

EXPLORING GOVERNMENTAL FACTORS AFFECTING SMALL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship success depends on various factors including personal, organizational, societal and governmental factors. This paper is meant to concentrate on the governmental factors that determine entrepreneurship success as these factors are equally important but receive less attention from researchers all over the world. To achieve this objective, a focus group study was conducted involving 25 entrepreneurs in Selangor. During the exercise, they were grouped into eight groups to brainstorm and discuss on various factors that affect their business success. A modified K-J Method was used to facilitate the process. At the end of the session, a number of factors emerged to be considered as important factors that affect business success. These factors comprise financing, online business encouragement, accounting system and taxation, government policy, and training and development. These factors pose significant implications to entrepreneurs and the economy as a whole. These implications will be discussed in detail in the paper.

Keywords: government, business success, entrepreneurship, focus group, K-J Method

INTRODUCTION

The national economic growth is attributed to business organizations. The large portion of the national gross domestic product (GDP) comes from these organizations. Since their significant contribution to GDP (37.4%) (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2019), abundance of studies has been conducted on these companies covering various angles of businesses, operations, leadership, and others for the purpose of developing models of excellence or good practices. Nevertheless, the contribution of small businesses to the national GDP has been given little attention. In reality, small businesses have played a major role in ensuring economic prosperity in the country.

The existence of small businesses provides employment for citizens. Previously, graduate employability was quite critical. More than half of the fresh graduates failed to secure jobs upon graduation. It was reported that 21 public-sector universities and 38 private-sector universities produced some 51,000 graduates annually, but 60 per cent were unemployed a year after graduation (New Straits Times, February 18, 2020). However, after some curriculum structural modifications, with the inclusion of entrepreneurship element, more and more graduates have ventured into small businesses. Their reliance on ready job offers has been gradually diminished. Some small companies are doing well but unfortunately some others could not sustain the business due to various reasons. The most probable reason is that there is no guideline or framework for small business to achieve success.

The present research is intended to explore factors that contribute to small business success with special focus on governmental factors. The reason for the concentration is because small businesses rely very much on the government support during the early stages of the business venture. Among the critical supports are financial support, technical support, and infrastructural support. Through a focus group approach, it is expected that the types of support critical to the survival and subsequently the success of small businesses can be identified and the small business success model can be developed for the benefit of those who intend to venture into business.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small Business Success

SME Corp Malaysia provides a clear definition of a Small Medium Enterprise (SME) as the one that employs not more than 200 full-time employees and has sales turnover not more than RM50 million for the manufacturing sector; and employs not more than 75 full-time employees and has sales turnover not more than RM20 million for the services sector (SME Corp, 2016). Specifically, small manufacturing businesses are defined as having sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM15 million or employing full-time employees from 5 to less than 75. For services and other sectors, small business is defined as having sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM3 million or employing full-time employees from 5 to less than 30 (SME Corp, 2016).

There is no specific definition of success. Generally, success can be defined in terms of growth rate, sales volume, business stability, customer acceptance, and overall satisfaction of the entrepreneurs (Sebora, Lee, & Sukasame, 2009).

Government Support and Small Business Success

Studies pertaining to the role of government support in leading to business success have found mixed results. Seborá et al also hypothesized that government support contributed to ecommerce success. Unfortunately, the hypothesis failed to be accepted. Similarly, Rose, Kumar, and Yen, (2006) in studying critical factors that contribute to venture growth among microenterprises in Malaysia found that government programs did not contribute to small business success. On the other hand, Lee and Yang (2013), when studying critical success factors of small business women entrepreneurs in Taiwan found that government support is significant in ensuring business success. Similarly, Obaji and Olugu (2014) proposed that supportive government policies help businesses to succeed. Shariff, Peou, and Ali (2010) in their study among entrepreneurs in Cambodia found that government policy moderates the relationship between entrepreneurship factors and SME growth performance.

