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## A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF AGROPRENEURIAL INTENTION: INSIGHTS FROM MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract:

Agriculture remains a vital sector in Malaysia, contributing significantly to food security, employment, and economic sustainability. However, the declining interest among graduates in agro-based ventures poses challenges to the sector's long-term viability. Agropreneurship, which integrates entrepreneurial principles within agriculture, offers a promising solution to revitalize the industry through innovation and market-driven strategies. This paper develops a conceptual framework examining the influence of agropreneurial curriculum content, agropreneurship experiential learning, and perceived university support on agropreneurial intention, with perceived desirability and perceived feasibility acting as mediators. Grounded in entrepreneurial learning theory and institutional support theory, the proposed framework underscores the significance of structured education, practical exposure, and institutional backing in shaping graduates' aspirations to engage in agribusiness ventures. Recent statistics indicate that Malaysia recorded 1,030,020 agricultural holders, with 97.9% being individual agricultural holders, highlighting the need for entrepreneurial education to sustain the sector. Additionally, findings from the 2024 Agricultural Census suggest that modernizing agricultural education and support systems could enhance the feasibility of agropreneurial careers. By integrating these elements, this study offers insights into how higher education institutions can enhance agropreneurial competencies and encourage

graduates to pursue careers in agro-based businesses. Future empirical research should validate the framework to measure its impact on graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations.

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Agribusiness Development, Agropreneurial Intention, Agropreneurship, Entrepreneurship Education, Graduate Entrepreneurship, Higher Education, University Support



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## Introduction

Malaysia's agricultural sector has long functioned as a cornerstone of national economic development, contributing significantly to food security, rural employment, and livelihood sustainability (Mohd et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the sector is presently confronting a structural challenge: the declining interest of university graduates in agropreneurial careers. This is largely attributed to prevailing perceptions of agriculture as a domain with limited financial viability and insufficient prospects for innovation-led growth (Razak et al., 2019). In light of this, agropreneurship which defined as the entrepreneurial engagement in agricultural activities has emerged as a salient policy and pedagogical response aimed at revitalizing the sector through sustainable agribusiness ventures.

Despite its transformative potential, empirical evidence suggests that Malaysian graduates often lack the requisite experiential exposure, structured training, and institutional scaffolding to facilitate successful agropreneurial engagement (Abdullah et al., 2018; Ambad et al., 2021). Data from the 2024 Agricultural Census reveal that out of 1,030,020 agricultural holders in Malaysia, 97.9% are individual operators, thereby underscoring the urgency of equipping young entrants with entrepreneurial competencies to ensure sectoral continuity.

Higher education institutions are strategically positioned to address this gap. By embedding agropreneurial elements into curricular design, facilitating experiential learning, and operationalizing institutional support mechanisms such as mentorship, funding access, and incubation programs, universities can play a catalytic role in fostering entrepreneurial mindsets (Kolb, 1984; Scott, 2008). Theoretical perspectives such as Entrepreneurial Learning Theory and Institutional Support Theory affirm the importance of dynamic learning environments and formal structures in shaping entrepreneurial behavior and aspirations.

Recent contributions in the Journal of International Business, Economics and Entrepreneurship further validate these assertions. Ambad et al. (2021) demonstrated the significance of perceived feasibility and desirability as predictors of agropreneurial intention, while Jaafar et al. (2023) identified socio-cultural and familial factors as additional determinants in rural agropreneurial contexts. Moreover, Ambad et al. (2022) advocate the integration of the Entrepreneurial Event Model and vocational orientation frameworks (e.g., RIASEC) to elucidate the mediating role of psychological readiness in the transition from interest to intention.

Against this backdrop, the present paper proposes a conceptual framework that synthesizes pedagogical, institutional, and psychological variables to examine the formation of agropreneurial intentions among Malaysian graduates. This model is grounded in empirically supported theories and seeks to contribute to both the scholarly discourse and the design of policy interventions promoting youth participation in agropreneurship.

