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## AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON ATTITUDE AND KNOWLEDGE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: PERSPECTIVE OF BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores entrepreneurial attitudes and knowledge among potential entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. The main objective of this study was to investigate the attitudes and knowledge of final year university students' towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The study surveyed final year students across the various schools on the attitudes and knowledge of entrepreneurship. It also investigated the attitudes and knowledge of entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. For data collection the descriptive survey was employed from a purposive sample of five schools and/or departments. The sample size was 500 students from all the five schools and/or departments at various public and private universities located in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The majority of students showed generally positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship at all the universities. They indicated that entrepreneurship education is crucial. All students showed a sense of social responsibility by suggesting that business owners should give back something to the community beyond providing employment. They believe entrepreneurship might be the quest for success. It was argued that attitudes towards entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are important determinants for future entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, they showed interest in starting up their businesses soon after graduation, although males were more inclined than female students to start up a business after graduation.*

### KEYWORDS

Entrepreneurship, Attitudes, Knowledge, Bangladesh.

### JEL CLASSIFICATION CODE

L26

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has emerged as the most potent economic force the world has ever experienced (Kuratko, 2005). The entrepreneurial interest has acquired its intensive level almost everywhere in the world. At most of the developing countries, it is seen as an engine of economic progress, job creation and social adjustment (Mohar, Singh and Kamal, 2007). Therefore, the entrepreneurship development education has been a significant subject-matter for research among academics in Bangladesh. The subject-matter of entrepreneurship has become a motivating factor for a number of reasons: Entrepreneurship education is considered as a means of stimulating stagnated economies; revitalizing developing economies and solving the unemployment problem by providing new job opportunities (Bishop, 1985).

Cachon and Cotton, (2008) explored some strong relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and the personal attitudes of potential entrepreneurs. Educational programmes also have significant impact on the entrepreneurial attitudes of potential entrepreneurs. After participation in such programmes, German potential entrepreneurs shifted their interest towards a higher entrepreneurial level (Schroder and Rodermund, 2006). Similar results have been reported from the US, UK and France (Soutaris, Zerbinati & Al-Laham 2007; Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005). Empirical evidence confirms that entrepreneurial programs have successfully imparted relatively higher confidence among the potential entrepreneurs to pursue their own line of entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, academic experience of entrepreneurs significantly predicts their entrepreneurial attributes and motivation (Lope Pihie 2008).

Universities enhance entrepreneurial potential of the prospective entrepreneurs (Van Burg, Romme, Gilsing and Reymen, 2008). Now entrepreneurship has become a prime university function (Fitzkowitz, 2004). Entrepreneurship is an important element in the dynamics of national economies and it is seen as the driving engine in economic growth and job creation (Sunter, 2000). Therefore, the need for entrepreneurship education cannot be undervalued (Bishop, 1985, Todaro, 1998 and Tichagwa, 1998) in any country like Bangladesh. Universities have a role to play in developing an entrepreneurship thriving society. They can change the attitudes of their students by instilling in them an understanding of the risks and research of business creation and the resultant causes of failures. University students form a powerful force that will supply future entrepreneurs. It is also quite clear that the lack of graduate employment in Bangladesh makes it necessary for government to come up with a deliberate policy to equip students with entrepreneurial skills, knowledge and abilities (Collins et al, 2004). The supply of entrepreneurs needs an environment that encourages positive and self-enabling perceptions of potential entrepreneurs (Kourilsky, 1985). The study focuses on the final year students in universities as they expect to be job seekers soon after graduation, and not all will be successful. The study surveyed final year students across the various schools on the perception and knowledge of entrepreneurship. It further investigated the perceptions and knowledge of entrepreneurship from a gender perspective.

