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## UNVEILING THE DRIVERS BEHIND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS' AMBITION TO PURSUE ENTREPRENEURIAL PATHS

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### Abstract:

Graduate employability continues to shape higher education priorities, and entrepreneurship remains a strategic pathway for students who aspire to become future job creators. This study examines the drivers of entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students in selected Higher Learning Institutions in East Coast Malaysia. Four predictors are investigated: contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education. A quantitative survey design was applied, and data from 182 postgraduate students were analysed using Pearson's Correlation and Multiple Regression Analyses. The results show that contextual factors, self-efficacy and entrepreneurial education significantly and positively predict entrepreneurial career intention. Self-efficacy recorded the strongest influence, indicating that

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students' confidence in their entrepreneurial capability is central to the formation of entrepreneurial career aspirations. Risk-taking propensity, however, did not significantly predict entrepreneurial career intention. This suggests that students' intention to pursue entrepreneurship may be shaped more by confidence, educational exposure and supportive environments than by risk orientation alone. The study offers practical implications for universities, entrepreneurship educators and policymakers in designing programmes that strengthen entrepreneurial confidence, opportunity recognition and career readiness among postgraduate students.

**Keyword:**

Contextual Factors, Entrepreneurial Career Intention; Entrepreneurial Education; Postgraduate Students; Risk-Taking Propensity; Self-Efficacy



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**Introduction**

Entrepreneurship has become increasingly important in discussions on economic growth, employment generation, innovation and national competitiveness. Classical entrepreneurship theory positions entrepreneurs as innovators who introduce new combinations of products, processes, markets and organisational practices (Schumpeter, 1934). In a complementary view, entrepreneurship involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities within changing market conditions (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). These perspectives remain relevant because entrepreneurial activities continue to stimulate productivity, create employment opportunities and support wider economic transformation.

Beyond its economic role, entrepreneurship also contributes to social value creation. Social entrepreneurship has gained attention because it combines enterprise-based solutions with social and environmental objectives. Rather than focusing solely on private financial gain, social entrepreneurs attempt to address societal needs through innovative and sustainable initiatives (Dees, 2001). This direction is consistent with the global recognition of social enterprises as contributors to poverty reduction, environmental sustainability and inclusive development, World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), 2024.

In Malaysia, entrepreneurship is closely linked to national development, graduate employability and inclusive growth. The policy emphasis on social enterprise development reflects the country's effort to encourage business models that generate both economic and social impact. KUSKOP (n.d.) defines social enterprises as purpose-driven entities that operate

through financially viable business models while addressing social or environmental challenges and creating positive outcomes for beneficiaries and the economy. This policy direction shows that entrepreneurship in Malaysia is no longer viewed only as profit-oriented business activity, but also as a mechanism for producing broader community impact.

Entrepreneurship is particularly relevant in higher education because students are expected to enter a labour market that requires adaptability, initiative and career resilience. For postgraduate students, entrepreneurial career intention is important because they are relatively close to career transition and may already possess disciplinary knowledge, professional exposure or prior work experience. Entrepreneurial career intention therefore reflects not only interest in starting a business, but also the readiness to view entrepreneurship as a meaningful and feasible career pathway.

Higher education institutions play a central role in shaping this readiness. Universities can introduce entrepreneurship concepts, provide practical learning activities, connect students with mentors and expose them to business pitching, innovation hubs, incubation programmes and funding information. In the Malaysian higher education context, entrepreneurship is also linked to graduate employability. Although graduate employment performance has improved, entrepreneurship remains a valuable alternative for graduates who wish to pursue self-employment, business ownership or socially driven enterprise creation.

Entrepreneurial intention is widely considered an important precursor to entrepreneurial behaviour. Intention-based models suggest that individuals are more likely to pursue entrepreneurship when they hold favourable attitudes, perceive social support and believe that they are capable of carrying out entrepreneurial tasks (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000). In this study, entrepreneurial career intention is examined through four key predictors: contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education.

Among these predictors, self-efficacy is expected to be especially influential because entrepreneurship requires confidence in recognising opportunities, mobilising resources, solving problems and managing uncertainty. Students may have an interest in entrepreneurship, yet without sufficient belief in their own capability, they may hesitate to convert ideas into entrepreneurial action. Contextual support and entrepreneurship education may also strengthen this belief by providing access to knowledge, encouragement and practical exposure.

