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(IJEMP)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijemp**SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AMONG
PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA**Mastura Ayob^{1*}, Koe Wei Loon², Siti Daleela Mohd Wahid³¹Department of Marketing, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia mastura944@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4499-956X>²Department of Marketing, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia koewei516@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3977-1884>³Department of Marketing, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia sitid365@uitm.edu.my <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8155-7756>

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Abstract:

Sustainable entrepreneurship has received increasing scholarly attention as an approach to addressing environmental and social issues while supporting economic development. This study examines factors associated with sustainable entrepreneurial intention (SEI) among students at selected public universities in Malaysia. The study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which provides a theoretical framework for understanding students' intention to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected through an online survey of 310 undergraduate students. The findings indicate that attitude ($\beta = 0.307$, $p < 0.001$), subjective norms ($\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$), and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.344$, $p < 0.001$) are significantly and positively associated with SEI, with self-efficacy emerging as the strongest predictor. The findings support all proposed hypotheses. Students with more positive attitudes, more favourable subjective norms, and greater confidence in their abilities are more likely to report stronger SEI. The study contributes to the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship by providing empirical evidence from Malaysian public universities. The findings also offer insights for universities and policymakers, particularly for strengthening entrepreneurship education and raising students' awareness of sustainability.

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Keywords:

Attitude; Public University Students; Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intention; Subjective Norms; Self-Efficacy; Theory of Planned Behaviour



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Introduction

Sustainable entrepreneurship has become increasingly important as businesses are expected to address not only economic needs but also environmental and social concerns (Dean & McMullen, 2007). It is also closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly through business activities that consider economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Entrepreneurs can contribute to these efforts by developing new ideas and business solutions that address sustainability challenges (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). In a developing country such as Malaysia, encouraging young people to consider sustainable entrepreneurship is therefore important.

Universities play an important role in preparing students for this career path. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has introduced entrepreneurship courses at public universities to provide students with relevant entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. This is particularly relevant because university students represent a potential pool of future entrepreneurs who may incorporate sustainability considerations into their business activities. Encouraging students to pursue entrepreneurship remains a challenge in Malaysia. Despite various initiatives, many graduates do not choose entrepreneurship as a career. Statistics from the 2022 Graduate Tracking Study Report indicate that, of 92,945 graduates from Malaysian public universities, only 6.7% chose entrepreneurship as a career. This finding highlights the need to examine factors associated with students' willingness to pursue entrepreneurship, including sustainable entrepreneurship. Accordingly, sustainable entrepreneurial intention (SEI) among Malaysian students has received increasing scholarly attention. Studies have examined a range of factors. For example, Koe et al. (2019) investigated SEI in relation to green marketing, changing consumer behaviour, and favourable market conditions. Tehseen and Haider (2021) analysed entrepreneurial attitude, perceived desirability, and perceived feasibility among Malaysian undergraduates. Subsequently, Latip and Yusuf (2024) examined sustainability attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in relation to SEI. Sustainable entrepreneurship is not concerned solely with financial outcomes. It also encompasses entrepreneurial activities that address environmental and social concerns. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors associated with individuals' development of sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial intentions. Vuorio et al. (2018) highlighted the need to examine factors associated with entrepreneurial intentions oriented towards sustainability. In this study, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), provides the main theoretical foundation. TPB proposes that intention is an immediate antecedent of

behaviour and is influenced by three main factors: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (PBC).

In this study, self-efficacy is used in place of PBC to capture students' confidence in their ability to undertake sustainable entrepreneurial activities. Although self-efficacy and PBC are not identical constructs, they are closely related in terms of perceived capability. Ajzen (2002) discussed the conceptual relationship between self-efficacy and perceived behavioural control, providing a basis for considering self-efficacy within the control dimension of TPB. Previous studies have also suggested that cognitive factors are associated with entrepreneurial intention (Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009). However, the strength of these relationships may vary by context, particularly in relation to sustainability-oriented entrepreneurship (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010).

