreneurial participation in Malaysia has remained relatively low over the years despite continuous efforts by the government and higher education institutions to promote entrepreneurship. Data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2017 showed that Malaysia recorded the lowest entrepreneurial intention rate (17.6) among selected Asian countries, compared to Thailand (37.4), Indonesia (28.1), Vietnam (24.96), and South Korea (22.8). This indicates that Malaysians demonstrated a relatively lower intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities compared to individuals in neighbouring Asian countries. Consistently, more recent evidence from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) showed that only 7.2% of employed graduates were classified as own-account workers in 2024, while the majority (86.4%) were employed as salaried workers. These statistics suggest that entrepreneurial involvement in Malaysia has remained relatively low from 2017 to 2024,

highlighting the need for greater efforts to strengthen entrepreneurial intention, particularly sustainable entrepreneurial intention, among university students and graduates.

Previous studies have consistently highlighted the importance of university support in encouraging entrepreneurial intention among university students. Recent studies further suggest that educational support, innovation exposure, and institutional entrepreneurial ecosystems significantly contribute to the development of sustainable entrepreneurial intention among students (Chan et al., 2025; Wiramihardja et al., 2022). In particular, universities that actively provide entrepreneurial support systems and sustainability-oriented educational exposure are more likely to encourage students to consider entrepreneurship as a viable and meaningful career path.

In the field of entrepreneurial intention research, many previous studies have extensively applied the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine how attitude, perceived behavioral control (PBC), and subjective norms (SN) influence an individual's intention to become an entrepreneur. (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000; Vamvaka et al., 2020). These three dimensions are widely recognized as important predictors of entrepreneurial intention and have contributed significantly to understanding entrepreneurial behaviour among students and graduates. However, despite the extensive application of TPB in entrepreneurship research, the level of entrepreneurial intention among graduates remains relatively low. This situation suggests that although TPB provides valuable explanations regarding intention formation, the theory alone is likely insufficient to fully explain why many graduates are still reluctant to pursue entrepreneurship as a career choice.

Therefore, scholars have increasingly argued that future studies should pay greater attention to other contextual and environmental factors, as well as alternative theoretical perspectives beyond TPB, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurial intention. Several recent studies have also suggested that entrepreneurial intention can be influenced by additional contextual and environmental factors beyond attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Al-Jubari, 2019; Ishak et al., 2024). In particular, the role of university support has become increasingly important, especially in shaping students' entrepreneurial mindset, confidence, and readiness to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Universities are not only responsible for delivering entrepreneurial knowledge, but also for providing an ecosystem that supports the development of entrepreneurial competencies and business capabilities among students.(Vamvaka et al., 2020).

Accordingly, this study focuses on the role of university support in influencing students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. In the context of this study, university support is conceptualised through three dimensions, namely perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS), and perceived business development support (PBDS), which were adapted from the university support model developed by Turker and Selcuk (2009); Saeed et al.,2015). These dimensions represent different forms of support provided by higher education institutions in developing students' entrepreneurial capabilities and encouraging them to pursue entrepreneurship as a career option. Specifically, PES refers to the support related to entrepreneurship education, knowledge, skills, and learning experiences provided by universities. PCDS focuses on support associated with creativity, innovation, opportunity recognition, and the development of entrepreneurial ideas and concepts. Meanwhile, PBDS refers to institutional support related to business establishment, mentoring, networking opportunities, incubation programmes, and access to entrepreneurial resources.

To explain the influence of these university support dimensions on students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention, this study adopts the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as the underpinning theory. SCT posits that human behaviour is shaped through the reciprocal interaction between environmental factors, cognitive processes, and individual behaviour (Bandura, 1986). In the context of this study, PES, PCDS, and PBDS are positioned as environmental factors under SCT because these forms of support originate from the university environment and have the potential to shape students' cognitive perceptions, confidence, and behavioural intentions towards entrepreneurship. Unlike the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which mainly emphasises psychological determinants such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, SCT provides a broader perspective by highlighting the importance of environmental influences in shaping behaviour. Given that entrepreneurship education (EE) and the supportive university environment (Ge and Li, 2015; Mustafa et al., 2016; Marques et al., 2018) are instrumental in encouraging graduates to engaged in entrepreneurial activities deserving for further investigation. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of students' entrepreneurial behaviour from the perspective of university support, particularly in influencing university students' intention to become sustainable entrepreneurs.