### **Research Problem and Gap**

Although entrepreneurship has been widely promoted as a strategic pathway for graduate employability, innovation and job creation, the development of entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students remains an important research issue. Postgraduate students are different from undergraduate students because they are usually closer to career transition, may already possess professional or disciplinary knowledge, and may evaluate entrepreneurship based on career feasibility, confidence, family commitment and available institutional support. In Malaysia, graduate employability remains relevant to higher education planning. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2025) reported that the number of graduates increased to 5.98 million in 2024, while the graduate unemployment rate declined to 3.2%. Although this trend indicates a more positive labour market, the need to develop graduates as job creators rather than only job seekers remain important for supporting a more resilient and innovation-driven economy.

The research problem addressed in this study is that postgraduate students may have exposure to entrepreneurship, but such exposure does not automatically translate into strong entrepreneurial career intention. Some students may perceive entrepreneurship as attractive, yet they may hesitate to pursue it due to uncertainty, limited confidence, insufficient support, weak opportunity recognition or concern about risk. Therefore, it is important to understand which factors most strongly influence their intention to consider entrepreneurship as a future career pathway.

The research gap lies in three main areas. First, many previous studies have examined entrepreneurial intention among undergraduate students, final-year students or youth, while less attention has been given to postgraduate students, particularly within selected Higher Learning Institutions in East Coast Malaysia. Second, existing studies often examine individual predictors separately, whereas this study investigates contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education simultaneously. Third, recent studies indicate that entrepreneurial education and university support may influence entrepreneurial intention through self-efficacy and perceived opportunity, yet the relative importance of these factors remains underexplored among postgraduate students (Duong et al., 2024; Galvão et al., 2025; Mahlaole & Malebana, 2026).

Therefore, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining the extent to which contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education influence entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students. By identifying the strongest predictor, the study offers useful implications for universities, entrepreneurship educators and policymakers in designing more effective entrepreneurship programmes that strengthen confidence, support systems and career readiness.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to examine the factors influencing entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students in selected Higher Learning Institutions in East Coast Malaysia.

1. To examine the relationship between contextual factors and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.
2. To examine the relationship between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.
3. To examine the relationship between risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.
4. To examine the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.
5. To identify the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between contextual factors and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students?
2. What is the relationship between self-efficacy and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students?

3. What is the relationship between risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students?
4. What is the relationship between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students?
5. Which factor is the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students?

## Literature Review

### *Entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurship is commonly associated with opportunity recognition, innovation and value creation. It involves more than starting a business because entrepreneurs must identify unmet needs, organise resources, manage uncertainty and convert ideas into viable outcomes. In the broader economy, entrepreneurial activity supports competition, employment creation and technological progress (Thurik & Wennekers, 2004). For students, entrepreneurship offers a pathway that allows them to use knowledge and skills creatively rather than relying solely on conventional employment.

Social entrepreneurship extends this logic by connecting business activity with social purpose. It emphasises the creation of social value while maintaining sufficient financial sustainability to continue operations. Mair and Marti (2006) describe social entrepreneurship as a process that addresses social needs through innovative and sustainable approaches. This perspective is relevant to Malaysia because national entrepreneurship policy increasingly encourages enterprises that are commercially viable and socially responsible.

The development of social entrepreneurship also requires institutional recognition, public awareness and ecosystem coordination. Limited access to funding, unclear regulatory arrangements, weak market visibility and insufficient management capacity may restrict social enterprises from scaling their impact. In Malaysia, social enterprise development is therefore closely connected to policy support, cross-sector collaboration and talent development within universities and entrepreneurial ecosystems.

In the context of this study, entrepreneurship provides the foundation for understanding why postgraduate students may consider business creation as a future career option. The decision to pursue entrepreneurship is shaped not only by individual interest, but also by perceived capability, learning exposure and contextual support. These dimensions are examined through entrepreneurial career intention and its four predictors.

Recent literature and policy evidence further support the relevance of entrepreneurship in higher education. The World Intellectual Property Organization (2024) highlights social entrepreneurship as part of innovation-driven development, while the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2025) shows that graduate employability continues to be a national priority. These recent developments strengthen the need for universities to prepare postgraduate students with entrepreneurial capabilities, career flexibility and readiness to create value in changing economic environments.

## ***Entrepreneurial Career Intention***

Entrepreneurial career intention refers to an individual's conscious plan, willingness and determination to pursue entrepreneurship as a future career. It represents an early cognitive stage before actual entrepreneurial behaviour occurs. Bird (1988) explains that entrepreneurial intention directs attention, experience and action towards venture creation. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that planned action is strongly influenced by intention, which is shaped by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Entrepreneurial career intention is also closely linked to opportunity recognition. Individuals who are able to identify, evaluate and develop opportunities may be more likely to consider entrepreneurship as a feasible career direction. Liñán and Chen (2009) further strengthened the measurement of entrepreneurial intention through the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire, which has been widely used to examine intention across different educational and cultural contexts.

