E-Learning Readiness on Bumiputera SME's Intention for Adoption of Online Entrepreneurship Training in Malaysia

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Abstract E-learning is an increasingly popular educational technology of the 21st century. As a key factor in developing the global knowledge economy, the implementation of e-learning has been carried out in educational institutions and also corporate organizations and government agencies. The importance of e-learning has led to the need in assessing Bumiputera SMEs' e-learning readiness to ensure they are capable of using the e-learning environment technology in the best way possible. Entrepreneurship training is recognized as an important determinant of entrepreneurial performance and success. In Malaysia, entrepreneurship training has been supported by the Government especially for Bumiputera SMEs through the government agency- Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA). This research aims to discover the Bumiputera SMEs' readiness for e-learning and their intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training in the future. The significance of this research is that the results attained will help the Government agencies in their planning, decisions and implementation of the latest e-learning environments for the Bumiputera SMEs throughout Malaysia.

Keywords E-learning Readiness, Entrepreneurship Training, Bumiputera Entrepreneurs

1. Introduction

For the success of a country's economy and social development, entrepreneurship plays a major contributing role. Entrepreneurial activity is a prerequisite for the success of economic growth, development, job creation, social well-being and political stability (Timmons & Spinelli, 2004; Eggers, Kraus, Hughes, Laraway & Snycerski, 2013; Filser & Eggers, 2014; Henderson & Weiler, 2010). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are of particular importance in developing countries for their role in economic growth; improving income distribution, productivity, efficiency and economic structure during an economic downturn (Abdullah & Manan, 2011). In the Malaysian context, the role of entrepreneurship is critical for Malaysia's vision of being a fully developed country by the year 2020 (Razak, 2011).

Thus, great effort is put into the promotion of entrepreneurship in developing countries with the strategy of the development, implementation, and distribution of entrepreneurship training programs (Martinez et al., 2010).

In Malaysia, the rapid growth of web-based technologies, internet broadband bandwidth and speed and the high usage of the Internet have made teaching and learning via the Internet, or e-learning, more viable in recent years. Many universities and educationally-based industries have set up e-learning environments (Khalid, Yusof, Heng, & Yunus, 2006). As e-learning becomes increasingly popular, government agencies for entrepreneurship development and training such as MARA are developing e-learning environments for their Bumiputera SMEs. It is important to assess the user's e-learning readiness to ensure they are capable of using the e- learning environment technology in the best way possible. This research intends to study the effect of the Bumiputera SMEs' e-learning readiness on their intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training in Malaysia.

Thus this study addresses the following four related research questions:

1. What are the e-learning readiness factors that affect Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training?
2. What are the relationships among the factors identified in question 1 that affect Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training?
3. Among the factors and relationships that affect Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training, which factors can be used to predict Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training?
4. What are the theoretical and practical implications of the research findings?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Entrepreneurship Training

Glaub and Frese (2011) reviewed 30 published and unpublished studies and concludes that entrepreneurship training programs seems to positively affect entrepreneurial performance. From Botha, Van Vuuren and Kunene, (2015)'s review of eight entrepreneurship training models by scholars, they recommend that the training of SMEs should focus on the development of key functional competencies (finance, marketing, operations and legal skills) and key enterprising competencies (motivation and the securing/ controlling of resources skills) as key to becoming an established business.

Kader, Mohamad and Ibrahim (2009) concludes that the determinants of SME success in Malaysia are government assistance in training and extension services such as courses in entrepreneurship, marketing, quality management, technical skills, basic accounting, advisory services, business information, technical knowledge and skills, moral support and awards / recognition.

2.2. E-learning

Sangrà, Vlachopoulos and Cabrera (2012), defined e-learning as "E-learning is an approach to teaching and learning, representing all or part of the educational model applied, that is based on the use of electronic media and devices as tools for improving access to training, communication and interaction and that facilitates the adoption of new ways of understanding and developing learning."

The benefits of e-learning are cost reduction through reduced travelling costs and downtime from workplaces. In addition to cost benefits, the other benefits of e-learning are its potential to: increase employee retention, rapidly develop, deploy and update courses; provide effective training, available anytime and anywhere; boost productivity; broaden training opportunities; stay competitive; improve motivation and morale; and implement strategic initiatives (Minton, 2000: Selvarajah and Sajilan, (2014).

