



The Entrepreneurial Attitude and Intentions of Newly Enrolled University Students – Issues and Policy Implications

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Abstract

The amount of entrepreneurial activities carried out by individuals is correlated with the presence of a supporting entrepreneurial context, and having a positive entrepreneurial attitude and intention. The subject of entrepreneurial attitude and intention has been widely researched previously within various contexts using different analytical frameworks. The current study aims at inquiring those stimulating factors that may potentially trigger the entrepreneurial drive, attitude and intention among the newly enrolled university students. The study also discusses those major challenges and risks which are perceived by the respondents as bottlenecks and barriers to their entrepreneurial journey i.e. in their efforts to turn their entrepreneurial intentions into actions, and thus to move forward from being a “latent entrepreneur” to a “nascent entrepreneur”. The newly enrolled university students in one of the higher educational institution in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been chosen as a case study. Mixed method research has been employed to conduct this study on a selected sample size of 121 students that includes both males and females almost in equal proportion. This research offers some interesting results and findings, which are deemed to be informative and relevant for young entrepreneurs, policymakers, universities, financial institutions, industrial players and academic researchers alike.

JEL Classification Codes: L26, M13

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The Study Context - Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is composed of seven small emirates with a growing population currently around 9.157 million (as per UN projection - July 2015), almost doubled in the last 10 years. Its demographics truly represents a cosmopolitan character in terms of its population make up and labor force composition, as currently the local Emiratis (UAE nationals) are outnumbered by the influx of expats, and the local citizens only represent 15% of the total residents. The UAE work force is also overwhelmingly dominated by the presence of expats, as currently they represent around 95% of total workforce, thus the country can literally be called an “expat market”. The expats represent almost all the nationalities; however predominantly the South Asian communities (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis) make up around half of the total population, followed by a quarter of the population belonging to different Arab nationalities of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, and the remaining 10% population from rest of the world.¹

Since the discovery of oil reserves in early 1960s (having 10% of the world’s total known reserves) and then the country’s independence from the British rule in 1971, the UAE observes a major boom in its economy mainly during the past two decades, as a result of the progressive vision of its rulers - particularly of Dubai’s. Realizing the fact that Dubai only had 10% of the share in the UAE’ oil reserves (and which was estimated to last another 10 years, as the remaining

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Expatriates_in_the_United_Arab_Emirates [accessed on 2nd April, 2015]

reserves mostly belong to Abu Dhabi), Dubai actively sought for alternative means for a sustainable economic development. Consequently, Dubai and other emirates started focusing on developing its trade, tourism, real estate and construction industries.² In result today the UAE is not solely reliant on its oil and gas revenues, as in 2011 the oil exports accounted for 77% of the UAE's state budget and the scale of economic dependence on oil-sector is projected to further decrease in future significantly. Today, the country has one of the highest GDP per capita incomes in the world, reaching nearly at \$65,000 USD.³

Under the UAE government's set strategic vision, it wants to further diversify its economy through fostering the conditions conducive to do business in the country. Hence, as per a recent report published in 2015 by World bank's study group with the title "doing business - 2015", the UAE is ranked as the 22nd best nation in the world on a composite index involving several factors.⁴ UAE aims at promoting entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial culture in the country, particularly among its local population (Emirati citizens) through giving plenty of regulatory support and financial incentives. Hence, this study is supposed to be a timely effort to bring important insights and analysis for the relevant stakeholders, about the presence of entrepreneurial attitude and intentions as well as the perceived level of entrepreneurial risks and challenges among the newly enrolled university students.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship is the startup of a new business or social venture that potentially offers significant economic or social value to an individual, an existing firm, or to the society at large. Lumpkin & Dess (1996) define entrepreneurship as an act of pursuing new ways of doing things in a real context, or more concretely "the essential act of entrepreneurship is new entry". Starting up a new venture has been often correlated with having a positive attitude, intention and disposition towards it, particularly in case of the "opportunity entrepreneurs". Reynolds et al. (2002) distinguish between opportunity-based and necessity-based entrepreneurship by perceiving that the opportunity-based entrepreneurship involves those individuals who choose to start their own business by taking advantage of an entrepreneurial opportunity, whereas necessity-based entrepreneurship involves people who start a business because other employment options are either absent or unsatisfactory. Thus the opportunity entrepreneurs are the individuals who want to realize or turn an abstract idea into a reality through putting systematic and well-coordinated efforts in that direction, and by effectively capitalizing on the available/acquired resources and social/business relations. They usually do it not because of any compulsion or external pressure but often out of a burning desire that intrinsically and innately keep them motivated to consistently look for any change in their surroundings, and in result they attempt to screen and capture the perceived opportunities among a wide range of emerging and floating ideas.

