Role of Family in Entrepreneurial Leadership Development of University Students

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Abstract: Family has been identified as the first place that enhances students’ awareness about, attitude toward and capabilities of entrepreneurship. However, little attention has been directed to how family nurtures entrepreneurial abilities particularly, the competencies to lead entrepreneurial activities in students. This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how family develops entrepreneurial leadership competencies of university students. A total of fourteen student entrepreneurial leaders, defined as students who were highly involved in leading university entrepreneurship clubs and projects, was purposefully selected and interviewed. Half of the students had one of their parents as an entrepreneur and the parents of the other half were not involved in entrepreneurship. Analysis of the data revealed that parents played an influential role in inspiring students to get involved in entrepreneurial activities, whether or not they themselves were entrepreneurs. Furthermore, lived and continuous involvement in family business developed the students’ self-efficacy in leading entrepreneurial activities. The findings are discussed in terms of theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: Family · Business · Entrepreneurial leadership · University students

INTRODUCTION

Family has been recognized as the first place that enhances student’s awareness about entrepreneurship [1, 2]. Family is one of the most important institutions that forms student’s attitude toward entrepreneurship, develops their capabilities to step into new venture creation, creativity in developing new business ideas and thereby improves their intention to choose entrepreneurship as their future career path [3-8]. Furthermore, growing in a family where one of the relatives and particularly, parents established and running their own business not only provides an inspiring and supportive environment and the requisite information and resources for launching a new business but also creates an opportunity to experience realities and challenges of the business world [1, 9]. However, little attention has been directed to how family develops entrepreneurial capabilities of university students as potential entrepreneurs particularly, their competency of leading entrepreneurial activities during the critical years of university when students have a strong desire to step into entrepreneurship [3, 4, 10].

The current study attempts to narrow this gap through providing deeper insights on how family develops university students’ entrepreneurial leadership competencies. It contributes to entrepreneurship theory development through focusing on the common ground of family, entrepreneurship and leadership. Moreover, it also provides contributions to the body of knowledge on entrepreneurial leadership and entrepreneurial leadership theory development through including family as one of the influential factors affecting development of competencies that enable students to lead entrepreneurial activities. Finally, the findings also extend beyond existing literature and empirical studies on prominent roles that parents play in developing student’s entrepreneurial leadership. This paper begins by reviewing the literature on the effects of family in nurturing entrepreneurial behaviour followed by examining the common ground between family, entrepreneurship and leadership. Then, methodology of the study and findings are reported. Finally, implications of the findings and areas for future research are discussed.

Family and Entrepreneurial Behaviour: In general, family business studies lack a conceptual definition and theoretical foundation [11]. More importantly, entrepreneurship research “has used very selective lenses that often ignore the family dimension” [12, p. 442].

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This is even more serious in examining the association between family and students’ entrepreneurial capability development. Therefore, our understanding about the impacts of family on creating entrepreneurial capabilities of students is limited to studies that considered family as one of the demographic factors affecting students’ entrepreneurial intention and behaviour. A review of literature on the role of family in shaping students’ entrepreneurial behaviour indicates that most of entrepreneurship researchers employed three common theories to explain the impacts of family on students’ entrepreneurial intention and behaviour which are: theory of Entrepreneurial Event [13], theory of Planned Behaviour [14] and theory of Social Cognition [15].

The theory of Entrepreneurial Event [13] which has been originally developed to describe entrepreneurship phenomenon considers intention to start-up a new business as a result of the interaction between “person” and “contextual factors”. This interaction highly influence one’s perceptions toward his or her ability to carry out entrepreneurial behaviours (feasibility), favourability to become an entrepreneur (desirability) and willingness to act according to entrepreneurial intention (propensity to act) and establish a new business [16, 17]. The findings of several studies confirmed the positive impact of involvement with a family business and students’ perceived feasibility and desirability to become an entrepreneur [4, 18, 19].

In less than a decade, the theory of Planned Behaviour was developed [14]. This theory is highly accepted in many disciplines. Through a socio-psychological perspective, the theory concentrates on decision to adopt behaviour as a result of intention; the determination, endeavour and perseverance directed to carry out volitional behaviours [14, 20]. According to the theory, intention is a function of three key components including perceived ability to perform the desired behaviour (control over behaviour), perceived negative or positive value of the desired behaviour and its’ consequences (attitude toward behaviour) and perceived expectations of significant others about being an entrepreneur (subjective or social norms). Interactions among all these components develop a sense of capability and emotional tendency which drives individuals to step into new venture creation [16, 17, 21, 22]. The findings of several studies show the significant impact of family values and expectations on students’ entrepreneurial intention [2, 21]. However, there are some researches that failed to find a significant relationship between having relatives with entrepreneurial experience and students’ entrepreneurial intention [18].