Literature Review

Definition of Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention

Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intention (SEI) refers to an individual's intention or willingness to establish a business venture that simultaneously pursues economic, social, and environmental goals in line with sustainable development principles (Thompson et al., 2011; Vuorio et al., 2018). Unlike traditional entrepreneurial intention, which mainly focuses on profit generation and business creation, sustainable entrepreneurial intention emphasises the creation of ventures that contribute positively to society and the environment while maintaining economic viability. According to Vuorio et al. (2018), individuals with sustainable entrepreneurial intention are motivated not only by financial opportunities but also by the desire to address sustainability-related issues such as environmental protection, social inequality, and community well-being through entrepreneurial activities. In the context of higher education, sustainable entrepreneurial intention reflects students' readiness and commitment to engage in entrepreneurial activities that integrate sustainability values into business practices (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010; Turker & Selcuk, 2009). Universities play an important role in shaping students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention by providing entrepreneurship education, sustainability awareness, and institutional support that encourage innovative and socially responsible entrepreneurial behaviour. Previous studies have suggested that students who possess higher awareness of sustainability issues, entrepreneurial knowledge, and supportive environmental exposure are more likely to develop stronger sustainable entrepreneurial intention (Vuorio et al., 2018; Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence sustainable entrepreneurial intention is important in promoting sustainable entrepreneurship among university students.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a relevant theoretical foundation for explaining the influence of university support on students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. According to SCT, human behaviour is shaped through the reciprocal interaction between environmental factors, cognitive factors, and behavioural outcomes (Bandura, 1986). In this study, perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS), and perceived

business development support (PBDS) are considered environmental factors because these forms of support are derived from the university environment and shape students' entrepreneurial cognition and behaviour. Through entrepreneurship education, idea development activities, mentoring, networking opportunities, and business-related support, universities are able to enhance students' entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence, creativity, and self-efficacy. SCT suggests that environmental support can influence an individual's cognitive perception and behavioural intention. Therefore, the support provided by universities is expected to strengthen students' intention to become sustainable entrepreneurs.

University support

In entrepreneurship education research, universities are often conceptualized as providing a triad of support that influences students' entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions: perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS), and perceived business development support (PBDS) (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Saeed et al., 2015; Qazi et al., 2020). These three dimensions jointly reflect how stakeholders view a university's role in knowledge provision, idea development, and venture-building resources, respectively. These three dimensions jointly reflect how stakeholders view a university's role in knowledge provision, idea development, and venture-building resources, respectively. Across diverse contexts, multiple studies operationalize these constructs and demonstrate their differential effects on entrepreneurial outcomes such as entrepreneurial intention, self-efficacy, and subsequent behaviors.

The relationship between Perceived Educational Support and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention

Perceived Educational Support (PES) refers to students' perceptions regarding the extent to which universities provide entrepreneurship-related education, knowledge, skills, training, and learning experiences that can encourage entrepreneurial development and intention (Turker & Selcuk, 2009; Saeed et al., 2015; Ahmed et al., 2020). It reflects the effectiveness of educational institutions in creating an entrepreneurial learning environment through entrepreneurship courses, practical learning activities, seminars, workshops, and exposure to entrepreneurial knowledge and experiences. According to Turker and Selcuk (2009), educational support provided by universities plays an important role in motivating students to consider entrepreneurship as a potential career option. Similarly, Saeed et al. (2015) argued that entrepreneurship education and institutional educational support can strengthen students' entrepreneurial competencies, confidence, and motivation towards entrepreneurial activities.

In the context of sustainable entrepreneurship, perceived educational support is expected to positively influence sustainable entrepreneurial intention because entrepreneurship education can increase students' awareness, knowledge, and understanding regarding sustainability-related business opportunities and social or environmental issues (Ahmed et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2021). Through entrepreneurship-related education and experiential learning, students have the potential to develop the skills and mindset needed to establish businesses that not only generate economic value but also contribute to environmental and social sustainability. Furthermore, educational support is likely to enhance students' self-efficacy, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, which are important factors in encouraging sustainable entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, higher levels of perceived educational support are expected to strengthen students' intention to become sustainable entrepreneurs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Perceived educational support (PES) significantly influence sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students.

The relationship between Perceived Concept Development Support and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention

Perceived Concept Development Support (PCDS) refers to students' perceptions regarding the extent to which universities provide support in developing entrepreneurial ideas, creativity, innovation, and opportunity recognition through various entrepreneurial activities and institutional initiatives (Turker & Selcuk, 2009; Saeed et al., 2015; Anjum et al., 2021). This form of support includes activities such as idea generation programmes, innovation competitions, entrepreneurial projects, workshops, brainstorming sessions, and exposure to creative problem-solving practices that encourage students to transform ideas into potential business opportunities. According to Saeed et al. (2015), concept development support plays an important role in stimulating students' entrepreneurial thinking and strengthening their confidence in identifying and developing viable business ideas. Similarly, Anjum et al. (2021) highlighted that institutional support related to innovation and opportunity recognition can significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial motivation and intention.