The observed changes that potentially trigger an opportunity for the entrepreneur may possibly be a result of a shift in the user/social contexts, competitive/market scenarios, political/legal/regulatory regimes, product/process/technological domains, nature/environmental forces or in the financial/economic factors. The change may occur either locally or at an international scale that triggers the need for an innovation to take place in order to fill the perceived gaps. In result the innovative entrepreneurs timely deliver the required value to gain exceptional economic returns or otherwise they may also become just a cause for a significant social development within the targeted communities. Brown & Ulijn (2004) refer to the same idea by defining entrepreneurship as a process of exploiting opportunities that exist in the environment or that are created through innovation in an attempt to create value.

The previous research has defined attitude as the predisposition to respond in a generally favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to the object of the attitude (Ajzen, 1982; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960; Shaver, 1987). Robinson et al. (1991) define attitude as essentially composed of three types of reaction: affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. The affective component consists of positive or negative feelings toward the object. The cognitive component consists of the beliefs and thought about an object. The behavioral component consists of behavioral intentions and predisposition to behave in a given way toward the object. Because attitudes and intentions are precursors of entrepreneurial action, an understanding of the attitudes, and those factors which may impact them is a critical step in promoting greater entrepreneurial initiatives (Gibson et al., 2011). A wide range of case studies have investigated the entrepreneurial attitude and intentions among the youths, particularly among the university students in various contexts all over the world. Those referred cases belong to U.S. (Gibson et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2008; Wurthmann, 2014), China (Zhang, et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2013), Malaysia (Shariff & Saud, 2009; Ismail et al. 2013), Spain (Liñán, et al., 2011; Veciana, et al., 2005), Croatia (Bilić et al., 2011), Greece (Zampetakis et al., 2009), Albania (Kume et al., 2013), Nigeria (Ekpe & Mat 2012), and Oman (Varghese & Hassan, 2012). Moreover, GEDI⁵ and GEM⁶

² <http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/careers/living/story.aspx> [accessed on 2nd April, 2015]

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Arab_Emirates [accessed on 2nd April, 2015]

⁴ <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/united-arab-emirates> [accessed on 2nd April, 2015]

⁵ <http://thegedi.org/>

⁶ <http://www.gemconsortium.org/>

also measure the scale of entrepreneurial attitude, aspiration and intention in different countries on a continual basis through employing a range of indicators, and release the data in their annual reports on global entrepreneurship index. The current study gets inspiration from the previous studies and attempts to make a valuable contribution to existing stream of literature by assessing the entrepreneurial attitude and intentions among the newly enrolled university students in the UAE.

Research Design and Methodology

The current research collects data from a selected sample of undergraduate students who are at large freshly enrolled into business and IT programs in Ajman University of Science and Technology, a semi-private university located in Ajman, UAE. The employed research tool was a semi-structured questionnaire with both quantifiable questions as well as open-ended questions for more qualitative analysis. The questionnaire was distributed to 4 sections of a course “Introduction to Management” which is an introductory level subject offered by the Business college. An introductory level course from the Business program was chosen, considering the fact that the students enrolled into this course would be a bit more informed respondents and would likely have more willingness to actively participate in a survey related to entrepreneurship, as compared to students enrolled in other colleges.