Although intention does not automatically lead to business creation, it remains a meaningful predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour. Kautonen et al. (2015) showed that entrepreneurial intention can predict later entrepreneurial action, although the intention-behaviour relationship may be influenced by contextual conditions, available resources and personal commitment. This indicates that intention should be understood as an important but incomplete step in the entrepreneurial process.

For postgraduate students, entrepreneurial career intention may be influenced by career maturity, educational exposure, perceived employability and personal confidence. Students who view entrepreneurship as achievable and valuable may be more prepared to consider it as a future career option. Therefore, examining entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students can help universities design more effective programmes that develop entrepreneurial interest, confidence and readiness.

Recent studies also show that entrepreneurial intention should be understood through a combination of psychological, educational and contextual mechanisms. Duong et al. (2024) found that perceived educational support and perceived entrepreneurial opportunity shape entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial career interest, while Galvão et al. (2025) demonstrated that higher education support and entrepreneurial education can strengthen entrepreneurial intention through self-efficacy and entrepreneurial mindset. Tewari (2026) further emphasised the mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the formation of entrepreneurial intent. These findings support the need to examine entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students through multiple predictors rather than through a single factor.

## ***Contextual Factors and Social Entrepreneurial Career Intention***

Contextual factors refer to the external conditions that shape students' entrepreneurial thinking and career decisions. These may include family encouragement, peer influence, university support, role models, institutional facilities, access to networks and exposure to entrepreneurship-related opportunities. Students do not form entrepreneurial aspirations in isolation; instead, their intentions are influenced by the environment in which they study, interact and make career decisions.

University support is one of the most important contextual influences. Turker and Selcuk (2009) found that educational, structural and relational support can affect students' entrepreneurial intention. When universities provide entrepreneurship courses, mentoring, incubation support and business development facilities, students may perceive entrepreneurship as more practical and achievable. Such support can reduce uncertainty and provide a clearer pathway from interest to career intention.

In social entrepreneurship research, perceived social support has also been identified as an important antecedent of intention. Hockerts (2017) demonstrated that social entrepreneurial intention is shaped by factors such as perceived social support, self-efficacy, empathy, moral obligation and prior experience with social problems. This suggests that students are more likely to consider entrepreneurship when their social and institutional surroundings provide encouragement and legitimacy.

In the Malaysian context, Ambad et al. (2024) found that perceived social support has a positive effect on social entrepreneurial intention among youth. This supports the argument that encouragement from the surrounding environment can strengthen students' confidence to pursue enterprise-based solutions. Hence, contextual factors are expected to positively influence entrepreneurial career intention in this study.

More recent evidence reinforces the importance of contextual and institutional support. Mahlaole and Malebana (2026) proposed that university environment and perceived support are important in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour, particularly when students require institutional encouragement, access to entrepreneurial resources and a supportive learning ecosystem. Fu and Zhang (2026) also showed that entrepreneurial intention can be explained through combinations of internal cognition and external environmental support, including innovation and entrepreneurship education as well as government policy support. Therefore, contextual factors remain a relevant predictor in understanding postgraduate students' entrepreneurial career intention.

### ***Self-Efficacy and Social Entrepreneurial Career Intention***

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform a particular task successfully. Bandura (1997) explains that people are more likely to undertake challenging activities when they believe they can manage the required actions. In entrepreneurship, self-efficacy reflects confidence in tasks such as recognising opportunities, developing business ideas, obtaining resources, solving problems and managing uncertainty.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is important because entrepreneurship often requires individuals to act before outcomes are certain. Zhao et al. (2005) found that self-efficacy plays a mediating role in the development of entrepreneurial intentions. This means that knowledge, experience and perceived capability can shape whether individuals view entrepreneurship as a possible career path.

Recent research has further shown that self-efficacy can strengthen social entrepreneurial intention. Al Issa et al. (2025) reported that self-efficacy partially mediates the relationship between experiential learning and social entrepreneurial intention among final-year students at Malaysian universities. This highlights the importance of practical learning experiences in helping students believe that they can create and manage meaningful ventures.

For postgraduate students, self-efficacy may be particularly influential because they are likely to evaluate entrepreneurship based on capability, feasibility and career consequences. Students who believe they can perform entrepreneurial tasks are more likely to interpret opportunities positively and develop stronger entrepreneurial career intention.