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, limited attention has been given to the combined association of attitude, subjective norms, and self-efficacy with SEI among final-year students at Malaysian public universities. This study addresses this gap by examining the associations of attitude, subjective norms, and self-efficacy with SEI among public university students. It contributes to the literature on sustainable entrepreneurship and offers insights for educators and policymakers seeking to promote sustainability-focused entrepreneurship. Further empirical research is needed to clarify how these cognitive factors are associated with students' intention to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship, particularly among business students approaching graduation and entering the workforce. Understanding the factors associated with students' intention to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship is therefore important.

Literature Review

Definition of Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Sustainable entrepreneurship focuses on business activities that seek to create economic value while also considering their effects on society and the environment. In this sense, operating a sustainable business is not limited to generating profit. It also involves considering longer-term social and environmental outcomes when identifying opportunities and making business decisions (Dean & McMullen, 2007). Sustainable entrepreneurs therefore play an important role in recognising opportunities that address sustainability challenges and support broader sustainable development (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). The contribution of sustainable entrepreneurship has received increasing recognition because of its relevance to global sustainability efforts and its potential to support sustainable development in developing and emerging economies (Muñoz & Cohen, 2018; United Nations).

Sustainable Entrepreneurial Intention (SEI)

Sustainable entrepreneurial intention (SEI) refers to an individual's willingness to start or pursue a business that takes sustainability into consideration. It extends beyond the aim of generating profit by reflecting an intention to create economic value while also contributing to environmental and social outcomes (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010). In line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), intention is an immediate antecedent of behaviour and reflects an individual's motivation to engage in a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In this sense, SEI indicates an individual's readiness to pursue sustainable entrepreneurial activities. Recent research suggests that SEI is particularly relevant among university students, who may be

exposed to sustainability education and innovation-driven environments (Anand et al., 2021; Liñán & Fayolle, 2015).

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), introduced by Ajzen (1991), is widely used to explain and predict human behaviour, including in entrepreneurship research. The theory proposes that behavioural intention is shaped by three main factors: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (PBC). Because it incorporates individual and social influences, TPB has been applied in research on entrepreneurial intention (Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009). More recent research has also examined the relevance of TPB to sustainable entrepreneurship, particularly in relation to cognitive factors associated with sustainability-oriented intentions (Yasir et al., 2021; Vuorio et al., 2018).

While the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this study, self-efficacy is used in place of perceived behavioural control (PBC). This construct is considered more appropriate for university students who are forming intentions regarding sustainable entrepreneurship. Unlike PBC, which encompasses an individual's perception of the extent to which a behaviour is within their control, self-efficacy focuses specifically on an individual's confidence in their ability to perform a behaviour. In the context of sustainable entrepreneurship, students with limited entrepreneurial experience may find it difficult to assess the degree of control they have over entrepreneurial activities. Consequently, self-efficacy is considered more suitable because it provides a more direct measure of students' confidence in their capacity to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship. This distinction is particularly relevant when examining university students' confidence in pursuing sustainable entrepreneurship. Ajzen (2002) discussed the conceptual relationship between self-efficacy and perceived behavioural control, providing a theoretical basis for considering self-efficacy within the control dimension of TPB. In addition, Armitage and Conner (2001) reported that self-efficacy has a clearer conceptual meaning and a stronger association with behavioural intention than PBC. Therefore, self-efficacy is incorporated into the TPB framework to capture the extent to which university students believe they can engage in sustainable entrepreneurship.