The duration of each interactive session was around 60 minutes, where in the first part of the session (about 45 minutes) students had to fill in the questionnaire under the supervision of researcher, who also took support of an Arabic speaking translator to further facilitate the students’ understanding of the content; whereas in the second part of the session, the researcher conducted a brief open-ended discussion with the students to collect their further critical reflections on this topic. These discussions were recorded for transcript analysis, whilst the students were pre-informed about that. A total number of 121 students participated in this survey, of which the number of male and female students were almost equal i.e. 60 and 61 respectively. More than three quarter of the respondents were freshly enrolled students who were currently in semester 1 and 2 of the undergraduate program. An overwhelming majority (84%) of the respondents were enrolled into College of Business, whereas the remaining students were attending IT & Engineering Colleges. Most of the respondents (84.3%) were currently unemployed. The majority (64%) of the respondents belong to different Arab nationalities, followed by the local citizens of UAE (16%) and the rest 20% of the respondents belong to different non-Arab nationalities. In this perspective, the sample didn’t fully represent the demographics of the UAE’s population; since the studied sample is overwhelmed with different Arab nationalities, and representation of South-Asian communities is not proportional to country’s ethnic make-up.

About 57% of the respondents were below the age of 20, and 40% were between the age bracket of 20-25 years. The sample of relatively a younger age group of the students were deliberately selected for this survey in order to assess the potential for “latent entrepreneurship” among the freshly enrolled university students who were not yet formally exposed to professional courses and experiences related to understanding and developing entrepreneurial skills and opportunities. It is assumed that the results of this survey partially reflect the entrepreneurial inspiration, attitude and intentions of the selected group of students. The survey also covers the topics related to the motivational and retarding factors, as well as the perceived roles of relevant stakeholders in promoting or impeding the students’ entrepreneurial aspirations.

Results and Findings

The respondents were asked 8 questions followed by any additional comments, if they had to say. The results of the inquiry are presented below in the tabular form, where deemed to be necessary or useful; otherwise the important results and findings are summarized in the discussions.

The first question was to know about the entrepreneurial context i.e. the respondents entrepreneurial background. The question aimed at knowing if the respondents have had any inspiration received from their circles of kinship and friendship. It’s a common perception and a widely discussed issue in the literature that the perceived heroes and role models play a significant part in inspiring the individuals for thinking of any entrepreneurial venture, and thus significantly influence in setting up their entrepreneurial orientation to choose entrepreneurship as a career.

	Y	N	% Y	
Female	40	21	65.57%	n = 61
Male	46	14	76.66%	n = 60
Total	86	35		
% (total)	71.07%	28.93%		n = 121

Table 2: Different Sources of Inspiration within Relatives and Friends

	Parents	Siblings	Uncles/Aunts	Cousins	Friends	Others
Female	20	2	14	8	7	1
Male	20	7	13	7	13	2
Total	40	9	27	15	20	3
% *	35.09%	7.90%	23.68%	13.16%	17.54%	2.63%

* The 86 respondents who were found positive in their entrepreneurial inspiration referred to 114 different types of relations. The above calculation is based on dividing the frequency of each type of referred relation with the total number of referred relations (114).

Table 1 and 2 reflect that 71.07% of the respondents consider one of their family members or a friend as their 'role model' and they are inspired by their success stories. Among them who affirmed it, male respondents were slightly higher in ratio (%Y). The parents were referred as the most inspiring role models, both by males and females i.e. by 35% respondents, followed by the relations of uncles/aunts, friends, cousins and siblings respectively. Some referred to their grandparents (in 'others' category) as their role models. Male respondents were found significantly high in getting entrepreneurially inspired by their siblings and friends as compared to their female counterparts.

Question 2 and 3 inquired about the respondents' entrepreneurial intentions (plan or dream in future) for starting up a business or social venture respectively as illustrated in table 3 and 4.

Table 3: Entrepreneurial Intention for Business Venture

	Y	N	% Y	
Female	40	21	65.57%	n = 61
Male	49	11	81.66%	n = 60
Total	89	32		
% (total)	73.55%	26.45%		n = 121

Table 4: Entrepreneurial Intention for Social Venture

	Y	N	% Y	
Female	38	23	62.29%	n = 61
Male	25	35	41.66%	n = 60
Total	63	58		
% (total)	52.06%	47.94%		n = 121

The aggregated response rate (combined male and female responses) reflect that the intentions for starting up a business venture is significantly higher (73.55%) than their intentions for starting up a social venture (52.06%). However looking at the responses of female and male respondents separately, we may observe a stark difference here. The male respondents are much lower (41.66%) in comparison to their female counterparts (62.29%) in terms of their intentions for starting a social venture; but on the other hand the male respondents are much higher on the index in terms of their intentions for starting a business venture (81.66%). The intention for starting up a business venture is almost twice as strong as thinking of a social venture among the male respondents; however, this ratio is moderately balanced in case of female respondents.