Recent findings continue to position entrepreneurial self-efficacy as a central psychological mechanism in entrepreneurial intention research. Dar et al. (2024) found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy positively influences students' entrepreneurial intention directly and indirectly through opportunity recognition capability. Pan et al. (2026) further showed that entrepreneurial self-efficacy plays an important role in linking entrepreneurship-related beliefs with entrepreneurial intentions. Similarly, Tewari (2026) indicated that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between subjective norms and entrepreneurial intent, suggesting that students are more likely to consider entrepreneurship when they believe they are capable of performing entrepreneurial tasks.

### ***Risk Taking Propensity and Social Entrepreneurial Career Intention***

Risk-taking propensity refers to an individual's willingness to make decisions and take action despite uncertain outcomes. Entrepreneurship is often associated with uncertainty because new ventures involve financial, market, operational and career-related risks. However, entrepreneurial risk-taking should be understood as calculated risk rather than reckless behaviour.

Zhao et al. (2010) identified risk propensity as one of the personality-related factors associated with entrepreneurial intention and performance. Individuals who are more comfortable with uncertainty may be more willing to consider entrepreneurship as a career. Nevertheless, the influence of risk-taking propensity may vary across contexts, especially among students who are still building business knowledge, experience and financial stability.

In social entrepreneurship, risk-taking may be even more complex because students must balance financial sustainability with social impact. Lyu et al. (2024) suggest that risk-taking can shape social entrepreneurial intention through attitude towards entrepreneurship. This indicates that the effect of risk-taking may not always be direct; it may operate through the way students evaluate entrepreneurship as meaningful, feasible and worth pursuing.

Accordingly, this study examines whether students' willingness to take calculated risks contributes to their entrepreneurial career intention. While risk-taking may support entrepreneurial action, it is possible that students' intention depends more strongly on confidence, education and contextual encouragement.

Recent research also suggests that risk-related factors may operate together with other cognitive and environmental conditions rather than as independent drivers. Fu and Zhang (2026) found that entrepreneurial intention can be explained through different configurations involving attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, entrepreneurship education and government policy support. This implies that risk-taking propensity may not always directly predict intention, especially when students still depend on confidence, educational support and perceived feasibility before deciding whether entrepreneurship is a realistic career choice.

### ***Entrepreneurial Education and Social Entrepreneurial Career Intention***

Entrepreneurial education refers to structured learning experiences that develop entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes and intentions. It may include formal courses, business simulations, pitching activities, incubator programmes, mentoring, community-based projects and exposure to entrepreneurs. Nabi et al. (2017) highlighted that entrepreneurship education can generate various outcomes, including knowledge acquisition, personal development, entrepreneurial intention and venture creation.

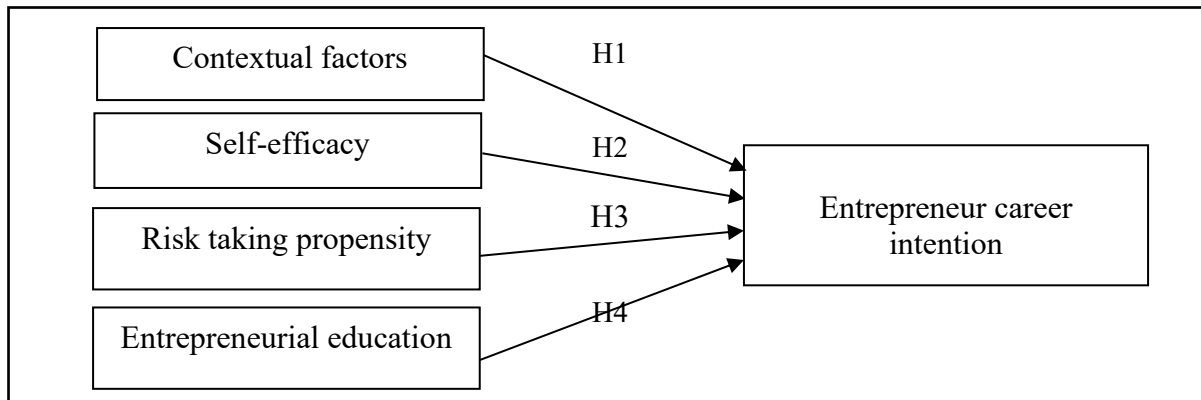
Entrepreneurial education can shape students' intention by improving their understanding of opportunity recognition, business planning, resource mobilisation and market development. It also helps reduce uncertainty because students learn how entrepreneurial risks may be assessed and managed. Education therefore functions not only as knowledge transfer, but also as a confidence-building process.