### 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From several studies it has shown that thirty percent (30%) of university students may not find jobs after they graduate (Cape, 2006). Traditionally, Bangladeshis have been socialized and educated to enter the labour market as employees, but not as entrepreneurs (Bishop, 1985). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2001) reported that there is an overall lack of entrepreneurship elements in the education systems of most of the countries in Asia. Education about entrepreneurship and for entrepreneurship has the capacity of increasing students' interest in becoming entrepreneurs at some stage after completing their university degrees (Friendrich and Visser, 2005). Less research has focused on the factors which deter students from engaging in entrepreneurial interests. High level entrepreneurial interest exists among university students in Singapore, but the deterrents here seem to be inadequate business knowledge and perceived risk (Wang and Wong, 2004). Additionally, lack of finance has appeared as a major entrepreneurship barrier in many cases (Wilson, Brown, Anderson & Galloway, 2003).

Attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of the youth towards entrepreneurship do vary among countries, and/or even regions (Green & Pryde, 1990). A 1998 opinion survey revealed that 48% of young people in UK, between the ages of 16 and 21, aspired owning their own business (Green and Pryde, 1990). About 70% of American youth would like to have their own business someday but have weak perceptions about their ability to actually do it. (Green and Pryde, 1990). In Canada, almost all the youth would like to start their own business some day but only half think they will, and the biggest barriers being fear of financial failures,

lack of strong identity with the entrepreneurial role and lack of knowledge about the first step to take (Green and Pryde, 1990). As much as 90% of Dutch people have favourable attitudes towards entrepreneurship. However, only 7% of Dutch university students have the ambition to start their own business within three years of completing their studies (Green & Pryde, 1990).

About 70% of Finns university students would prefer to be "employed" than self employed and only 27% would prefer to be self-employed (Gallop Europe). Thus the lack of motivation is the biggest challenge in Finland at the present. Government policy has been focused in the opportunity area that is, reducing administrative barriers and improving access to financing, information, and counseling support. With regard to youth entrepreneurship, Finland has been progressive in its efforts to include a provision for entrepreneurship education in the national curriculum guidelines and to introduce compulsory entrepreneurship courses in secondary and vocational education. Mass media coverage is without doubt, the most effective tool for creating widespread, awareness of entrepreneurship in society and increasing its legitimacy (Fallows and Stephen, 2000). Even in the United States of America, which is the most entrepreneurial nation in the world, media coverage is an important component of building the culture of entrepreneurship. Taiwan and Canada also use a variety of promotional tools, television, programmes, newspapers print and profiles of entrepreneurs and well-publicized public entrepreneurship events (Fallows and Stephen, 2000). Most countries celebrate Entrepreneurship Week, the events being built around a variety of award programmes.

Dyer (1994) discusses the different dimensions of a theory of careers and applies those ideas to entrepreneurship. Dyer (ibid) noted that a vital dimension of socialization that contributes to entrepreneurial careers is the education and training that the individual receives. In their final year of studies, the students should be introduced to entrepreneurship as a career option and should be offered alternative perspectives to their pre-conceived career orientation towards more traditional occupations (Kourilsky, 1995 cited in Brijjal, 2008). Veciana (1998), cited in Veciana et al (2005), argued that students should look for "seed beds" rather than "job beds" and that in the knowledge of society, the most promising sources of entrepreneurs are the university students. Among the growing body of literature which analyses the relationship between gender and perceptions towards starting a business, several studies have found that males have a higher preference for entrepreneurship behaviour than females (Delmar and Davidson, 2000). Studies by Kolvereid (1996) have found that males have a significant higher preference for self-employment than females.

The attitudes and perceptions about entrepreneurship are enormously important and establish the foundation for becoming an entrepreneur long before an individual actually makes the decision to become one (Kruegar and Brazeal, 1994). The supply of entrepreneurs can be strongly affected by creating a favourable entrepreneurial environment at an early stage that encourages positive and self-enabling perceptions of potential entrepreneurs. It is indeed from this pool that the supply of entrepreneurs will eventually be drawn. Therefore tertiary institutions can be seen as an environment that can prepare students by providing the necessary knowledge and skills to become entrepreneurs (Brijjal, 2008). University students naturally prepare for employment in the corporate sector after graduation.