Due to inconsistent findings from some of the studies, the present study is intended to explore the aspects of government support that will contribute to small business success especially among entrepreneurs in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present research is exploratory in nature as its purpose is to explore the organizational factors that determine entrepreneurship success. The identification of the factors is based on the perception of the participating entrepreneurs. The K-J Method was used when conducting the focus group study. The K-J Method was created as the Affinity Diagram by Kawakita Jiro in the 1960s and has been used as one of the Seven Management and Planning Tools in Total Quality Control (Anonymous, 2020). The use of this technique is meant to encourage participants to freely contribute ideas that will be later on discussed and decided upon to be considered as important ideas.

Population and Sampling

To ensure that those involved in the focus group study can represent the population, a set of criteria was established to guide the researchers during the selection process. The criteria include (1) the entrepreneurs are considered successful in their business. They have been in the business for at least one year. (2) They represent various types of business including retail, service, food, online business, apparel, and household products. And, (3) they have received various types of aid from certain agencies to boost up their business.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Variables	Description	Frequency	Percentage
Products	Flowers	1	4.0
	Apparels	1	4.0
	Education/ Training	2	8.0
	Baby care/ Healthcare	2	8.0
	Beverages	3	12.0
	Food	9	36.0
	Grocery/ Retail	3	12.0
	Fruits	2	8.0
	IT Service	1	4.0
	Rental	1	4.0
Age	21-30 years old	2	8.0
	31-40 years old	12	48.0
	51-60 years old	5	20.0
	41-50 years old	4	16.0
	61-70 years old	2	8.0
Marital Status	Single	3	12.0
	Married	22	88.0
Business Experience	Less than 5 years	7	28.0
	5-10 years	14	56.0
	More than 10 years	4	32.0
Monthly Sales	Less than RM2500	6	24.0
	RM2500 - RM9000	9	36.0
	RM9000 - RM31000	6	24.0
	More than RM31000	4	16.0
Costs of Operation	Less than RM1000	9	36.0
	RM1000 - RM3000	5	20.0
	RM3000 - RM12000	7	28.0
	More than RM12000	4	16.0
Gross Monthly Income	Less than RM1800	6	24.0
	RM1800 - RM3800	7	28.0
	RM3800 - RM20000	9	36.0
	More than RM20000	3	12.0
Monthly Expenses	Less than RM700	6	24.0
	RM700 - RM2000	6	24.0
	RM2000 - RM3800	7	28.0
	More than RM3800	6	24.0

Number of Employee	0 employee	1	4.0
	1 employee	4	16.0
	2 employees	6	24.0
	3 employees	5	20.0
	4 employees	3	12.0
	5 to 8 employees	3	12.0
	13 to 25 employees	3	12.0

The total number of respondents involved in this focus group study is 25. They had conducted businesses in various fields and most of them were involved in food business, followed by beverages and retail/ grocery businesses. Some others were involved in providing baby care/ health care, education/ training and fruits to customers. The rest were florist, apparel trader, IT service provider and rental service provider. They came from various types of businesses, thus, their input can be considered representative of small business entrepreneurs.

In terms of age of respondents, 12 of them were between 31 to 40 years old. Five of them aged in the range between 51 and 60 years old, followed by those aged between 41 to 50 years old. These are the golden ages of the entrepreneurs as they have stabilized their business and most of them have expanded their businesses. The rest of the respondents aged between 21 and 30 years old and between 61 and 70 years old. Most respondents were married. Looking from the perspective of business experience, most respondents (14 individuals) have between five and 10 years of experience conducting businesses. Seven respondents had less than five years of business experience and four of them had more than ten years of experience. It can be summed up that the respondents had sufficient business experience to provide the required input for the study.

From monthly sales, nine respondents recorded sales between RM2500 and RM9000. Six respondents had less than RM2500 and between RM9000 and RM31000, respectively. The remaining four respondents recorded more than RM31000 for monthly sales. High sales are normally associated with high costs of operation. But in this study, costs of operation depend on the types of business the respondents are doing. Nine respondents said that the costs of operation for their business were less than RM1000, followed by seven respondents who mentioned that they incurred between RM3000 and RM12000 as costs of operation. Five respondents paid between RM1000 and RM3000 as the costs of doing business. And, only four of them paid more than RM12000 as the costs of operation.