The challenges of e-learning are the substantial up-front costs involved (Welsh et al., 2003). The costs required include investment for developing IT infrastructure and human resources; designing and building the actual courses, and providing hardware and software to allow users to access the e-learning systems. As technology is rapidly evolving and systems may become outdated or obsolete, the are many additional ongoing costs for upgrading and maintaining the systems. Lack of technical skills, fear of technology, negative attitudes towards technology usage and lack of technical support; the possibility of system crashes, bandwidth and infrastructure issues and integrating e-learning technology with the existing systems with software and hardware compatibilities, are also issues that challenge the implementation of e-learning (Ali & Magalhaes, 2008).

2.3. Learning Readiness

E-learning readiness can be defined as the level of readiness of certain institution or organization towards various aspects of the technology of e-learning. Therefore, any e-learning readiness will be conducted prior to the introduction of the e-learning technology itself to the prospective users, whom will be the respondents to the e-learning readiness assessment. The typical e-learning readiness assessment will measure the users' ability in adapting to technological challenges, collaborative learning and training as well as the synchronous and asynchronous self-paced learning and training (Hashim & Tasir, 2014).

E-learning readiness measurements studies have been mostly conducted in developed countries (Haney, 2002) and research in the context of developing countries is still lacking (Aydin & Tasci, 2005). There have been studies on the readiness of e-learning in Malaysia but are focused on the academic institutions such the study of e-readiness among enablers of e-learning (Abas, 2005), e-readiness among school leavers (Yoke, Chiam & Lee, 2010), and e-learning readiness at Open University Malaysia (Kaur & Abas, 2004). However, there is a lack of research on the effect of e-learning readiness of SMEs in Malaysia and this study is intended to address this gap in the literature.

In their study of e-learning readiness in Malaysia, Abas, Kaur and Harun (2004) cited that E-learning readiness in ASEAN countries were examined using constructs such as infrastructure, political will, integration of business requirements into a country's policies, legislation and regulation with regards to E-learning, as well as innovations that improve productivity and standard of living. Another report cited was by the Economic Intelligent Unit that assessed six categories: technology infrastructure, their general business environment, the degree to which E-business is being adopted by consumers and companies, social and cultural conditions that influence Internet usage, and the availability of services to support E-businesses. In comparison to these report, another study cited was by McConnell International (2000) that examined E-readiness with the constructs of connectivity, E-leadership, informal security, human capital, and the E-business climate. Abas et al (2004) concluded that although operational definitions and assessment criteria for readiness are varied, most measures of E-learning readiness examine the following dimensions: the learner, the management, the personnel, the culture, the provision of relevant content, as well as technical, financial, and environmental resources.

For the purpose of this research, the e-learning readiness construct that will be measured are the following dimensions: the learner readiness, cultural readiness, technical, financial, and environmental readiness (Abas et al, 2004).

2.4. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Since the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is the most widely used model to study the acceptance of technology, this study will adopt the TAM. The Technology

Acceptance Model (TAM) is an adaptation of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to the field of Information Systems (IS). TAM is capable of explaining user behavior across a broad range of end-user computing technologies and user populations, while at the same time being both parsimonious and theoretically justified (Lee, Cheung, & Chen, 2005). TAM posits that Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use determine an individual's intention to use a system, with intention to use serving as a mediator of actual system use. Perceived Usefulness is also seen as being directly impacted by Perceived Ease of Use (Davis, 1989).

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework for this research is adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with the external variables adapted from E-learning Readiness in Malaysia Report (Abas et al., 2004).

2.6. Research Methodology

This is a cross sectional quantitative research with a random sampling of the population. Cross sectional studies provide a clear 'snapshot' of the outcome and the characteristics associated with the study at a specific point in time. Cross-sectional research is focused on finding relationships between variables at one moment in time (Bethlehem, 1999).

Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques (Babbie, 2010). Quantitative research deals in numbers, logic, and an objective stance and the data is gathered using structured research instruments. The results are based on larger sample sizes (than in qualitative research) that are representative of the population.