The contradictory research results employing the theory of Entrepreneurial Event and theory of Planned Behaviour led entrepreneurship scholars to conclude that the theories do not portray a complete picture of how students’ entrepreneurial capabilities develop in family contexts. In addition, there is little information on the link between intention to become an entrepreneur and the actual capabilities of new venture creation [16, 19, 21, 22]. Therefore, entrepreneurship researchers sought more comprehensive theoretical foundations for examining entrepreneurial behaviour.

Recently, Social Cognitive theory [15] turned to become one of the main theoretical frameworks for studying entrepreneurial intention and behaviour [18, 23-27]. Based on the theory, action is a function of three main elements including person, behaviour and environment and is highly dependent on the strength of personal beliefs in one’s abilities to successfully perform a specific task (self-efficacy). Researchers applied the theory in entrepreneurship domain and defined entrepreneurial self-efficacy as the degree of individuals’ beliefs in their abilities to successfully execute the roles and tasks related to entrepreneurship [8]. Therefore, individuals who perceive themselves as lacking entrepreneurial capabilities avoid entrepreneurial activities and consequently, entrepreneurial behaviours. The authors provided empirical evidence for association between having entrepreneurial relatives and students’ perceived entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention. Parents play two prominent roles in developing students’ entrepreneurial self-efficacy and consequently their entrepreneurial intention [18]. First, entrepreneurial parents act as role models for their children and second, they transfer their entrepreneurial skills and experiences to their children. However, the authors failed to find a significant relationship between having entrepreneurial parents and students’ entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention. Recent research findings also show the significant and positive effect of having entrepreneurial parents on the interest to become an entrepreneur [23]. Despite the enormous literature on the relationship between having entrepreneurial parents and students’ entrepreneurial intentions, there is still little information on how family develops entrepreneurial capabilities in students.

**Role of Family in Developing Entrepreneurship and Leadership Capabilities:** From the large body of literature focusing on family and entrepreneurial intention and behaviour, only few researches looked at the common
ground between family, entrepreneurship and leadership with the purpose of theory and practice development in entrepreneurship and leadership disciplines based on particular context of the family businesses [28, 29]. Researchers argue that "The failure of scholarship to recognize, embrace and deliberately incorporate family businesses into the mainstream theories of entrepreneurship and management may lead to the neglect of factors that would otherwise make those theories more robust and valuable" [12, p. 441]. The author further emphasizes that involvement of family in entrepreneurship creates a profound opportunity for understanding how entrepreneurial qualities develop. Other researchers also emphasize embedding family perspective in entrepreneurship research stating that "researchers need to include family dimensions in their conceptualizing and modelling, their sampling and analyzing and their interpretations and implications" [28, p. 574]. They also identified the urgent need for understanding the role that family plays in developing entrepreneurial capabilities.

On the other hand, entrepreneurship and leadership scholars have recently concentrated on the commonalities between the two fields and merged them into a new paradigm of entrepreneurial leadership in order to improve theory and practice development in the both school of thoughts [30-33]. Based on definition, entrepreneurial leadership is a distinctive type of leadership in highly competitive and uncertain situations such as new venture creation [34]. To successfully lead entrepreneurial activities, therefore, entrepreneurial leaders require to learn and develop specific competencies [33-38]. These competencies can be developed through being engaged in real roles and tasks of entrepreneurial leaders and dealing with the challenges and problems associated with entrepreneurial venturing [33, 37, 39]. The findings of a recent study indicate that having relations with entrepreneurial parents and entrepreneurship experiences in the family play a critical role in developing one’s entrepreneurial leadership values, style and behaviour [40].

In general, although family is a fruitful context for entrepreneurial leadership studies and specifically how family develops the capabilities to lead entrepreneurial activities [12], there is little information about the influence of family in creating entrepreneurial leadership capabilities [40]. Based on the literature about the common ground between family, entrepreneurship and leadership, this study concentrates on how family develops entrepreneurial leadership competencies of university students.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

We employed qualitative research method in this study to gain a deeper understanding of how family develops students’ entrepreneurial leadership competencies. Researchers suggest qualitative research techniques for better understanding of the family business and entrepreneurship [11]. Moreover, entrepreneurship researchers utilized qualitative research method to gain rich insights on how entrepreneurs learned and developed their entrepreneurial leadership competencies [38, 40].