Regarding respondents' monthly gross income, nine respondents received between RM3800 and RM20000 per month. Seven respondents received gross monthly income ranging from RM1800 to RM3800 while six of them received less than RM1800 per month. Remarkably, three respondents received more than RM20000 per month as gross income. The more the respondents earned the more they spent. This is true as reflected in the monthly expenses of the respondents. Seven respondents spent between RM2000 and RM3800, followed by those who spent between RM700 and RM2000, and those who spent less than RM700, respectively. Six respondents also spent more than RM3800 monthly.

Lastly, pertaining to the number of employees the respondents had, six respondents had two employees, five respondents had three employees, and four respondents had one employee. One respondent worked alone. Meanwhile, three respondents had 3 employees, between five and eight employees and between 13 and 25 employees, respectively. This information shows that while doing the business, respondents have contributed to the society by providing employment opportunity to them.

Research Instrument

This is a qualitative research intended to explore the government factors that determine entrepreneurship success. Initially, a number of open ended questions were used to gauge the responses from the participants. The questions are as follows:

1. What are the aspects of assistance or support received by your business recently?
2. Why do you consider the assistance or support to be important?
3. How does this assistance or support help your business to grow?
4. What are other aspects of support that you think must be provided by the government?

Data Collection Process

In the present study, the participants were asked to think and list down the aspects of government assistance received by them recently. Later, they were asked to discuss these aspects of government assistance in groups to reach common agreement. After that, the commonly agreed factors were transferred to the *mahjong* paper. The *mahjong* paper was divided into four quadrants based on two indicators; important vs not important, and within control vs beyond control. The participants discussed the factors and agreed on the placement of these factors on the *mahjong* paper. After that, the group leader presented the findings to the floor and the rest of the group members could ask for further explanation and clarification.

The factors listed under “important and within control” and “important but beyond control” were considered for further deliberation. On the other hand, factors listed under “not important but within control” and “not important and beyond control” were put aside and not discussed further.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the focus group study were analyzed using content analysis. Data from all eight groups were compiled and categorized according to themes. The five final themes emerged from the analysis. They are financing, online business encouragement, accounting system and taxation, government policy, and training and development. These factors will be discussed in detail in the following section. Table 2 below presents the summary of the findings from the data analysis.

Table 2: Summary of Governmental Factors as Perceived by Respondents

	Important	Not Important
Within Control	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repayment (Finance) 2. Online business encouragement (online business) 3. Government Funding (Finance) 4. Loans (Finance) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compound 2. Price control
Beyond Control	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accounting systems 2. Economy 3. Government regulations (government policy) 4. Technology advancement (online business) 5. Business guidelines/ regulations (government policy) 6. Government assistance 7. Taxation 8. Provision of loans and grants (finance) 9. Provision of courses and seminars (training and development) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government subsidies 2. Political changes 3. Government support 4. Awards 5. Premise audit and classification 6. License issuance

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first factor that is important to assist entrepreneurs in achieving business success is financing. Financing can be in the form of low-interest loans, government grants, financial incentives, financial support from agencies such as MATRADE, PUNB, PNB, etc. The finding is consistent with Alom, Abdullah, Moten, and Azam (2016), Lee and Yang (2013) and Tuyon, Bujang, and Jidwin (2012). Why is this financial support important? The answer lies in the nature of business itself. Every business requires funding in terms of capital, premise, staffing, systems and infrastructure investment to start off and to expand the business. Most private financial institutions rely on track record to award loans to businesses but for a new business venture, not having a favorable track record will surely result in unsuccessful applications. Therefore, small business entrepreneurs turn to the government for financial support.

Online business encouragement is the second critical factor perceived by the entrepreneurs to contribute to business success. A study by Choshin and Ghaffari (2017) among employees in Azerbaijan found that customer satisfaction, costs, infrastructure, and knowledge and information contribute to e commerce success. Another study by Wardoyo, Iriani, and Kautsar (2018) found that e commerce adoption, among other factors, contributes to SME performance in food industry. The findings indicate that online business encouragement helps entrepreneurs achieve business success. Nowadays, it is a trend to conduct businesses on the internet due to various advantages.