The Relationship between Attitude and SEI

Attitude refers to an individual's favourable or unfavourable evaluation of a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In sustainable entrepreneurship, it reflects the extent to which individuals regard sustainability-oriented business activities as desirable and worthwhile. Previous research suggests that individuals who hold favourable views of entrepreneurship tend to report stronger entrepreneurial intentions (Liñán & Chen, 2009). In sustainable entrepreneurship, this association may also apply to individuals who value environmental and social responsibility and are more inclined to pursue sustainability-oriented business activities (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010; Vuorio et al., 2018). For university students, exposure to sustainability-related learning may be associated with more positive views of sustainable businesses and greater willingness to consider sustainable entrepreneurial activities (Anand et al., 2021). Based on these arguments, a positive relationship is expected between attitude and SEI.

The Relationship between Subjective Norms and SEI

Subjective norms refer to the perceived expectations and social pressure that individuals experience from significant others, including family members, friends, and peers (Ajzen, 1991). In entrepreneurship, the views and encouragement of significant others may be associated with how individuals perceive entrepreneurship as a career option. Support from family, friends, and peers may also be associated with greater confidence in pursuing an entrepreneurial career. Previous research suggests that subjective norms are associated with entrepreneurial intention, particularly in societies where social relationships and approval from others play an important role in individual decision-making (Krueger et al., 2000; Hofstede, 2001). This social influence is also relevant to sustainable entrepreneurship, as encouragement from family and peers may be associated with greater willingness to pursue ventures that address environmental and social concerns (Yasir et al., 2021). For university students, interactions with peers and wider social networks may also be associated with career preferences and entrepreneurial aspirations (Mahfud et al., 2020). Therefore, subjective norms are expected to have a positive relationship with SEI.

The Relationship between Self-Efficacy and SEI

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to perform a particular task or behaviour successfully (Bandura, 1997). This confidence is relevant to entrepreneurship because starting and operating a business involves a range of tasks, decisions, and challenges. In relation to TPB, self-efficacy is closely related to the perceived control dimension of the theory, as both concern individuals' perceived capability to perform a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Zhao et al., 2005). Among university students, this sense of capability may be associated with how they view entrepreneurship as a possible career option. When students believe that they can undertake entrepreneurial activities, they may be more willing to consider becoming entrepreneurs (Zhao et al., 2005). This confidence may also be relevant to sustainable entrepreneurship, where individuals may need to respond to uncertainty while addressing environmental and social concerns through their business activities (Hockerts, 2017).

Supporting this view, Rodríguez-Jasso et al. (2025) reported a positive relationship between self-efficacy and sustainable entrepreneurial intention among university students. This finding suggests that students with greater confidence in their entrepreneurial abilities are more likely to report an intention to pursue sustainable entrepreneurship.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study proposes the research framework shown in Figure 1 and the following hypotheses.