Investigating students’ perceptions of the effects of the family in developing their ability to lead entrepreneurial activities was based on the rational that students’ views are a powerful indicator of the impacts of different factors specifically, their parents on their entrepreneurial behaviour [11].

**Participants:** This study involved fourteen undergraduate students who were highly engaged in leading university entrepreneurship clubs and activities for more than two semesters. Undergraduates were purposefully selected as the participants of this study [41] based on the assumption that they are the most interested university students in entrepreneurship [3, 4, 10]. Their active involvement in leading entrepreneurship clubs and projects assure that they have considerable experiences in different leadership practices [40]. Half of the respondents were selected from the students who had one of their parents (four mothers and three fathers) as an entrepreneur (Table 1) and the other half were selected from the students whose parents were not involved in entrepreneurship (Table 2). This allowed us to compare and contrast the impact of the family in developing the students’ entrepreneurial leadership. The participants were selected from two public and two private universities (in central zone of Malaysia) in order to include the variety among students in public and private universities [42]. The average age of the students with and without entrepreneurial parents was almost the same respectively 22.4 and 22.2 years. One of the respondents in each group (with and without entrepreneurial parents) was female and all the rest were male. Of the students with entrepreneurial parents, three were from public universities and four students were from private universities. Five of the students without entrepreneurial parents were from public universities and two were from private universities. The students came from different educational backgrounds including Business Administration, Landscape Architecture, IT Business, Computer Science, Creative Multimedia, Telecommunication Engineering, Accounting and Networking System.
Table 1: Background information of the students with entrepreneurial parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Having parents who are entrepreneurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muaz</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadiah</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Landscape Architecture</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firdaus</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhyar</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>IT Business</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hysarn</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Software Engineering</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saif</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Creative Multimedia</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Telecommunication Engineering</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Background information of the students without entrepreneurial parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zakaria</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eza</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fareez</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakim</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariz</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Networking System</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zahid</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection:** We selected semi-structured interviews which is the most appropriate method for examining how entrepreneurial leadership competencies develop [38, 40]. The interviews were conducted at the participants’ universities and focused on identifying how the students perceived their family contributions in developing their ability to lead entrepreneurial activities. A list of questions on family impacts on entrepreneurial leadership learning was developed based on the literature review. To confirm the content validity of the interview questions, they were given to an “expert panel” consisting of three local university entrepreneurship and qualitative research lecturers. The interviews lasted between 50 to 110 minutes and were recorded on a digital audio recorder. The interviews were transcribed verbatim within 48 hours of the actual interview. The transcriptions were sent to the respondents for confirming the content validity.

**Data Analysis:** We utilized NVIVO 8 software to analyse the data and facilitate data organization and coding. The data was analysed based on two main phases [43]. The first phase was “preliminary data analysis”. This phase was carried out during the data collection process and after each interview was conducted. This phase focused on recognizing the emerging issues, potential themes, gaps in the data and future research directions. The second phase was “thematic analysis”. This phase was performed once all of the interviews had been conducted and data collection had been completed. It aimed at reducing the data to manageable and meaningful groups, categories and themes based on research questions. Two main approaches were used for thematic data analysis including “block and file” and “conceptual mapping”. First, we read all interview transcriptions and underlined the parts where the students described the impacts of their family on developing their abilities to lead entrepreneurial activities. Then, we read the underlined parts of the transcriptions to identify different contributions that the students perceived for their family in developing their entrepreneurial leadership. Afterwards, we compared two groups of the students with and without entrepreneurial parents in order to identify the similarities and differences in the impacts of the family in their entrepreneurial leadership development. Through the second approach to thematic data analysis, “conceptual mapping”, we labelled emerging issues and identified interconnections between different themes.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Examination of the data revealed two dominant themes related to the impacts that the students perceived for their family on developing their abilities to lead entrepreneurial activities. First, parents played an influential role in inspiring students to get involved in entrepreneurial activities, whether or not they themselves were entrepreneurs. Second, lived and continuous involvement in family businesses develop students’ self-efficacy of leading entrepreneurial activities. Each of the themes is presented in the following sections.

**Parents and Inspiration for Involving in Entrepreneurial Activities:** Parents played a prominent role in inspiring and encouraging the students to get involved in entrepreneurial activities and thereby develop their entrepreneurial leadership competencies. For example, Akhyar whose father has a small catering business explained his parents’ role in encouraging and supporting him to do business as “my parents support me
100 percent in doing business. My father even suggested me ideas of doing business to encourage me to do business..." Interestingly, the parents’ role in inspiring the students for entrepreneurial activities did not appear to be dependent on being an entrepreneur. Hakim, Eza and Muaz’s parents greatly encourage them to do entrepreneurial activities although they are not entrepreneurs. None of Hakim’s parents is an entrepreneur. However, they encouraged and supported him to do entrepreneurial activities:

“My parents are very open. They said you do what you like...they are very supportive [and] encouraging. If they asked me to just be an accountant, that is their dream not my dream. They know that I have the dream to become an entrepreneur...so they said this is what you want to do, do it."