As parents are busy working, purchasing items online is the best option. Offering products online can ensure businesses reap the fullest benefits of the situation. On the other hand, online business can reduce overhead expenses as businesses can reduce the monthly rentals, workers' wages and utility expenses. Therefore, encouragement by the government through MDEC for example can open up the opportunity for small businesses to engage in online business.

Accounting system and taxation are also found to be critical to help small businesses achieve success. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of accounting and taxation in ensuring business success (Mitter, & Hiebl, M., 2017; Quinn, Hiebl, Moores, & Craig, 2018). So far, the government has been helpful in encouraging small businesses. Many initiatives have been given to business owners to reduce their burden especially during the early stages of their businesses. The first five years of the business are critical to determine their survival and success. Tax exemption or tax incentive, for example, helps them to better strategize or grow their businesses. The excess from the taxable income or retained earnings can be used to refinance their business. This favorable accounting system and taxation helps them achieve business success.

Government policy was also perceived to be critical to ensure entrepreneurs achieve business success. The finding is in line with the one proposed by Obaji and Olugu (2014), Shariff, et al. (2010), and Suliantoro, Winarno, and Handayani, (2019) that supportive government policies help entrepreneurship to succeed. Auspicious government policy such as encouragement to start a business venture, facilitation in getting a license, allocation of business venue, assistance in promoting the business locally and internationally, and other initiatives and policies provide assurance for small business owners to grow their businesses. Without this promising government policy, entrepreneurs will face great challenges in ensuring their businesses survive the raging business environment. Realizing the need to help small businesses, the government has prioritized this agenda in its yearly budget.

Training and development is another factor unanimously agreed by the entrepreneurs to be critical in ensuring business success. The finding is consistent with the one found by Alom, et al. (2016) and Lee and Yang (2013). Not all small business entrepreneurs have adequate experience and formal education in conducting business. Some of them received informal business lesson from their parents, peers and employers. With the advancement of technology, increasing customer demands, and stricter government regulations, training becomes a necessity to equip small entrepreneurs with the most recent knowledge, skills and the right attitudes required to succeed in their business endeavors. Training ensures entrepreneurs learn faster compared to learning from their own experience.

Managerial Implications

The present study is meant to explore government factors that contribute to small business success based on the focus group study approach. The findings discovered that five factors are important to affect small business success comprising financing, online business encouragement, accounting system and taxation, government policy, and training and development. The implications of the study are discussed further in this section.

Financing is the most critical factor highlighted by the respondents because as small business owners, they need financial assistance to operate and expand the business. Although the government through various agencies such as Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), TEKUN Nasional, Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Berhad (PUNB) and Tabung Ekonomi Belia (TEB) have provided financial assistance to those in need, this is still insufficient as there are a lot more entrepreneurs who did not get the facilities. Some financial assistance requires collaterals and needs track records to be supplied together with the application. Not all applicants can fulfill the requirements as a result, they are left without support from the relevant agencies. It is suggested that the terms and conditions for getting the financial support should be lessened so that more entrepreneurs can benefit from the facilities.

In terms of online business encouragement, although Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) has done a good job in educating entrepreneurs to go online, the number of online businesses is still low compared to other neighboring countries. MDEC has trained academics and business owners on how to conduct their business online but the effect is still not satisfactory. Many business owners are still running their business using conventional approach. Having MDEC alone is not enough to transform the Malaysian business landscape. The role should be equally shared by other agencies such as MARA and other ministries such as Ministry of Higher Education. Online business should be made one of the compulsory subjects taught at universities and colleges, regardless of the programs that the students enroll.

Lenient accounting system and taxation might benefit small business entrepreneurs in moving forward. The government should provide a lot more incentives to small business owners to ease their burden or overcome obstacles. Small businesses are currently entitled for tax deductions on start-up costs, education, equipment, vehicle, business meals, travelling, charity and advertising. The list can be extended to include other items such as legal expenses, tax expenses, reference materials, ICT, and other business related expenses so that entrepreneurs are able to equip themselves with the latest technology and skills required to succeed.