Sun et al. (2023) found that entrepreneurship education strengthens entrepreneurial mindset, which in turn supports entrepreneurial intention. Their study shows that both curriculum-based and extracurricular learning may help students develop the mindset needed to recognise and act on opportunities. This is relevant to higher education institutions because entrepreneurial intention may be strengthened when education is practical, experiential and connected to real business contexts.

For postgraduate students, entrepreneurial education can encourage the transition from career interest to career readiness. When students are exposed to practical entrepreneurship learning, they may become more confident in evaluating business ideas, building networks and considering entrepreneurship as a future career pathway.

Recent studies further confirm that entrepreneurship education should move beyond theoretical exposure and should develop motivation, engagement and self-efficacy. Otache et al. (2024) found that entrepreneurship education improves entrepreneurial self-efficacy, alertness, opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial intention. Malathi and Venugopal (2025) showed that entrepreneurial education and student engagement are significantly related to entrepreneurial intention, while Yulastri et al. (2026) demonstrated that entrepreneurial motivation and self-efficacy can serially mediate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention. Tewari (2026) also indicated that entrepreneurial education can strengthen the subjective norms-intention relationship through entrepreneurial self-efficacy. These recent findings support the view that entrepreneurship education is a confidence-building and career-readiness mechanism for postgraduate students.

## Research Framework



**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**

Source: Arrighetti, Caricati, Landini and Monacelli (2016) & Zhang, Duijsters, Cloodt (2014)

The research framework positions entrepreneurial career intention as the dependent variable. Four independent variables are examined: contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education. Drawing on intention-based perspectives and recent evidence that internal cognition, educational exposure and environmental support jointly shape entrepreneurial intention (Duong et al., 2024; Fu & Zhang, 2026), the framework proposes that these factors may predict the extent to which postgraduate students intend to pursue entrepreneurship as a future career path.

H1: Contextual factors significantly predict entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.

H2: Self-efficacy significantly predicts entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.

H3: Risk-taking propensity significantly predicts entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.

H4: Entrepreneurial education significantly predicts entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students.

## Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design with an exploratory approach to examine factors influencing entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students. A survey method was considered appropriate because the study aimed to measure students' perceptions of contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity, entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial career intention.

The target population consisted of approximately 491 postgraduate students from selected Higher Learning Institutions located in East Coast Malaysia. The final sample comprised 182 respondents. Postgraduate students were selected because they are generally closer to entering or re-entering the workforce and may therefore evaluate entrepreneurship as a potential career pathway.

The questionnaire was adapted from established instruments by Arrighetti et al. (2016) and Zhang et al. (2014). The instrument consisted of three main sections: demographic profile, independent variables and entrepreneurial career intention. Overall, the questionnaire included 31 items covering demographic information and measurement items for contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity, entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial career intention.

A five-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' level of agreement, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis. These techniques enabled the researchers to assess the reliability of the instruments, the relationship between variables and the predictive influence of the independent variables on entrepreneurial career intention.

## Findings Analysis

**Table 1: Demographic Analysis**

Demographics factors	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	64	35.2
	Female	118	64.8
Age	20-30	105	57.7
	31-40	51	28.0
	41-50	20	11.0
	51-60	6	3.3
Marital Status	Single	45	24.7
	Married	129	70.9
	Divorce	8	4.4
Field of study	Business	120	65.9
	Management	25	13.7
	Economy	19	10.4
	Science	18	9.9
Entrepreneurial history	Yes	143	78.6
	No	39	21.4

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the 182 respondents. Female respondents formed the majority, with 118 respondents or 64.8%, while male respondents accounted for 64 respondents or 35.2%. This shows that the sample was more strongly represented by female postgraduate students.

In terms of age, the largest group was between 20 and 30 years old, representing 105 respondents or 57.7% of the sample. This was followed by those aged 31 to 40 years old, with 51 respondents or 28.0%. Respondents aged 41 to 50 years old accounted for 20 respondents or 11.0%, while the smallest group was aged 51 to 60 years old, with 6 respondents or 3.3%. Overall, the sample was mainly represented by younger postgraduate students.

For marital status, 129 respondents or 70.9% were married, 45 respondents or 24.7% were single and 8 respondents or 4.4% were divorced. This indicates that most respondents had family or household commitments, which may influence how they evaluate entrepreneurship as a career option.

Regarding field of study, business students represented the largest group, with 120 respondents or 65.9%. Management students accounted for 25 respondents or 13.7%, followed by economy students with 19 respondents or 10.4% and science students with 18 respondents or 9.9%. The sample was therefore largely drawn from business-related academic backgrounds.