## **Literature Review**

This study is informed by entrepreneurial learning theory and institutional support theory, which collectively explain how education and formal support structures foster entrepreneurial behavior among students. Entrepreneurial learning theory posits that experience-based education strengthens problem-solving skills and entrepreneurial competencies (Kolb, 1984), whereas institutional support theory suggests that access to university-based resources enhances students' confidence in engaging in entrepreneurship (Scott, 2008). In addition, perceived desirability and perceived feasibility constructs from entrepreneurial intention models (Krueger, 1993) mediate the relationship between education, support, and entrepreneurial aspirations, influencing graduates' willingness to pursue agropreneurship.

Several studies emphasize the ethical quandaries related with the digital transformation of accounting, notably in terms of data privacy and security, algorithmic decision-making, and the possibility of bias in automated systems (Binns, 2018; Zysman & Kenney, 2018). One major problem is the use of AI in financial reporting and audits. While AI provides significant advances in efficiency and accuracy, it raises concerns about accountability when computers make choices rather than humans (Kokina & Davenport, 2017). Scholars have suggested that preserving ethical norms in the use of AI necessitates openness in algorithmic operation as well as effective risk mitigation techniques (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017).

### ***Agropreneurial Curriculum Content***

An effective agropreneurial curriculum is essential in equipping graduates with agricultural knowledge and entrepreneurial competencies (Abdullah et al., 2018). Studies indicate that a curriculum incorporating agribusiness management, financial literacy, market analysis, and sustainable farming enhance students' capacity to engage in agribusiness ventures (Mohd et al., 2021). Additionally, the inclusion of digital agriculture technologies, such as precision farming and supply chain innovations, strengthens graduates' preparedness for modern agropreneurial challenges (Hussain et al., 2020). Exposure to industry collaborations and community-based projects further enriches students' practical understanding of agribusiness ecosystems. Embedding sustainability and climate-smart practices ensures graduates are ready to address environmental challenges while creating innovative market opportunities.

### ***Agropreneurship Experiential Learning***

Experiential learning allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world agricultural settings (Kolb, 1984). Agropreneurial education should incorporate farm-based internships, agribusiness simulations, and mentorship programs to enhance students' entrepreneurial capabilities (Razak et al., 2019). Exposure to entrepreneurial ecosystems, industry collaborations, and practical business activities contributes to students' ability to transition from theory to practice, thereby improving their problem-solving skills and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Abdullah et al., 2018).

### ***Perceived University Support***

University support plays a critical role in fostering entrepreneurial ambitions (Scott, 2008). Institutions that offer funding schemes, mentorship opportunities, incubation centers, and networking platforms significantly influence students' motivation to pursue agropreneurial careers (Mohd et al., 2021). Additionally, institutional support systems provide students with access to entrepreneurial advisors, industry linkages, and research-driven innovations, all of which contribute to their confidence in launching agribusiness ventures (Razak et al., 2019).

### ***Perceived Desirability and Perceived Feasibility as Mediators***

Perceived desirability refers to graduates' perception of agropreneurship as an attractive career option, while perceived feasibility represents their confidence in successfully pursuing agropreneurship (Krueger, 1993). Both factors significantly shape entrepreneurial intentions by influencing students' willingness and ability to engage in agribusiness ventures.

Firstly, perceived desirability is influenced by the economic benefits, career independence, and social impact associated with agropreneurship (Abdullah et al., 2018). Research suggests that students exposed to successful agropreneurship case studies, positive agricultural trends, and institutional support are more likely to develop a favorable attitude toward agribusiness careers (Hussain et al., 2020). Universities can enhance perceived desirability by highlighting the opportunities in modern agriculture, such as smart farming, organic food production, and agritech innovations.