So far, the government has implemented a policy in favor of small business entrepreneurs. For example, National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (Kementerian Pembangunan Usahawan, n.d.) that was launched in 2019 has outlined six strategic thrusts in which the fifth strategic thrust is dedicated to small business entrepreneurs. Under the fifth thrust, there are four strategies and 14 initiatives to help entrepreneurs succeed. However, there are challenges waiting ahead including changing the mindset, dealing in demographic changes, monitoring business performance, dealing with legalities, getting access to financial support, technology advancement, improving the capability and sustainability of small businesses, and getting the right education. These aspects have to be given fullest attention by the government agencies and private corporations to help entrepreneurs deal with the challenges.

As highlighted in the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (Kementerian Pembangunan Usahawan, n.d.), training and development has been given due attention. There are 60 government agencies, more than 40 policies, and 153 entrepreneurship development programs offered by the government agencies. A sum of RM13.7 billion was allocated for that purpose and there were 637,808 recipients of the government programs (SME Corp Malaysia, 2018). The question is, do

these programs benefit small business entrepreneurs at large? Through Malaysia Cooperative Institute (IKM), National Entrepreneurship Institute (INSKEN), Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), and Professional Training and Education for Growing Entrepreneurs (PROTÉGÉ), entrepreneurship training was provided to entrepreneurs and graduates. Another question emerges, how effective are the programs offered by these agencies?

Research Implications

The present study was conducted using a focus group approach where 25 entrepreneurs from Selangor participated and contributed ideas and suggestions. The findings from the study indicate the existence of five factors based on the experience of the participated entrepreneurs. These factors need to be verified using a quantitative approach. A valid and reliable questionnaire should be developed and used to obtain representative data for the study. Getting representative data requires larger participation from entrepreneurs not only from the state of Selangor but also from different states in Malaysia.

Since it is quite difficult to get participation from the entrepreneurs, a non-probability sampling technique or more precisely purposively sampling is suggested. Respondents can be selected when they attend specific training programs organized by relevant government agencies. Thus, collaboration with these government agencies is required. Secondly, the potential respondents should be selected based on their types of business, the duration of being in business, and experience in getting any types of government support. By considering these criteria of selection, the participated respondents will be able to provide better insights for the success of the study.

The trend nowadays is using online survey to collect data from respondents who are dispersed across geographical boundaries. However, due to the respondents' tight daily schedule, low participation or response can be expected from the use of online survey. Therefore, in the subsequent confirmatory study, the use of a conventional paper and pencil approach is recommended. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when using this data collection approach. The questions should be direct and simple so that they can be easily understood by respondents from different educational background and accurate response will be obtained. Moreover, the time taken to answer the questionnaire should be limited to 10 minutes in order to encourage participation.

Lastly, the model of small business success based on the government support factors can be enhanced by looking the moderating factors that may affect the direct relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. They include personal factors such as educational background of the respondents, types of business, duration of being in business, etc. therefore the inclusion of these factors might assist researchers in accurately describing the significant findings from the study. The findings will be richer and specific recommendations based on the moderating factors can be appropriately made.

CONCLUSION

Small business entrepreneurs are impartially important contributors to the growth of the economy. However, their significant role in the economic development has not received due recognition as limited studies have been attributed to exploring this field in further detail. The present study is an initiative to specifically explore the role of governmental factors in affecting small business success. From the input presented by 25 participated entrepreneurs in the focus group study, five governmental factors were identified to influence small business success. These factors are financing, online business encouragement, accounting system and taxation, government policy, and training and development. The findings indicate that the government must improve its current undertaking especially on the five aspects highlighted by the entrepreneurs. The subsequent research initiative is the verification of the present study's findings through quantitative research design. It is expected that the study will assist the government agencies in providing outstanding services to the small business entrepreneurs and subsequently ensuring their success.

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