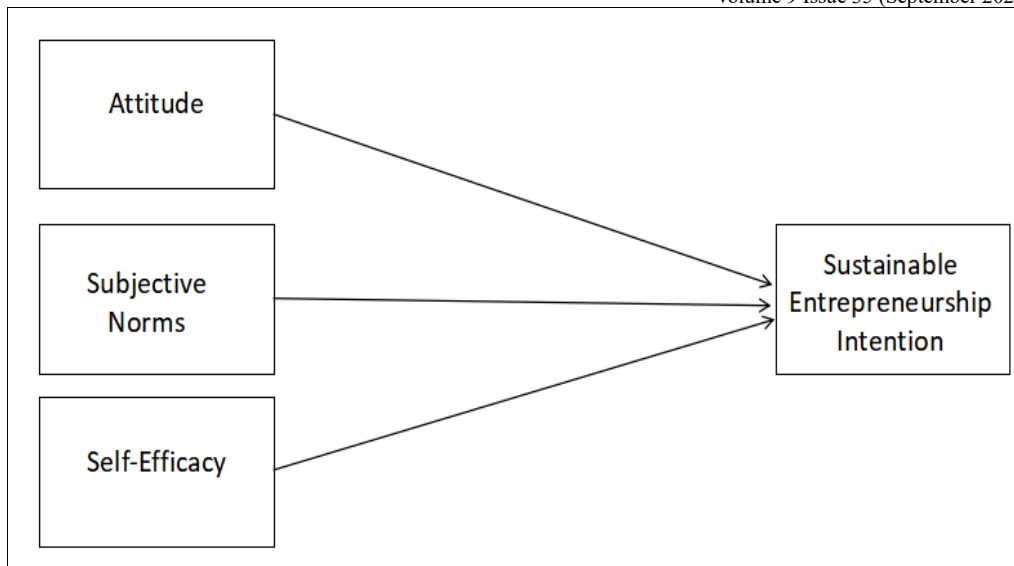


Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

Adapted from Ajzen (1991)

H1: Attitude is positively associated with SEI.

H2: Subjective norms are positively associated with SEI.

H3: Self-efficacy is positively associated with SEI.

Research Methodology

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents. Of the 20 public universities in Malaysia, nine were purposively selected based on two criteria: participation in the UI GreenMetric World University Rankings 2023 and the provision of relevant business or entrepreneurship degree programmes for undergraduate students. The selected universities were Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP), Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The UI GreenMetric World University Rankings is an international ranking initiative established by Universitas Indonesia that assesses universities' environmental commitments and sustainability-related initiatives. The selection of the nine public universities was also informed by their participation in the UI GreenMetric ranking, which was treated as an indication of institutional engagement with sustainability-related initiatives. This criterion was considered relevant to the study's focus on sustainable entrepreneurship.

The study administered an online survey to 310 final-year students enrolled in business or entrepreneurship programmes at the nine selected public universities. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms and completed independently by the students. The questionnaire was administered entirely in English and used a seven-point Likert scale for the response options.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee before data collection commenced. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their responses would be treated confidentially and reported anonymously. After data collection was completed, the responses were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). This analysis was conducted to examine the proposed associations among the study variables and address the research objectives.

Results

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	75	24.2
Female	235	75.8
Age		
18–20	10	3.2
21–22	154	49.7
23–24	132	42.6
25 and above	14	4.5
Race		
Malay	251	81.0
Chinese	29	9.4
Indian	8	2.6
Others	22	7.1
Family entrepreneurial background		
Entrepreneurial	65	21.0
Non-entrepreneurial	245	79.0

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. Female respondents constituted the larger proportion of the sample (75.8%), whereas male respondents accounted for 24.2%. In terms of age, almost half of the respondents were aged 21–22 years (49.7%), followed by those aged 23–24 years (42.6%). This distribution indicates that most respondents were young adults. In terms of ethnicity, Malay respondents represented the largest group (81.0%), followed by Chinese respondents (9.4%), Indian respondents (2.6%), and respondents from other ethnic groups (7.1%). Regarding family entrepreneurial background, most respondents reported coming from non-entrepreneurial families (79.0%), whereas 21.0% reported an entrepreneurial family background.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude	0.924	0.925	0.768
Subjective Norms	0.879	0.888	0.736
Self-Efficacy	0.950	0.951	0.740
SEI	0.945	0.946	0.820

The measurement model results indicate that all four constructs—attitude, subjective norms, self-efficacy, and SEI—meet the recommended thresholds for internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.879 to 0.950, indicating good internal consistency across the items used to measure each construct. The composite reliability values were also satisfactory, ranging from 0.888 to 0.951. In addition, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.736 to 0.820, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50. This indicates that the constructs explained a sufficient proportion of variance in their respective indicators. Taken together, the results indicate that the measurement items provided reliable and valid measures of the constructs, supporting progression to the structural-model assessment.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity through Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	1	2	3	4
Attitude	-			
Self-Efficacy	0.746	-		
Subjective Norms	0.702	0.642	-	
SEI	0.742	0.732	0.689	-

The HTMT results were used to assess discriminant validity among the four constructs: attitude, self-efficacy, subjective norms, and SEI. The HTMT values ranged from 0.642 to 0.746, indicating acceptable separation among the constructs. As all values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, discriminant validity was considered established. This suggests that the constructs are empirically distinct within the measurement model.