The respondents were further asked to mention what kind of business or social venture they intend to launch in future. After the careful coding of a wide range of listed ideas (77 for business ventures, and 50 for social ventures), the received responses were then grouped into major categories. It was found that in case of starting up a business venture, a significant number of the respondents (about 20%) didn't have any clue about their business idea even though they had a positive intention. Thus in that case it can be derived that for many latent entrepreneurs, their business aspiration and intention is led by the overall charm and reward of owning a successful business venture and is not necessarily derived by a convincing business plan or an envisioned idea. Among the others, the higher frequency of ideas were related to businesses such as: food & restaurant, real estate & construction, fashion and beauty salon, and auto mobile in the first place; followed by the second category of business ideas with moderate frequency such as IT, finance, trading, garments & boutiques. It is interesting to note that the tendency of presented business ideas largely correlates with the general thriving status of these businesses in the UAE market. So we may generally conclude the fact that most of the latent entrepreneurs in the studies sample size follow the general growth trends and reward aspects of different businesses, as a primary determinant for their entrepreneurial intentions to decide in which industry they would want to make an entry.

On the social venture side, the intention to deliver education to poor people was referred the most; followed by other ideas with almost similar frequency such as establishing charity foundation, helping needy people through delivering general commodities and services, helping orphans, providing healthcare facilities to poor people, and providing sports and fitness facilities for youth. Some other interesting ideas were also discussed with lower frequency such as starting motivational programs & trainings for public, running anti-corruption & anti-fraud campaign, working on environmental issues, developing kids' welfare and entertainment programs, working for war refugees and Arab women rights, offering interest-free loans, supporting minorities and outcast people, and establishing an Instagram account or a Facebook page for creating awareness on different social issues.

The next question inquired about the motivational factors behind the respondents' entrepreneurial intentions, since people may have different reasons in mind to become an entrepreneur.

Table 5: Motivational Factors

	Excessive Wealth and Financial Resources	Work Independence, Autonomy And Freedom	Power And Control in Decision Making	Social Status, Respect and Recognition in Society	Luxury and Comfort in Life	Contribution to Society and Bringing Change to People's Life	Other
Female	27	33	27	21	22	27	1
Male	30	29	24	19	41	22	
Total	57	62	51	40	63	49	1
% *	17.65%	19.20%	15.79%	12.38%	19.50%	15.17%	0.31%

* The percentages are derived by dividing the frequency of each motivational factor with the total frequency (323) of the marked factors.

Table 5 reflects the most relevant factors that potentially may inspire the respondents to become entrepreneur. These motivational factors are placed here in chronological order in terms of their relative importance for the respondents: Luxury and comfort in life; work independence, autonomy and freedom; excessive wealth and financial resources; power and control in decision making; contribution to society and bringing change to people's life; and social status, respect and recognition in society. The only major discrepancy is obvious in case of the factor "luxury and comfort in life", where male respondents were indexed significantly high as compared to their female counterparts. A strong urge for having an ultimate luxury and comfort in life is quite vivid in the UAE's psychological and social construct, and is now increasingly considered to be an indispensable part of the UAE' life style. On the other hand, females were found high on the factor "work independence, autonomy and freedom", which logically seems quite meaningful impetus for female entrepreneurs in a traditionally male-dominant society. One respondent added "creativity" as another motivational factor in her comments.

The respondents were then inquired about those retarding factors (challenges) which may potentially cause hindrances or may act as a psychological barrier in their decision to becoming an entrepreneur.