This paper lay down to investigate the attitudes and knowledge of students in various universities in Bangladesh. It would be interesting to explore the attitudes and knowledge of university students regarding entrepreneurship across the different departments from a gender perspective. If attitudes and knowledge differ across departments then it may motivate some sort of entrepreneurship module for university students across all departments. This would enable them to become employment creators, instead of being employed after graduation (Brijjal, 2008). This study has implications for policy makers, educators and practitioners in the field as it provides new insights for curriculum development for the fourth year university students.

In view of the findings of the different literature, none have considered the attitudes, perceptions and knowledge on entrepreneurship of university students across different departments. Bangladesh has a highly respected system of education in Asia and it would be beneficial to carry out a survey to measure the extent to which the system of education is changing the attitudes of university graduates towards accepting entrepreneurship as the new order of life today.

### 3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The specific objective of this paper is to examine the university student's attitudes and knowledge regarding entrepreneurship development.

### 4. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Typical educational system prepares the youth to fill city jobs in the modern sector. The concept of entrepreneurship is not sufficiently rooted in national culture. Educational systems and their output, especially in developing countries, have in recent years been growing two or three times as fast as the economy, hence faster than the number of new jobs available (Bishop, 1985). This has given rise to the problem of graduate unemployment. Thus, the values, subject matter and examination criteria at all levels of the education system assume that university graduates want to become civil servants, lecturers, and managers in relatively modern and industrial and commercial establishments.

Historically, most young people have been socialized and educated to enter the labour market as employees, but not as entrepreneurs. The image of entrepreneurship in Bangladesh is unfavourable. Therefore, the government, universities and educational planners have a duty to stimulate entrepreneurial discussions, to demystify and to raise awareness of the entrepreneurial process and thereby bringing communities to the required level of readiness to accepting entrepreneurship.

#### 4.1 HYPOTHESES

Thus the following four hypotheses were developed in this research concerning entrepreneurship.

Hypothesis-1 (H1): Attitudes of university students regarding entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are the same across gender.

Hypothesis-2 (H2): Attitudes of university students regarding entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are the same across all departments.

Hypothesis-3 (H3): Knowledge of university students on entrepreneurship is the same across gender.

Hypothesis-4 (H4): Knowledge of university students on entrepreneurship is the same across all departments.

### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research was designed for this study. This kind of design is helpful as it uses different methods of data collection techniques such as questionnaires, documentary analysis; and interview schedules. Questionnaires were used to collect data from a sample of university students across various departments/ schools at various both private and public universities located in Dhaka. The departments/ schools are Business Administration, Computer Science and Engineering, Department of LAW, Hospitality and Tourism, Electronics and Electronic Engineering. Attitudes toward entrepreneurship were measured using a Likert scale (ordinal) while knowledge was measured using a nominal scale. In the analysis, equal numbers of males and females across all the five schools were considered. Questions were made up of both closed and open-ended questions. Interviews were used to confirm the reliability of the data provided through questionnaires and to provide in-depth understanding of the attitudes and knowledge of fourth year university students towards entrepreneurship.

The target group for this study was final year students at various private and public universities located in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Final year students normally prepare for employment in the corporate sector soon after graduation. Therefore a total of 500 respondents participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to come up with 500 students from the five departments. This was done in order to make comparisons between the different schools easier. Stratified sampling was done for the school and the random sampling procedure was employed within the departments in the school. A small percentage of graduates actually become entrepreneurs within a few years after graduation. It was felt that final year students would provide reliable and relevant information pertaining to their attitudes and knowledge towards entrepreneurship.

### 6. DISCUSSING THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES

#### 6.1 MAJOR FINDINGS

From the survey we have found some important issues. The following outcomes and discussion present the different schools, gender, attitudes towards entrepreneurship and knowledge of entrepreneurship among final year university students.



TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS BY GENDER AND DEPARTMENTS

Departments	Business Administration	Computer Science and Engineering	Department of Law	Hospitality and Tourism	Electronics and Electronic Engineering
Gender					
%		%	%	%	%
Male	52	40	42	56	60
Female	48	60	58	44	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey

From the total final year students surveyed, 50% were males whereas 50% were females. This has implications for female graduates on entrepreneurship, as they constitute a large pool that can be tapped for business start-ups.