Table 1

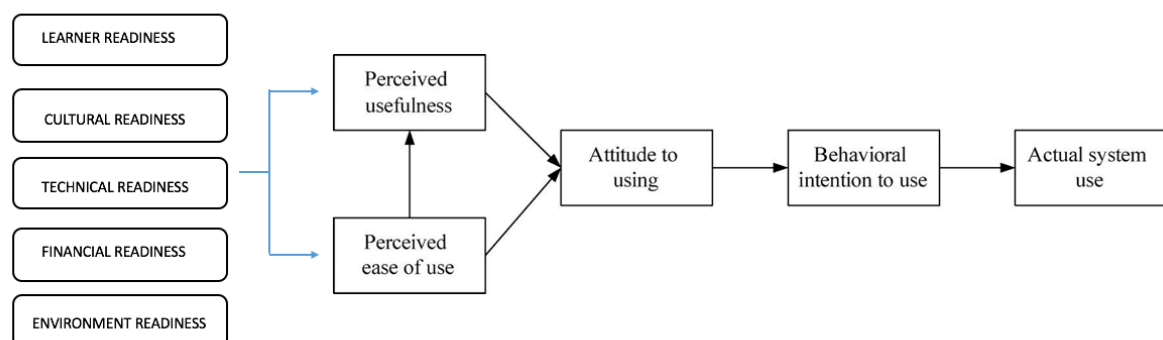| Area of Readiness	Definition
LEARNER READINESS	This refers to the readiness of the learner or trainee in terms of time commitment, discipline and interest in E-learning the perception of the value of qualifications obtained via E-learning.
CULTURAL READINESS	The enculturation of E-learning in terms of Internet use and networked technologies to disseminate information, communication, interaction and teaching. Basically it is how the institution/organisation is ready to enculturate E-learning as a mode for teaching and learning as perceived by the policy makers, enablers and learners/trainees.
TECHNICAL READINESS	This refers to the institution/organisation providing the necessary infrastructure for E-learning in terms of technical help, E-learning content delivery, broadband facilities as well as a Learning Management System (LMS).
FINANCIAL READINESS	This refers to learner/trainee and institutional/organisational readiness to spend or allocate funds to develop and/or acquire E-learning. It generally refers to whether a learner/trainee or institution/organisation is finacially ready for E-learning programmes as perceived by policy makers, enablers, and learners/trainees.
ENVIRONMENTAL READINESS	This refers to the readiness of the country as a whole in terms of the presence of government policy, the role of mass media, intellectual property regulations and proficiency in the English language. It refers to a readiness of a society/nation for E-learning as perceived by the policy makers, providers, enablers and learners/trainees.

Figure 1

2.7. Sample

The respondent of this research will be selected from a random sampling of 30,000 Bumiputera SMEs throughout Malaysia, who have attended classroom style entrepreneurship training with MARA in the period of 2010-2015.

The minimum sample size for random sampling is estimated to be 384 and this sample size also satisfies the criteria for the use of descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques used in the study.

2.8. Research Instrument

The research instrument is a self-administered, structured survey questionnaire that will sent to MARA Entrepreneur Development Centers that is located in all states of Malaysia. The administrator of the centers will invite entrepreneurs registered with the centers to complete the survey questionnaires. The completed questionnaires will be collected by the researcher to be tabulated through data analysis software.

2.9. Significance

This research is significant to policy makers, government agencies (MARA) and training providers to determine the Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training.

Firstly, this study will provide data for policy makers – Ministry of Rural and Regional Development Malaysia, to develop program and guidelines best suited to the level of e-learning readiness of Bumiputera SMEs throughout Malaysia.

Secondly, the study will provide better understanding of factors and relationships that affect Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training. This will enable the relevant government agencies, e-learning platform providers and e-learning content providers to design and develop the most suitable online entrepreneurship training programs.

Thirdly, this study will discover the relationships among the factors influencing Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training. The findings of this study will help the relevant government agencies to leverage on the availability and low cost of e-learning tools and resources online.

Fourthly, the study will be useful as the initial research data that can be expanded upon in a bigger study of the SMEs' population. As there is a lack of research in this topic especially in the developing countries, this study is a starting point for further in-depth research with more variables to determine the different factors that impact SMEs' intention to adopt e-learning. Finally, the study will enrich the existing body of knowledge and will be valuable for researchers and practitioners for measuring intention to adopt e-learning particularly in the developing countries.

3. Conclusions

The emergence of e-learning as a preferred environment for teaching and learning must not be ignored in entrepreneurship training. With its substantial cost reduction and the ability to reach learners anywhere and anytime, the use of e-learning is crucial to reach Bumiputera SMEs throughout urban, sub-urban and rural Malaysia. Through e-learning, entrepreneurship training programs can be made available to more Bumiputera SMEs. With entrepreneurship training, the potential for improved entrepreneurial performance will positively impact Malaysia' economic growth.

Therefore, it is important to discover the factors and relationships that affect Bumiputera SMEs' intention to adopt online entrepreneurship training. The findings of this research is beneficial to policy makers, government agencies and training providers; and will influence the development of policies, guidelines and the successful implementation of e-learning environments for online entrepreneurship training of Bumiputera SMEs in Malaysia.

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