Most respondents also reported prior entrepreneurial history. A total of 143 respondents or 78.6% indicated that they had entrepreneurial experience, while 39 respondents or 21.4% reported no such experience. This suggests that many respondents were already familiar with entrepreneurship, which may shape their confidence, perceptions and career intention.

**Table 2. Reliability Analysis**

No of item	Study Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Remark
10	Entrepreneurial Career Intention	0.927	Excellent
4	Contextual Factor	0.798	Acceptable
4	Self-Efficacy	0.838	Good
4	Risk Taking Propensity	0.609	Poor
4	Entrepreneurial Education	0.889	Good

Reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement items. The Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.609 to 0.927, indicating that most constructs achieved acceptable to excellent reliability levels.

Entrepreneurial Career Intention recorded the highest Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.927 across 10 items. This indicates excellent internal consistency and suggests that the items used to measure the dependent variable were highly reliable for further analysis.

Self-Efficacy and Entrepreneurial Education also showed good reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.838 and 0.889 respectively. These results indicate that the items measuring students' confidence in entrepreneurial tasks and exposure to entrepreneurial learning were internally consistent.

Contextual Factors recorded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.798, which falls within the acceptable range. This suggests that the four items measuring environmental support, social influence and institutional encouragement were sufficiently consistent.

Risk-Taking Propensity recorded the lowest value, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.609. Although this value is weaker than the other constructs, it can still be interpreted cautiously in exploratory research. Future studies may refine this construct by improving item wording, increasing the number of items or conducting factor analysis to identify items that do not fit the construct well.

**Table 3. Pearson's Correlation Analysis**

Variables	Entrepreneurial intention	Contextual	Self-efficacy	Risk Taking	Education
Entrepreneurial Career Intention (DV)	1				
	182				
Contextual Factor (IV)	.677**	1			
	.000				
	182	182			
Self-Efficacy (IV)	.676**	.534**	1		
	.000	.000			
	182	182	182		
Risk Taking Propensity (IV)	.544**	.555**	.572**	1	
	.000	.000	.000		
	182	182	182	182	
Entrepreneurial Education (IV)	.669**	.667**	.614**	.688**	1
	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	182	182	182	182	182

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 presents the Pearson's correlation analysis between entrepreneurial career intention and the four independent variables. All independent variables showed positive and significant relationships with entrepreneurial career intention at the .01 significance level.

Contextual Factors recorded the highest correlation with entrepreneurial career intention, with  $r = .677$ ,  $p < .01$ . This indicates that stronger perceived support from family, peers, universities and institutions is associated with higher entrepreneurial career intention.

Self-Efficacy showed a similarly strong relationship with entrepreneurial career intention, with  $r = .676$ ,  $p < .01$ . This result suggests that students who believe more strongly in their entrepreneurial ability also tend to report stronger intention to pursue entrepreneurship as a career.

Entrepreneurial Education also recorded a strong positive relationship with entrepreneurial career intention, with  $r = .669$ ,  $p < .01$ . This implies that greater exposure to entrepreneurship education is associated with higher entrepreneurial career intention.

Risk-Taking Propensity was positively and significantly related to entrepreneurial career intention, with  $r = .544$ ,  $p < .01$ . Although the relationship was significant, it was weaker than the correlations recorded for contextual factors, self-efficacy and entrepreneurial education. This suggests that risk orientation is related to entrepreneurial career intention but may not be the most dominant factor among the respondents.

**Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis**

Variables	$\beta$	Significant
Contextual Factor	.335	.000
Self-Efficacy	.360	.000
Risk Taking Propensity	-.005	.946
Entrepreneurial Education	.228	.003
F Value: 72.228		
R Square: .620		
Adjusted R Square: .612		
Durbin Watson: 1.766		
*p<.05 **p<.01		

Table 4 presents the multiple regression results. The model recorded an R Square value of .620, indicating that 62.0% of the variance in entrepreneurial career intention was explained by contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education. The Adjusted R Square value of .612 indicates that the model retained strong explanatory power after adjusting for the number of predictors. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.766 suggests that serious autocorrelation was not present.

Self-Efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial career intention, with  $\beta = .360$ ,  $p < .001$ . This indicates that students with stronger confidence in their entrepreneurial capability were more likely to develop entrepreneurial career intention.

Contextual Factors were also a significant positive predictor, with  $\beta = .335$ ,  $p < .001$ . This finding shows that a supportive environment can strengthen students' intention to pursue entrepreneurship as a future career.

Entrepreneurial Education recorded a significant positive effect, with  $\beta = .228$ ,  $p = .003$ . This suggests that educational exposure contributes to students' entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence and readiness.