Table 4: Coefficient Of Determination and Effect Size

Construct	R ²	Predictor	f ²	Effect Size
SEI	0.600	Attitude	0.103	Small
		Subjective Norms	0.076	Small
		Self-Efficacy	0.140	Medium

R² = coefficient of determination indicating the variance explained in the endogenous construct; f² = effect size of each predictor. Effect size thresholds: 0.02 (small), 0.15 (medium), 0.35 (large).

The R^2 value for SEI was 0.600, indicating that attitude, subjective norms, and self-efficacy jointly explained 60.0% of the variance in SEI. The effect-size results indicated differences in the relative contribution of each predictor. Self-efficacy had an effect size of $f^2 = 0.140$, whereas attitude ($f^2 = 0.103$) and subjective norms ($f^2 = 0.076$) had small effect sizes. Among the three predictors, self-efficacy had the largest effect size in relation to SEI.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Attitude $\rightarrow$ SEI	0.307	4.462	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	Subjective Norms $\rightarrow$ SEI	0.234	4.082	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H3	Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ SEI	0.344	4.790	$p < 0.001$	Supported

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; t = t-value (bootstrapping); p = significance level; *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The hypothesis-testing results indicated that all three proposed associations were statistically significant and supported. Attitude was positively associated with SEI ($\beta = 0.307$, $t = 4.462$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students with more favourable views of sustainable entrepreneurship reported stronger SEI. Subjective norms were also positively associated with SEI ($\beta = 0.234$, $t = 4.082$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that more favourable subjective norms were associated with stronger SEI. Self-efficacy showed the strongest positive association with SEI ($\beta = 0.344$, $t = 4.790$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that students reporting higher confidence in their ability to undertake entrepreneurial activities also reported stronger SEI.

Discussion

The findings indicate that attitude, subjective norms, and self-efficacy were positively and significantly associated with SEI. These results are consistent with the proposed TPB-based framework. Attitude was positively associated with SEI ($\beta = 0.307$), indicating that more favourable evaluations of sustainable entrepreneurship were associated with stronger SEI. This finding suggests that educational approaches and exposure to sustainability-related entrepreneurship may be relevant to students' attitudes towards sustainable entrepreneurship. Previous studies, including Vuorio et al. (2018) and Ndofirepi (2022), have reported positive associations between attitude and sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial intention among university students. Subjective norms have also been identified as a relevant correlate of SEI, although the magnitude of their association may vary across contexts and samples. Although subjective norms were positively associated with SEI ($\beta = 0.234$), their standardised coefficient was smaller than those of attitude and self-efficacy in this sample. This finding suggests that, in this sample, attitude and self-efficacy had stronger associations with SEI than subjective norms. Consistent with prior research, perceived expectations and support from peers, family members, lecturers, and the wider social environment have been associated with students' intentions to pursue sustainable entrepreneurship (Bouarar et al., 2022; Santika et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2023). These findings suggest that students who perceive a supportive social environment that values sustainability and pro-environmental behaviour may report stronger entrepreneurial intentions. In addition, the association of social support with entrepreneurial

intention may be stronger where institutional support and environmental sustainability values are present (Bouarar et al., 2022).

Self-efficacy had the largest standardised path coefficient among the predictors ($\beta = 0.344$), indicating the strongest association with SEI in this sample. This finding suggests that perceived capability may be relevant to students' intention to engage in sustainable entrepreneurship, alongside subjective norms. This finding is consistent with studies reporting a positive association between students' entrepreneurial confidence and entrepreneurial intention (Peng et al., 2021; Hussain et al., 2021). The bootstrapped t-values for all three paths exceeded conventional significance thresholds, providing statistical support for the reported associations.