TABLE 2: ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTITUDES ACROSS GENDER

Attitude Factors	Females (%)	Males (%)
Entrepreneurship education is necessary	78	80
Prefer to start one's own business	37	65
Perform social responsibility	79	76
Idol or role models	35	51

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey

Table-2 shows that there were no significant differences in the attitudes of males and females with respect to the need for entrepreneurship education. About 80% of male students and 78% of female students felt the need for entrepreneurship education.

There was a significant difference between male and female students wanting to start a business after graduation ( $p < 0.05$ ). Female students were less likely than males to give themselves a higher rating on starting a business soon after graduation, supporting the findings, of other researchers like Kolvereid (1996), and Delmar and Davidson (2000). This apparent difference in attitude is a cause for concern as it may directly diminish the size of the potential pool of female entrepreneurs.

There was no apparent difference in the need for social responsibility. Seventy-six percent of the male students compared with 79% of the female students considered social responsibility as important.

Further analysis reveals that 51% of male students knew of a friend who owned a business, compared to 35% of the female students. This may imply that female students may not be motivated enough to start a business due to lack of contacts.

TABLE 3: ENTREPRENEURSHIP ATTITUDES ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Departments	Business Administration	Computer Science and Engineering	Department of Law	Hospitality and Tourism	Electronics and Electronic Engineering
Attitude Factors					
Entrepreneurship education is necessary	78	65	60	70	68
Prefer to start one's own business	45	40	46	46	47
Perform social responsibility	80	78	74	80	76
Idol or role models	65	35	40	45	67

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey

Table-3 shows that students in the school of Business Administration and Hospitality & Tourism Management showed the highest need for entrepreneurship education compared to the students in the school/ Department of LAW who showed the least need for entrepreneurship education.

There was no significant difference in attitudes among the various schools in wanting to start a business. However, it was interesting to note that more engineering students (47%) than business students (45%) seemed to be interested in wanting to start a business. On the question of social responsibility all schools indicated that entrepreneurs should be involved in social responsibility. The highest percentage (80%) came from the school of Business Administration while the lowest percentage (74%) came from the School/ Department of Law. Sixty-five (65%) percent of the students from the School of Business Administration indicated that they knew of someone who owned a business. Thus the highest percentage (67%) came from the School of Electronics and Electronic Engineering while the least percentage (35%) came from School of Computer Science and Engineering. There was an association between students who wanted to start a business and knowing someone who is an entrepreneur ( $P < 0.05$ ). The final year students were tested on basic knowledge on entrepreneurship. Eight multiple choice questions were adopted to assess basic knowledge about entrepreneurship and business in general.

Table 4 and 5 describe the topics covered by the questions and gives the percentage of correct responses for each item across the various schools and gender.

TABLE 4: ENTREPRENEURSHIP KNOWLEDGE ACROSS GENDER

Entrepreneurship Knowledge	Male (%)	Female (%)
Meaning of entrepreneurship	70	60
Employment creation	60	60
Establish a business venture	60	60
Bearing risks (moderate & calculated)	40	40
Pricing system	50	50
Creativity and innovation	40	50
Inflation, GDP	50	50
Market demand, supply; and Gap analysis	40	50
<b>Mean (%)</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>54</b>

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey

Table-4 shows that there were notable differences between males and females in terms of knowledge on entrepreneurship. The results of Table 4, suggest an entrepreneurship knowledge gap between males and females, with males scoring 52% and females scoring 54% on average. There were no differences in scores between males and females on the issues of employment creation, starting up a business, bearing risks, and mergers.

50% of females, compared to 40% of males had the correct answer on demand, supply and price. There were no differences in terms of scores between males and females on the issue of inflation. On the issue of price discrimination females students scored 50% compared to male students who scored 40%.