Risk-Taking Propensity was not a significant predictor, with  $\beta = -.005$ ,  $p = .946$ . The very small negative beta value indicates that risk-taking propensity had almost no direct influence on entrepreneurial career intention in the regression model. Thus, entrepreneurial career intention among the respondents appears to be shaped more strongly by self-efficacy, contextual support and entrepreneurial education.

### Hypothesis Summary

Hypothesis	Path	Result	Conclusion
H1	Contextual Factors → Entrepreneurial Career Intention	$\beta = .335$ , $p = .000$	Supported
H2	Self-Efficacy → Entrepreneurial Career Intention	$\beta = .360$ , $p = .000$	Supported
H3	Risk-Taking Propensity → Entrepreneurial Career Intention	$\beta = -.005$ , $p = .946$	Not supported
H4	Entrepreneurial Education → Entrepreneurial Career Intention	$\beta = .228$ , $p = .003$	Supported

The hypothesis summary shows that H1, H2 and H4 were supported, while H3 was not supported. Self-efficacy had the strongest predictive effect, followed by contextual factors and entrepreneurial education. Risk-taking propensity was positively correlated with entrepreneurial career intention but did not remain significant when all predictors were entered into the regression model.

## Discussion

### *Contextual Factors*

The regression results shows that contextual factors significantly predict entrepreneurial career intention. This indicates that postgraduate students are more likely to consider entrepreneurship as a career when they perceive their surroundings as supportive. Such support may come from family members, peers, lecturers, university programmes, institutional facilities, entrepreneurial networks and access to business-related information.

This finding is consistent with Yesmin et al. (2024), who showed that educational and social support can encourage university students' entrepreneurial intentions through self-efficacy and Theory of Planned Behaviour variables. In the present study, contextual support appears to provide students with encouragement and legitimacy, helping them view entrepreneurship as a realistic option rather than an uncertain or isolated career choice.

The finding also aligns with Galvão et al. (2025), who reported that perceived higher education support and entrepreneurial education can strengthen entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial mindset. This suggests that university support should not be limited to classroom learning. Students may benefit more when institutions provide mentoring, incubation, pitching activities, exposure to successful entrepreneurs, networking opportunities and access to funding-related information.

From a practical perspective, the result implies that universities should strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem around students. Contextual support can reduce perceived barriers, build confidence and encourage students to explore entrepreneurship more seriously. Therefore, institutional support, family encouragement and peer networks should be treated as important elements in the development of entrepreneurial career intention.

### *Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial career intention in this study. This indicates that postgraduate students who believe in their ability to identify opportunities, manage challenges, make decisions and start a venture are more likely to intend to pursue entrepreneurship as a future career.

Dar et al. (2024) provide support for this finding by showing that entrepreneurial self-efficacy influences opportunity recognition capability and intention to undertake entrepreneurial activity. This means that confidence does not only affect how students feel about entrepreneurship; it also shapes their ability to recognise and evaluate opportunities that may lead to entrepreneurial action.

The result can also be interpreted through Social Cognitive Career Theory. Duong et al. (2024) found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy and entrepreneurial career interest directly influence

entrepreneurial intention, while perceived educational support and perceived entrepreneurial opportunities shape intention indirectly. This suggests that students develop entrepreneurial career intention when they believe they are capable, perceive entrepreneurship as meaningful and recognise available opportunities.

Practically, universities should design learning activities that strengthen students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Business simulations, pitching sessions, mentoring, venture planning, role-model engagement and experiential projects can help students build confidence through practice. Such activities may be especially useful for postgraduate students, who may already possess academic knowledge but still require confidence to apply it in entrepreneurial settings.

### ***Risk-Taking Propensity***

Risk-taking propensity did not significantly predict entrepreneurial career intention in the regression model. Although it was positively correlated with entrepreneurial career intention, its influence disappeared when contextual factors, self-efficacy and entrepreneurial education were considered simultaneously. This suggests that willingness to take risks alone may not be sufficient to explain students' entrepreneurial career intention.

The insignificant effect may be explained by the nature of student decision-making. Postgraduate students may be interested in entrepreneurship, but they may still evaluate financial security, family commitments, career stability and the availability of resources before making career decisions. Therefore, entrepreneurial intention may depend more on perceived feasibility and capability than on risk orientation alone.

Murad et al. (2024) noted that risk-taking propensity may operate more clearly in the transition from entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial behaviour. In other words, risk-taking may become more important when individuals move from thinking about entrepreneurship to launching or operating a venture. This helps explain why risk-taking propensity was not a significant direct predictor in the present regression model.