In the context of sustainable entrepreneurship, perceived concept development support is expected to positively influence sustainable entrepreneurial intention because innovation, creativity, and opportunity recognition are essential elements in developing sustainable business solutions that address social, environmental, and economic challenges (Fellnhöfer, 2019; Anjum et al., 2021). Universities that encourage students to develop innovative ideas and sustainable business concepts strengthen students' ability to recognise sustainability-related opportunities and generate creative solutions for societal and environmental problems. Furthermore, concept development support could enhance students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, critical thinking, and confidence in transforming innovative ideas into sustainable business ventures. Therefore, higher levels of perceived concept development support are expected to strengthen students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Perceived Concept Development Support (PCDS) significantly influence sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students.

The relationship between Perceived Business Development Support and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention

Perceived Business Development Support (PBDS) refers to students' perceptions regarding the extent to which universities provide practical support and institutional assistance related to business establishment and entrepreneurial activities (Turker & Selcuk, 2009; Saeed et al., 2015; Ahmed et al., 2020). This form of support includes mentoring programmes, business incubation facilities, networking opportunities, financial guidance, consultancy services, industry collaboration, and access to entrepreneurial resources that can assist students in transforming business ideas into actual ventures. According to Turker and Selcuk (2009), business development support provided by universities can create a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem that encourages students to consider entrepreneurship as a feasible career path. Similarly, Saeed et al. (2015) found that institutional support such as mentoring, networking, and incubation programmes can significantly enhance students' entrepreneurial confidence and intention.

In the context of sustainable entrepreneurship, perceived business development support is expected to positively influence sustainable entrepreneurial intention because practical entrepreneurial support are able strengthen students' readiness and capability to establish businesses that integrate economic, social, and environmental values (Ahmed et al., 2020; Vuorio et al., 2018). Sustainable entrepreneurship often requires not only innovative ideas but also access to resources, industry guidance, and supportive networks to transform sustainability-oriented ideas into viable business ventures. Universities that provide business-related support, entrepreneurial mentoring, and incubation opportunities assists students better understand the practical aspects of managing sustainable businesses and overcoming entrepreneurial challenges. Furthermore, such support help to enhance students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, confidence, and perceived feasibility towards sustainable entrepreneurship. Therefore, higher levels of perceived business development support are expected to strengthen students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. This lead to the following hypothesis:

H3: Perceived business development support (PBDS) significantly influences sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual paper approach to develop a proposed framework of Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI) among university students. The framework was developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature related to sustainable entrepreneurship, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), entrepreneurial intention, and university support factors. Previous empirical and theoretical studies were critically analysed to identify key variables and relationships relevant to the development of sustainable entrepreneurial intention. In developing the proposed framework, three dimensions of university support, namely perceived educational support, perceived concept development support, and perceived business development support, were identified as important antecedents of sustainable entrepreneurship intention. The proposed framework aims to provide a theoretical foundation for future empirical studies in the context of sustainable entrepreneurship among university students in Malaysia.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research framework of this study. The framework proposes that perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS), and perceived business development support (PBDS) have significant relationships with sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

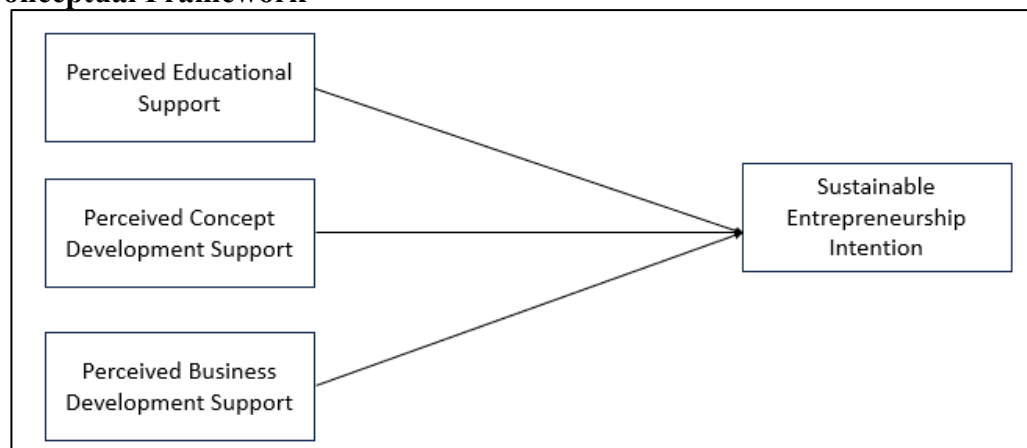


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Implication of the Study

This proposed framework provides several important theoretical contributions to the entrepreneurship and sustainable entrepreneurship literature. Most previous studies on entrepreneurial intention primarily relied on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in explaining entrepreneurial behaviour and intention. However, this framework extends the discussion by applying Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which emphasises the influence of environmental factors on individual behaviour and intention. By integrating perceived educational support, perceived concept development support, and perceived business development support as antecedents of Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI), the framework highlights the important role of university support systems in shaping students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, this framework contributes to the growing sustainable entrepreneurship literature by offering an alternative perspective that focuses on environmental support mechanisms rather than solely individual attitudes and perceptions.