Table 6: Retarding Factors

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Other
Female	22	33	19	17	20	15	17	13	0
Male	15	41	19	9	20	11	18	7	2
Total	37	74	38	26	40	26	35	20	2
% *	12.42%	24.83%	12.75%	8.72%	13.42%	8.72%	11.75%	6.71%	0.67%

* The percentages are derived by dividing the marked frequency of each individual retarding factor with the total frequency (298) of the marked factors. The retarding factors potentially may be the absence of:

- A. A good business/social idea (business/project plan)
- B. Enough financial resources
- C. Dedicated time available to run a business/social venture
- D. Moral support from the family and friends
- E. Sufficient experience to start a new venture
- F. Proper coaching and mentorship
- G. Required competences and skills
- H. A habit of working independently and autonomously (self-discipline and self-accountability)

Table 6 suggests that the lack of sufficient financial resources is considered as the most significant retarding factor, which makes sense considering the fact that most of the respondents are fresh students with having foreign nationalities and expat family backgrounds in the UAE. Most of the funding schemes and sponsorships to entrepreneurial ventures in the UAE are currently designed specifically for the UAE nationals and thus the expats are generally not privileged to acquiring those generous sources of potential funding and easy loan schemes. The second interesting finding that this table reveals is the fact that females find it almost twice as difficult to gain the required moral support from their family and friends in launching an entrepreneurial idea, as compared to their male counterparts. The female respondents relate this finding to their perceived lack of support from their cultural background, where females are usually discouraged to get involve in an independent and risk-taking venture as compared to their male counterparts. The females are rather asked and expected to assume their household responsibilities, as their primary assignment.

The respondents were further asked to imagine a scenario of having an equal opportunity to be either employed by an established firm or by a government organization after their graduation, or otherwise having the opportunity of starting up their own business or social venture provided with the required financial and technical support; what would have they likely chosen then? Hence, their responses indicate the scale of their entrepreneurial attitude to assess whether would they prefer to choose entrepreneurship as a career or not?

The following table indicates two interesting facts. Firstly, that the majority (57%) of the respondents show a risk-averse attitude and prefer to be employed in an established firm or a government organization possibly for the following reasons as identified in the follow up discussions: for a more stable income, having an established career path and for a relatively comfortable work environment; as these three features are predominantly attributed to an established employment. Secondly, we can observe a noticeable difference in the entrepreneurial attitude between the male and female respondents; as the male counterparts are more likely to choose entrepreneurship as a career path after their graduation.

Table 7: Entrepreneurial Attitude				
	Entrepreneur	Employed	Positive Entrepreneurial Attitude %	
Female	21	40	34.42%	n = 61
Male	31	29	51.66%	n = 60
Total	52	69		
% (total)	42.98%	57.02%		n = 121

The next question checks the perceived level of risks involved in starting up an entrepreneurial venture, as viewed by the respondents. They were asked to choose the major risks or threats involved in starting up their own entrepreneurial venture that they perceived as seriously threatening in case of failure of their venture.

Table 8: Perceived Entrepreneurial Risks						
	A Financial	B Social	C Family	D Professional	E Moral	Other
Female	40	24	17	32	26	2
Male	38	20	13	18	20	3
Total	78	44	30	50	46	5
% *	30.83%	17.39%	11.86%	19.76%	18.18%	1.98%

* The percentages are calculated by dividing each of the listed entrepreneurial risk factor with the total frequency (253) of the marked risk factors.

- A. Risk of losing financial capital
- B. Risk of losing social and market credibility in case of failure
- C. Risk of losing family bonding or having negative effects on family relations
- D. Risk of losing professional career path
- E. Risk of losing moral and motivational ground in case of failure

The results of Table 8 is consistent with the finding of table 6, where we found that the lack of financial capital was considered as the biggest constraint for entrepreneurial ventures and the explanation of that index equally applies to this table as well. Hence, in this table as well, the risk of losing financial capital (invested or borrowed) was perceived by the respondents as the biggest threat in starting up an entrepreneurial venture. It is also interesting to note that the female respondents seem to be like more risk-averse as compared to their male counterparts in all aspects of risk perception related to entrepreneurial venture (considering the fact that the sample was almost equally distributed among the two genders).

Finally, the respondents were asked to reflect on the perceived relative importance of different listed actors or institutions in promoting entrepreneurship within their own national context. The mean values of their rated responses are shown in table 9.