The finding is also consistent with Mothibi and Malebana (2025), who showed that risk-taking propensity can influence entrepreneurial intention indirectly through attitude towards behaviour and perceived behavioural control. Thus, risk-taking should not be viewed as a stand-alone driver. Universities may need to help students manage risk through financial planning, business feasibility analysis, market validation, simulation-based learning and practical entrepreneurial projects.

### ***Entrepreneurial Education***

Entrepreneurial education was found to significantly predict entrepreneurial career intention. This finding indicates that postgraduate students who receive greater exposure to entrepreneurship education are more likely to consider entrepreneurship as a future career. Entrepreneurial education may strengthen knowledge, confidence, opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial mindset and perceived feasibility.

Fauzi et al. (2025) provide relevant Malaysian evidence, reporting that entrepreneurship education is positively related to entrepreneurial intention among UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang students. Their study also highlights the role of perceived feasibility and propensity to

act, suggesting that entrepreneurship education becomes more effective when students believe that entrepreneurship is possible and actionable.

Wang et al. (2023) also found that entrepreneurship education can influence entrepreneurial intention through entrepreneurial self-efficacy. This supports the present result because education does not merely provide knowledge; it can also strengthen students' belief that they can perform entrepreneurial tasks. In this sense, entrepreneurship education and self-efficacy reinforce one another.

Otache et al. (2024) further showed that entrepreneurship education can improve entrepreneurial self-efficacy, alertness, opportunity recognition and intention. Therefore, universities should ensure that entrepreneurship education is not overly theoretical. Practical exposure, industry engagement, business mentoring, group projects, incubation support and pitching activities can help students translate learning into career readiness.

Overall, the finding confirms that entrepreneurial education remains an important institutional mechanism for developing entrepreneurial career intention. For postgraduate students, such education should focus on applied learning, opportunity recognition and confidence-building so that students can move beyond awareness and develop a stronger intention to pursue entrepreneurship.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the influence of contextual factors, self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity and entrepreneurial education on entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students in selected Higher Learning Institutions in East Coast Malaysia. The findings show that contextual factors, self-efficacy and entrepreneurial education significantly and positively predict entrepreneurial career intention, while risk-taking propensity does not have a significant direct effect in the regression model.

Self-efficacy emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that students' confidence in their entrepreneurial capability plays a central role in shaping career intention. When students believe that they can identify opportunities, manage challenges and develop entrepreneurial ideas, they are more likely to view entrepreneurship as a feasible future career. This highlights the need for universities to strengthen confidence-building activities through experiential learning, mentorship and practical entrepreneurship exposure.

Contextual factors also contribute meaningfully to entrepreneurial career intention. Support from family, peers, universities and institutions can create an environment that encourages students to consider entrepreneurship more seriously. A supportive ecosystem may reduce perceived barriers and help students recognise entrepreneurship as a realistic and attractive pathway.

Entrepreneurial education was another significant predictor, confirming that structured learning experiences can develop entrepreneurial knowledge, mindset and readiness. Universities should therefore continue to strengthen entrepreneurship education through practical projects, business simulations, pitching activities, incubation programmes, industry collaboration and social enterprise exposure.

Risk-taking propensity was not a significant direct predictor in this study. This does not mean that risk is irrelevant to entrepreneurship. Rather, the result suggests that risk-taking alone may not be enough to shape entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students. Students may require confidence, support, knowledge and practical exposure before they are willing to act on entrepreneurial opportunities.

The findings can be interpreted through Social Cognitive Career Theory, which emphasises self-efficacy, outcome expectations, contextual support and career interest in shaping career-related choices (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2019). They are also consistent with intention-based perspectives which suggest that entrepreneurial behaviour is more likely to emerge when individuals hold favourable beliefs, perceive support and feel capable of performing entrepreneurial actions. Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. Since the study involved 182 postgraduate students from selected Higher Learning Institutions in East Coast Malaysia and used a cross-sectional, self-reported survey design, the findings may not be fully generalisable and cannot confirm whether intention later becomes actual entrepreneurial behaviour. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal or mixed-method designs, refined risk-taking measures and additional variables such as attitude towards entrepreneurship, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, opportunity recognition, financial literacy and access to entrepreneurial support systems.

In conclusion, entrepreneurial career intention among postgraduate students is shaped by a combination of psychological, educational and contextual factors. Higher education institutions and policymakers should therefore focus on developing students' entrepreneurial confidence, strengthening supportive ecosystems and improving the practical quality of entrepreneurship education. These efforts may encourage more postgraduate students to view entrepreneurship as a viable, meaningful and achievable career pathway.

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