Eza’s parents also are not entrepreneurs. However, his father has a positive attitude toward entrepreneurial activities and encouraged him to write up a proposal for establishing a business because recognized the potential in her:

“My dad is a government servant... but he is very agreed with entrepreneurship. He is planning to open up a convenient shop. I have a background of business and accounting...so my dad said I see [the] potential...you can come out with the business proposal...”

Muaz believes that even though his mother is an entrepreneur, she did not play as influential role as his father who is a lecturer in encouraging him to become an entrepreneur and establishing a small enterprise in selling stationary:

“When I finish my secondary school, it was my father [who] didn’t allow me to work. Like being an employee. He encouraged [me and] asked me to work for myself. My dad said to me why not you do trading. So I started up by registering, an enterprise in stationary business."

As observed, parents had significant impacts in inspiring students to do entrepreneurial activities whether or not they themselves were entrepreneurs. This inspiration was the first step that directed the students to get involved in entrepreneurial activities.

Family Businesses and Developing Students’ Self-efficacy in Entrepreneurial Leadership: In addition to the influential role of parents in inspiring and supporting the students to step into entrepreneurial activities, lived and continuous involvement in family businesses had significant impacts on developing entrepreneurial leadership self-efficacy of students with entrepreneurial parents in many ways. First, daily involvement in family business from childhood enhanced some of students’ understanding of leadership in a business, ability to communicate with and influence people and motivation for entrepreneurial activities. Hisyam whose mother is an entrepreneur doing a business in furniture trading replied the question about how family business helped him to learn leadership of entrepreneurial activities as:

“It started from my childhood. I stayed in our shop. So, I saw the furniture trading every day... during that time I didn’t understand what is entrepreneurship all about. I just learned the trading informally from my mother. I could feel every moment how my mother deals with people, how she communicates with clients. How she sells the furniture and all that. She helped her to sell the furniture. So, I was involved [in the business] and right now I have the passion too.”

Second, lived and continuous involvement in family business enhanced students’ awareness about and changed their perceptions of their entrepreneurial capabilities. This is evident in Ariif’s comment whose father is an entrepreneur doing businesses in telecommunication, agriculture and chicken breeding:

“Most of the time I help him a bit to see how is the market, how good is the things. [I] give him some ideas. So basically from doing with him, it helped me a lot to explore my ability in business. I mean he didn’t teach me but I just learned by how he was doing it... so I got a few bit ideas about myself. I mean now I know [that] I can do it.”

Third, the entrepreneurial parents enhanced some of the students’ confidence in doing a business through a close guidance and mentoring them. For example, Sairy whose mother is an entrepreneur doing a business in selling wedding cakes highlighted his close relationship with his mother in enhancing his confidence in doing the business:

“I get the entrepreneurship skill from my mom. Because she is the one who started the cake business. So I learned it from experiencing with her day by day. Because I started selling the cakes from primary school. She gave me some ideas, do this, do that. If [there is] any problem I can ask her how to do this, how to do that. She guides me in every step. This gives me confidence [in] doing the business.”

Finally, entrepreneurial parents emerged as the students’ entrepreneurial leadership role models who they want to comply with in understanding and doing the business, being opportunistic and being adventurous to try new business ideas as Ariif asserted:

“By looking to my father I learned a lot. I mean someday I want to be like him. He knows what the job is. He knows how to get it done and he is very smart to look in the opportunity that is available in the market and he [did] not limited himself only to the field that he likes. He also likes agriculture. So he before goes to the venture, he does a lot of business in it.”
Further into the interview, Ariif highlighted his father as his role model in human relations and networking:

“The way he appears is that he get a lot of networking. He is very friendly. He can be familiar or get friend with anyone. Even people from other countries also can be his friends in a second. It was quite impressive for me. I want to be like him one day. By doing the business I know that networking is very important. So that is part of how he can become successful and I can use it.”