Secondly, perceived feasibility reflects students' self-confidence and ability to execute entrepreneurial tasks in agriculture (Mohd et al., 2021). Studies indicate that when students receive hands-on training, access to business networks, and institutional backing, they feel more capable of launching agribusiness ventures (Razak et al., 2019). This perception is further strengthened by mentorship programs, financial incentives, and exposure to real-world entrepreneurial challenges, reinforcing students' belief in their capability to succeed.

As mediators, both perceived desirability and perceived feasibility bridge the gap between education and agropreneurial intention, shaping graduates' final career decisions. If universities increase exposure to success stories and provide strong support systems, students will not only find agropreneurship appealing but also feel confident in their ability to pursue it.

## ***Agropreneurial Intention***

Agropreneurial intention refers to graduates' motivation and willingness to engage in agricultural entrepreneurship (Razak et al., 2019). Several factors contribute to this intention, including self-efficacy, exposure to agribusiness, institutional backing, and financial readiness. Research suggests that students who receive comprehensive agropreneurial education, hands-on training, and strong university support develop a higher propensity to start agribusinesses (Mohd et al., 2021). Additionally, agropreneurial intention is shaped by personal attitudes, market opportunities, and entrepreneurial competencies (Abdullah et al., 2018).

The role of higher education institutions is not only to provide agricultural knowledge but also to create an environment where students feel empowered and equipped to enter the agrobusiness landscape. By integrating curriculum development, experiential learning, and institutional support, universities can increase students perceived desirability and feasibility toward agropreneurship, ultimately leading to stronger entrepreneurial intentions among graduates.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study will adopt a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey method to examine the influence of agropreneurial curriculum content, experiential learning, and perceived university support on agropreneurial intention, with perceived desirability and perceived feasibility as mediating variables. The framework is grounded in entrepreneurial learning theory and institutional support theory.

### ***Population and Sampling***

The target population comprises final-year undergraduate students enrolled in agriculture or entrepreneurship-related programs at selected Malaysian universities. A stratified random sampling technique will be used to ensure representation across institutions in both urban and rural areas. The estimated sample size will be determined using G\*Power software to ensure adequate statistical power, aiming for at least 180 responses.

### ***Instrumentation***

Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire developed based on existing validated scales:

- Agropreneurial Curriculum Content (adapted from Abdullah et al., 2018)
- Agropreneurship Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984; Razak et al., 2019)
- Perceived University Support (Scott, 2008)
- Perceived Desirability and Feasibility (Krueger, 1993)
- Agropreneurial Intention (Razak et al., 2019)

Each item will be measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A pilot study will be conducted to assess reliability and validity

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

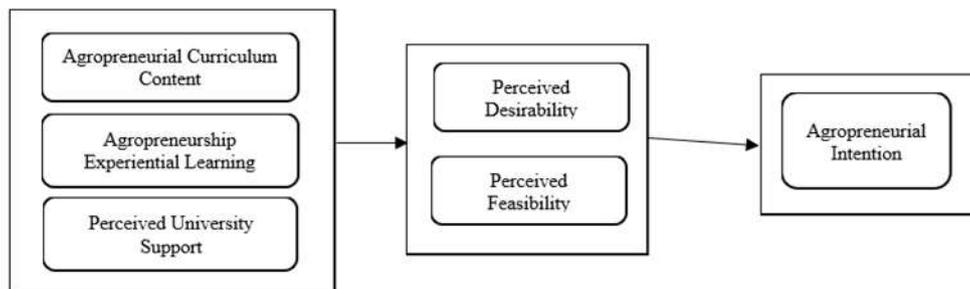
Surveys will be administered online and/or in person, depending on institutional preferences and student accessibility. Participants will receive informed consent forms ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. Ethical approval will be sought from the university's ethics review board.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via software such as SmartPLS. The analysis will proceed in two stages:

- Measurement Model: Assess reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.
- Structural Model: Test hypothesized relationships, including direct and mediating effects.