Overall, the findings indicate that attitude and self-efficacy had larger standardised associations with SEI than subjective norms in this sample. Establishing and managing a sustainable venture may be challenging because students may need to navigate market uncertainty while addressing environmental and social considerations. In this context, students' confidence in their own abilities (self-efficacy) and their attitude towards sustainable entrepreneurship may be associated with their SEI. Support from family, friends, and peers may also be associated with students' willingness to consider entrepreneurship; however, social encouragement alone may be insufficient when students lack confidence in their ability to start and manage a business. These findings suggest that higher education institutions could complement awareness-based activities with opportunities for students to develop practical skills and entrepreneurial self-efficacy through experiential learning.

For the public universities involved in this study, efforts to support SEI could include entrepreneurship programmes that integrate sustainability-related activities with experiential learning. For example, universities could incorporate sustainable business projects into existing entrepreneurship courses and provide opportunities for students to learn directly from entrepreneurs engaged in sustainable businesses. Such activities may provide students with practical experience and opportunities to develop confidence in undertaking entrepreneurial tasks. These initiatives may be particularly relevant for final-year business and entrepreneurship students preparing to transition from university to the workforce and consider their future career options.

Evidence from higher education institutions suggests potential value in integrating sustainability into entrepreneurship education. For example, at the University of Tarumanagara in Jakarta, Indonesia, the integration of green entrepreneurship into entrepreneurship education was associated with students' green entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions (Aurellia & Nuringsih, 2023). This suggests that sustainability concepts can be integrated into entrepreneurship curricula rather than treated as a separate topic. When students have opportunities to connect sustainability principles with practical entrepreneurial activities, they may develop a clearer understanding of how these principles can be applied in venture creation and management.

In universities in Jiangxi, China, research on green entrepreneurial behaviour among university students has examined experiential elements, including role models, endorsements, and hands-on projects, as factors associated with green entrepreneurial behaviour (Shenmiao & Kamruddin, 2024). Freiha and Mawad (2025) reported that, in a cross-country study of Pakistan and China, SEI was associated with individual values, institutional support, and

entrepreneurship education, within country-specific cultural contexts. The findings also suggest that national and cultural contexts may be relevant when considering the association between entrepreneurship education and SEI. Additionally, a study by Baber et al. (2023) across universities in India reported an association between sustainability education and SEI through TPB-related constructs. The study also highlights the potential role of universities in fostering sustainability-related norms that may be associated with SEI. Cai et al. (2022) also suggested that practical opportunities, such as sustainability projects with industry partners, may be associated with SEI by enabling students to learn from green-business practices. Tiemann (2018) highlighted the potential value of university-level support systems for sustainable entrepreneurship. Such systems may combine top-down and bottom-up strategies involving curriculum, mentorship, funding, and ecosystem development.

The literature suggests that supporting SEI among university students may require an approach that considers both individual-level factors and institutional conditions. SEI may be supported when students' beliefs are accompanied by institutional backing, structured curricula, and practical exposure.

Conclusion

This study examined factors associated with sustainable entrepreneurial intention (SEI) among final-year students at nine selected public universities in Malaysia. It examined the associations of attitude, subjective norms, and self-efficacy with students' SEI. The results indicated that all three factors were positively and significantly associated with SEI. Among the predictors, self-efficacy had the largest standardised path coefficient, followed by attitude and subjective norms. These findings suggest that students' confidence in their capabilities was positively associated with SEI. In addition, favourable attitudes towards sustainable entrepreneurship and more favourable subjective norms were positively associated with SEI.

This study provides empirical evidence on factors associated with SEI among public university students in Malaysia. The findings contribute to understanding of the associations between cognitive and social factors and students' sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial intentions.

Future research could extend the study framework by incorporating Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to examine the potential roles of environmental and institutional factors in relation to SEI. Subsequent studies could also examine emotional intelligence as a potential moderator of the associations between attitude, subjective norms, self-efficacy, and SEI. Such approaches could provide a broader understanding of the factors associated with SEI among university students.

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