In addition to positive impacts of the family in developing students’ entrepreneurial leadership, it may also have negative influences in students’ attitude toward entrepreneurship. Daily involvement of the parents in family business made Nadia's whose parents own a photo framing shop realize the realities, challenges and the “darker side” of entrepreneurs’ life so that it stopped her to become an entrepreneur in near future:

“When I was young, I felt like very much neglected and even my brothers as well. The family tightness was not there sometimes. My father used to work for seven days a week and sixteen hours a day...and I am not so sure whether he is happy or not but at least my childhood was not that happy and also my father’s health... he is having heart attack, high blood pressure and lots of things and my mother as well. Because they have to work very hard and they don’t have their meal on the proper time and sometimes they don’t eat. My father has a very serious gastric problem...I won’t open my business unless I learn [how] to do it.”

As observed, lived and continuous involvement in family business improve students’ self-efficacy in establishing a business. Furthermore, parents’ involvement in business changed the students’ perceptions toward their entrepreneurial abilities and motivated them to learn how to avoid the challenges of leading a business.

**CONCLUSION**

Few of the robust literature on family business and entrepreneurship provide a deep understanding of the family impacts on developing entrepreneurial abilities specifically, entrepreneurial leadership competencies [40]. This lack of empirical insights is even more serious for university students as the most likely prospective entrepreneurs [5, 4, 10]. Scholars argue “it is vital that further research delves deeper into the varying levels of “leadership preparedness” brought to new venture creation” [40, p. 5].

The main purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how family develops university students’ ability to lead entrepreneurial activities. The findings indicate that parents play a critical role in inspiring and motivating students to get involved in entrepreneurial activities whether or not they themselves are entrepreneurs. Therefore, parents may have positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship and encourage their children to get involved in entrepreneurial activities regardless they themselves are entrepreneurs. In contrast to the majority research findings on the relationship between having entrepreneurial parents and entrepreneurial intention and behaviour [8, 23, 25, 26], the findings of this study reveal that parents’ critical role in inspiring students to entrepreneurial activities is not dependent on their involvement in entrepreneurship. Accordingly, parents who were not entrepreneurs encouraged students to get involved in entrepreneurial activities. This contributes a new insight in evaluating the effects of parents in students’ entrepreneurial intention and behaviour. In addition to having entrepreneurial parents, entrepreneurship researchers might need to include attitudes of the students’ parents toward entrepreneurship to evaluate their influences in students’ entrepreneurial intention and behaviour. Furthermore, educators may improve the attitudes of students’ parents toward the benefits of being an entrepreneur and entrepreneurship for personal and social development through parents’ training programs and thereby increase students’ entrepreneurial interest and intention.

In addition, the findings of this study indicate that the respondents’ lived and continuous involvement in family business improves their self-efficacy of leading entrepreneurial activities in many ways. First, it enhanced students’ understanding of leadership in a business, communication skills and ability to influence people and motivation for entrepreneurial activities [1, 9]. Second, it improved students’ awareness about their entrepreneurial abilities and changed their perceptions of their ability to lead entrepreneurial activities. Third, close guidance and mentorship of entrepreneurial parents improved students’ confidence in leading a business. Finally, entrepreneurial parents act as the role models of the students not only in their leadership style, but also in recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities and being adventurous to try new business ideas [18]. Therefore, the impact of family business goes beyond improving students’ intention to start-up a business and enhances their
self-efficacy in leading entrepreneurial activities. However, involvement of parents in entrepreneurship makes some of the students aware of the realities and challenges or the “darker side” of leading ones own business and reduces their desire to become an entrepreneur [39]. This finding also confirms the critical importance of self-efficacy in entrepreneurial behaviour [8, 25, 26]. Understanding of these profound impacts can help parents to create an appropriate environment for their children to become highly involved in entrepreneurial activities under their close guidance and mentorship. Knowledge of the sources of entrepreneurial leadership self-efficacy may also help educators to design more purposive entrepreneurship education programs to develop students' competencies of leading entrepreneurial activities [8]. Entrepreneurship educators may also utilize the entrepreneurial potential among students who came from entrepreneurial families to improve entrepreneurial leadership abilities among these students through improving the synergy between family business and entrepreneurship education programs and trainings. Furthermore, educators might use this potential to develop students' entrepreneurial leadership by engaging them in leading university entrepreneurship projects and programs [37]. Finally, the impacts of family might need to be included in entrepreneurial leadership theories.

However, further studies with larger and more diverse samples need to be undertaken to examine the impacts of parents' attitudes towards entrepreneurship on students' entrepreneurial intention. Moreover, future research can examine the relationship between involvement in family businesses and improving perceptions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in students. Additionally, researches can be done to investigate which one of family and entrepreneurship education has more significant influence in developing students' ability to lead entrepreneurial activities.

REFERENCES