TABLE 5: ENTREPRENEURSHIP KNOWLEDGE ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

Departments	Business Administration	Computer Science and Engineering	Department of Law	Hospitality and Tourism	Electronics and Electronic Engineering
<b>Entrepreneurship Knowledge</b>					
Meaning of entrepreneurship	70	60	60	70	60
Employment creation	60	50	60	50	50
Establish a business venture	60	30	40	50	50
Bearing risks (moderate & calculated)	30	30	30	60	40
Pricing system	60	30	40	30	50
Creativity and innovation	60	30	30	40	50
Inflation, GDP	60	40	50	50	50
Market demand, supply; and Gap analysis	40	40	40	40	40
<b>Mean (%)</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>

Source: Structured Questionnaire Survey

Table-5 shows that both the Schools of Business Administration and Hospitality & Tourism Management showed the best results of 70% each in case of meaning of entrepreneurship. The School of Business Administration normally includes business related modules, hence the best performance in the survey. On the question of raising money to start up a business, the most common response was borrowing from the bank as a solution. Using personal money, or borrowing from family or friends are other sources of money. Raising finance is seen as one of the main obstacles to starting a business (Galloway and Brown, 2005).

**6.2. HYPOTHESES TESTING RESULTS**

This research paper explored attitudes, knowledge, gender, and department-wise differences of university students towards entrepreneurship. A summary of the hypotheses and the outcomes are discussed below.

<b>H1:</b> Attitudes of university students towards entrepreneurship are the same across gender.	<b>Not supported</b>
<b>H2:</b> Attitudes of university students towards entrepreneurship are the same across all departments.	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H3:</b> Knowledge of university students on entrepreneurship is the same across gender.	<b>Not supported</b>
<b>H4:</b> Knowledge of university students on entrepreneurship is the same across all departments.	<b>Not supported</b>

**H1:** Males seemed to be more inclined to start a business after graduation in compared to female students. The hypothesis is not supported.

**H2:** This hypothesis was supported, as there were no significant differences across the departments.

**H3:** There were marked differences between male and female students on the knowledge of entrepreneurship. This hypothesis was not supported.

**H4:** Differences among the departments on the total results were noteworthy. The department of Business Administration and Hospitality and Tourism management showed the best performance. This hypothesis is not supported.

**7. RECOMMENDATIONS/ SUGGESTIONS**

This is an empirical study from the perspective of Bangladesh. Although entrepreneurship development course is assigned in the business studies field, but in the other field of studies this is not assigned as a course. Therefore, the researcher recommends that in all the fields of studies or education in Bangladesh there should be included a provision for entrepreneurship education in the national curriculum guidelines and to introduce compulsory entrepreneurship courses in primary, secondary, universities and vocational schools & colleges. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that it changes the attitudes and behavior of students to the extent that they perceive employment creation as the correct ideology of life. The curriculum should allow students to prepare for taking risks and starting business ownership.

**8. CONCLUSIONS**

The study showed that entrepreneurship education is important. According to the survey, although sixty percent (60%) of the students showed their eagerness to begin a business soon after graduation, but the real number becoming entrepreneurs might be practically lower. Attitudes of students toward entrepreneurship did not differ significantly across departments. However, more male students rather than female students showed a curiosity in starting a business. There was also a noticeable difference between male and female students on the knowledge of entrepreneurship. Basically, the department of Business Administration, Hospitality & Tourism Management and Electronics and Electronic Engineering showed the best outcome on the knowledge of entrepreneurship.

**9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following limitations are faced in the time of preparation of this research.

- The scope of study is limited to a few schools and/or departments of university only.
- The survey area is only Dhaka (Capital City of Bangladesh) based.
- Difficult to collect the necessary information (sometimes difficult to realize the actual required information).
- Reluctant to provide enough time for filling survey form by the target group students.
- Lack of previous literatures regarding the related issue in the context of Bangladesh.

**10. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION**

Each & every research creates an opportunity of further research. It is also true for this present research. Future researchers can work on the comparative analysis of students' attitudes and knowledge of different schools / departments on entrepreneurship, analysis of male and female students' interests and eagerness towards entrepreneurship, impacts of potential entrepreneurs' on the economic development of a country, emerging young entrepreneurs as a quest for success etc. based on this study.

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