Table 9: The Relative Significance of Different Actors/Institutions in Promoting Entrepreneurship

	University (Academic Institutions)	Industrial And Market Players (Business Firms)	Government & Public Sector Institutions	Media (Print/Social/ Electronic Media)	Financial Institutions (Banks & Investors)	Society (Friends/Family /People Around)
Female	3.5573	3.6166	3.6271	3.5762	4.1666	4
Male	3.5762	3.5084	3.5084	3.1864	3.8135	3.7288
Average	3.5666	3.563	3.5677	3.3813	3.9915	3.8666

* 1 = Least Important 3= Moderately Important 5= Highly Important

In consistence with our findings of table 6 and 8, this table again verifies the same fact that respondents consider the role of financial or money lending institutions as the most important one in promoting entrepreneurship, followed by a general support from the society as a whole. The significance of other listed institutions were more or less equally realized by the respondents. However, the above finding may also partially reflect the finance- or capital-driven entrepreneurial understanding of entrepreneurship, which may get improve if these freshly enrolled students are provided with proper education about the entrepreneurship discipline both through teaching more specific courses at the university level, as well as giving them market exposure through different support mechanisms and entrepreneurial initiatives taken by the relevant stakeholders under the auspices of government and industrial players.

Transcript Analysis and Discussions

Through coding and categorization of the transcripts, the data reveals some interesting facts about the respondents' entrepreneurial attitude, aspirations, intentions, and perceived challenges. Some of these qualitative findings are summarized here to complement the results of the quantitative analysis.

The recorded comments indicate at large a positive entrepreneurial attitude among the respondents, but they are attached with an obvious sign of risk-averse and conscious behavior. Another noticeable fact points out towards the lack of entrepreneurial orientation, and an absence of entrepreneurial mentorship for these young students. Many of the recorded comments reflect that either they don't have any business idea in mind, they are unable to map out or articulate the idea into an actionable business plan, or they have no clue from where and how to begin with. One important observation indicates the relatively lower tendency and entrepreneurial drive among the respondents for starting up a social ventures as compared to thinking of a business ventures. Furthermore, the lack of social support and lower appreciation for the females to start up an entrepreneurial venture has been considered a major obstacle. Many females mentioned the point that in the Arab culture, women are traditionally assigned only the household chores and the children's brought up responsibilities; and due to facing those traditional constraints, they are generally not appreciated to undertake economic responsibilities or to think of entrepreneurial activities. The women are commonly viewed as a better fit within the role of a subordinate, rather than playing at the forefront in the leadership capacity.

There is found less awareness among the respondents about the significant roles played by different supporting pillars and institutions in promoting entrepreneurship in a country, and predominantly they only perceived the interactions between an entrepreneur, its family, banks and the government. Akin to typical statist models, there is an over emphasis on the availability or unavailability of the required financial capital and government facilitation. The subsequent roles for other important stakeholders such as the academic institutions, media channels, industry and market players, private investors and venture capital firms, mentorship and coaching, and other forms of public-private-partnership (PPP) models is apparently not properly understood and acknowledged. Hence, the need for more entrepreneurial education, proper coaching and training, and a broader coalition between all the relevant stakeholders has been felt significantly.

Finally, some recommendations have been brought forward by the respondents during the discussions to support entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial culture in the UAE. These recommendation are primarily related to government, regulatory agencies and policy makers to take supportive measures and right initiatives. Some of the comments are quoted here directly with some minor lingual editing. A respondent signifies the importance of social media as an important source of entrepreneurial learning saying that "Media is an effective place to share and grab business ideas such as the social forums on internet like twitters and Instagram etc." One respondent comments upon the value of entrepreneurship for the society by saying "Entrepreneurship is an important and integral concept for a nation since it

greatly impacts on its economy. It would be beneficial to the people in the Arab countries to be taught this subject through holding seminars in order to enlighten the current generation, and through creating more programs in which students could actively participate within an entrepreneurial environment.” Another respondent realizes that “Entrepreneurship is a good way to develop our society and it is very important to promote entrepreneurial attitude.” Another follows the same line “I think that entrepreneurs are important for the society. The government should encourage and help entrepreneurs.”