Bootstrapping procedures will be employed to test the significance of the mediation paths.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

### **Implications for Higher Education Institutions**

The findings of this conceptual paper have several implications for higher education institutions aiming to strengthen agropreneurial education in Malaysia. Universities play a crucial role in cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets and preparing graduates to contribute to the agricultural sector. To enhance agropreneurial intention, institutions should focus on curriculum development, experiential learning opportunities, institutional support systems, and fostering positive perceptions toward agropreneurship.

Firstly, curriculum development must be improved by integrating business-focused agricultural modules that emphasize both traditional farming techniques and innovative agribusiness strategies (Abdullah et al., 2018). Universities should incorporate lessons on financial management, market trends, and digital agriculture, ensuring that students acquire practical and theoretical knowledge essential for successful agro-business ventures. Additionally, case studies on successful agropreneurs should be included in coursework to provide students with entrepreneurial role models.

Secondly, experiential learning opportunities should be expanded through hands-on training, internships with agro-industries, and entrepreneurship boot camps (Kolb, 1984). Practical exposure allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, thereby enhancing their problem-solving abilities and confidence in agro-business management (Razak

et al., 2019). Industry-academic collaborations should be strengthened to provide students with direct access to industry professionals, networking opportunities, and mentorship programs that facilitate entrepreneurial growth (Hussain et al., 2020).

Moreover, institutional support systems need to be strengthened to boost students' entrepreneurial confidence. Universities must establish grant funding schemes, business incubation centers, and expert advisory networks to nurture agropreneurial aspirations (Scott, 2008). Access to financial resources and business support structures can reduce entry barriers, making agropreneurship a more viable career option for graduates. Additionally, hosting university-driven agropreneurship competitions can motivate students to develop innovative business solutions.

Finally, shaping positive perceptions of agropreneurship is critical to increasing perceived desirability and perceived feasibility (Krueger, 1993). Universities should actively promote the economic viability, technological advancements, and sustainability aspects of agropreneurship to counter negative stereotypes about agricultural careers. Public awareness campaigns, featuring success stories of young agropreneurs, can influence students' attitudes and encourage them to explore agro-business ventures. Furthermore, partnerships between universities and government agencies should be fostered to create agropreneurship support programs, ensuring long-term engagement of graduates in the agricultural sector.

By addressing these educational components, higher education institutions can significantly impact students' agropreneurial intentions, ultimately contributing to the sustainability and modernization of Malaysia's agricultural industry.

## **Conclusion**

Agropreneurial education plays an essential role in equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to pursue agribusiness ventures. This conceptual paper presented a framework that examines the influence of agropreneurial curriculum content, experiential learning, and university support on agropreneurial intention, with perceived desirability and perceived feasibility acting as mediators. Grounded in entrepreneurial learning theory and institutional support theory, the proposed model highlights how structured education, real-world application, and institutional resources contribute to increasing graduates' entrepreneurial aspirations in the agricultural sector.

The declining interest of Malaysian graduates in agriculture poses challenges to food security and rural economic development. However, recent data suggest that Malaysia recorded 1,030,020 agricultural holders, with 97.9% being individual agricultural holders, signaling the need for a new generation of agropreneurs to sustain the industry. Findings from the 2024 Agricultural Census further emphasize the necessity of modernizing agricultural education and support programs to enhance the feasibility of agropreneurial careers.

By integrating business-oriented agropreneurial curricula, strengthening experiential learning pathways, and expanding institutional support mechanisms, universities can increase students' perceived desirability and feasibility toward agropreneurship, thereby positively shaping agropreneurial intentions. The findings suggest that a well-rounded agropreneurial education ecosystem can serve as a catalyst for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable agriculture in Malaysia.

Future research should empirically validate this framework to assess its impact on graduates' entrepreneurial outcomes. Policymakers, educators, and industry stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that agropreneurship is positioned as a viable and attractive career path, enabling Malaysia to transition toward a knowledge-driven, sustainable agricultural economy. Therefore, the researchers attempt to further this study by investigating the variables to test the framework.

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