From a practical perspective, this framework offers valuable implications for higher education institutions and policymakers in strengthening sustainable entrepreneurship development among university students. The framework suggests that universities should not rely solely on traditional classroom-based entrepreneurship education, but instead strengthen educational support, concept development support, and business development support within students' learning structures. This is particularly important for Generation Z and younger generations, who generally prefer more practical, flexible, and experiential learning approaches rather than purely theoretical instruction. Therefore, entrepreneurship education should be redesigned to include more hands-on entrepreneurial activities such as business simulations, incubation programmes, mentoring sessions, innovation projects, industry collaboration, and sustainability-focused entrepreneurial programmes. In addition, the learning content and entrepreneurial activities should also be aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 and SDG 17, to ensure that students are exposed to sustainable and socially responsible entrepreneurial practices. The framework may also assist policymakers in improving current initiatives such as the Entrepreneurship Action Plan for Higher Education Institutions (EAP-HEIs) 2021–2025 in fostering a stronger sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem within universities.

Finally, this framework also provides important implications for students and future graduates themselves. Strengthening sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students can contribute to the development of a younger generation that is more competitive, innovative, adaptable, and resilient within the entrepreneurial landscape. In the current era of economic uncertainty and rapid technological change, graduates are expected not only to seek employment opportunities but also to become job creators capable of generating economic, social, and environmental value through entrepreneurship. Through stronger university support systems and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship education, students can develop entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, confidence, and sustainability awareness that are essential for future entrepreneurial success. This is particularly important in supporting the Malaysian government's aspiration to produce more entrepreneurial and sustainable graduates while contributing towards sustainable national development. In the long term, strengthening sustainable entrepreneurial intention among students is likely to reduce graduate dependency on salaried employment, encourage sustainable business creation, and support the achievement of Malaysia's sustainable development agenda.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, this paper is conceptual in nature and does not involve empirical data collection or statistical analysis to validate the proposed relationships between university support dimensions and Sustainable Entrepreneurship Intention (SEI). Therefore, the significance and strength of the relationships between perceived educational support, perceived concept development support, perceived business development support, and SEI remain theoretical. Empirical investigation is necessary to determine which dimensions of university support exert the strongest influence on students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. Second, the variables incorporated in this framework are relatively limited as the study primarily focuses on environmental support factors, particularly university support, under the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) perspective. Finally, this study mainly focuses on university students, which limits the generalisability of the framework to other educational or non-student populations.

Future research is encouraged to empirically examine the proposed framework using quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable entrepreneurial intention among students and young individuals. Future studies should also consider incorporating additional variables such as emotional intelligence, entrepreneurial motivation, and sustainability awareness to further strengthen the understanding of sustainable entrepreneurial behaviour. This is particularly important among Generation Z, as emotional factors increasingly influence their decision-making, career preferences, and entrepreneurial behaviour. In addition, future researchers are encouraged to explore the motivational factors that drive young individuals to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship, including personal aspirations, financial goals, social contribution, and environmental concerns. Future studies should also extend the target population beyond university students to include college students, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students, and other young individuals who are similarly exposed to employment uncertainty and unemployment challenges. Such broader investigations could provide deeper insights into sustainable entrepreneurial intention across different educational backgrounds and youth groups in Malaysia.

Conclusion

This conceptual paper extends the discussion on sustainable entrepreneurial intention by proposing the role of university support through three dimensions, namely perceived educational support (PES), perceived concept development support (PCDS), and perceived business development support (PBDS). Grounded in the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), this paper argues that university support functions as an environmental factor that influence students' cognitive perceptions and behavioural intentions towards sustainable entrepreneurship. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the present conceptual framework emphasises the importance of institutional and environmental support in shaping students' sustainable entrepreneurial intention. Therefore, this paper contributes to the entrepreneurship literature by providing a broader understanding of how university support encourage final-year university students to pursue sustainable entrepreneurial careers. In addition, the proposed framework could provide useful insights for higher education institutions and policymakers in designing effective entrepreneurial support systems and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship programmes.

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