Some of the respondents go more specific to recommend the authorities about what need to be done in their view to promote entrepreneurship in the society. One student suggests “The government should take initiative to help developing ideas for young generation how to improve their skills; so they could take risks and learn entrepreneurship.” Other student suggests “The government should offer a flow chart of actions for individuals to understand how to start a successful business with some legal tips. The government should also provide a strategic plan and its vision for industry and economy to point out how to keep active the school/college/university drop outs and how to assist those who want to start their own business or those who want to start thinking on this option.” Finally another comment was made by a student that “I suggest the government to establish a financial institution dedicated to helping entrepreneurial ventures, and to particularly support those creative ideas which carry social benefits for people.” Many of these insights, suggestions and discussions are self-explanatory and there is a lot to be learnt from these discussions for the government and other relevant authorities and stakeholders, if they are committed to develop and promote the entrepreneurial culture and attitude among the youth segments of the UAE’s society.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Promoting the entrepreneurial activities and entrepreneurial culture among the youngsters is on top of the strategic and economic objectives, but this strategic vision cannot come true until the underlying bottlenecks and challenges are properly understood and effectively addressed within the given context. It is commonly found that the policy makers, executive authorities and related institutions are in rush to measure the presence of entrepreneurship in a society through measuring the entrepreneurial outputs in terms of counting the number of new firms, generated employments and additional revenues; whilst assuming that a cadre of entrepreneurs is always ready to jump into starting up the new ventures with their ready-made business plans with the help of some additional financial incentives and regulatory facilitations. Adopting this kind of deterministic approach may lead to a major mistake of potentially ignoring the “latent” stages of entrepreneurship that entrepreneurs pass through well before reaching to the stage of turning their ideas and intentions into action plans i.e. the “nascent” entrepreneurship (Bönte et al., 2012; Stel et al., 2003; Wagner, 2007). This research emphasizes on paying more attention to developing that entrepreneurial attitude and intention that fosters within an entrepreneurially conducive socio-economic context. In the literature and policy debates, the entrepreneurial character has been widely discussed, as considering him/her a person with inborn and instinctive capabilities, and a list of innate and intrinsic characteristics as presumably required to successfully carryout an entrepreneurial venture; however this study reckons the fact that the entrepreneurial attitude and skills are required to be nurtured and nourished over the period of time, during the childhood and adolescence of the future entrepreneurs with the help of community and institutional support by engaging all the important stakeholders to effectively overcome the presumed entrepreneurial risks, challenges and bottlenecks.

The role of university is very significant in instilling and nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit as well as developing the entrepreneurial skills among the young graduates, through well-designed courses and specialized programs offered within the framework of entrepreneurship, with the breadth and depth of the topics designed as per the students’ specific requirements, their prequalification and relevant experience. The university can also play a pivotal role in facilitating the nascent entrepreneurs in the startup phase by providing them temporary spaces (“business incubators”) for free or at a very minimal cost within the university premises or in a nearby vicinity, as well as providing or finding the initially required “seed capital” for them to take off. Such a facilitating role of an entrepreneurial university is well acknowledged in the literature.

Finally, in the current context a recommendation is made to the UAE’s policy makers and relevant authorities to broaden their entrepreneurial focus to the country’s whole population; since by narrowing the strategic focus only towards the local Emiratis (UAE citizens) may potentially jeopardize and put at risk of ignoring the rest of the population, which essentially makes the overwhelming majority of the UAE’s residents. It has been argued that the currently adopted strategic approach and policy imperative to promote entrepreneurship in the UAE may result in creating a sense of further alienation and isolation among the vast majority of expats for not being properly taken care of, on the equal grounds as like the local citizens are given attention to, due to the increasingly widening differential scale of incentives and privileges received by the expats and local population.

Research Validity and Limitations

The relatively small sample size may be considered as one of the study limitations, as ideally a study of this nature should have been conducted across the campuses engaging students of different colleges to cross compare the relative differences in their entrepreneurial attitude and intentions due to their enrollments into different disciplines, hence to gauge the impact of their enrolled study programs on their entrepreneurial attitude. The results of this research can be however cautiously extrapolated to another cases having a similar age group of students, and if there were found to be some degree of resemblance in their socio-economic conditions and geo-political context. This study is expected to benefit all those relevant stakeholders who may potentially be interested in promoting the entrepreneurial culture and attitude in the society.

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