The recognition and value of entrepreneurship and its contribution towards economic growth, job creation, sources of creativity and productivity, has received increasing attention of the years. As such, developing countries like Malaysia are urging students to engage in entrepreneurship as a career. It has been recognised that undergraduates constitute a significant source for future entrepreneurs in the future. Moreover, the ability to network is one of the most important skills for entrepreneurs to acquire. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between informal and formal networks toward entrepreneurial intention among public university undergraduate students. In conducting this research, a total of 250 bachelor degree students, as respondents, participated in a survey. The results analysed from the survey indicated that the informal network (IN) with moderate correlation and positive relationship with entrepreneurial purpose was important. On the other hand, while the relationship between the formal network (FN) was found to be significant, it was found to have a weak positive relationship towards entrepreneurial intention (EI). The implication and suggestions for future research are also presented in this study.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial Intention, Informal network, Formal network, Networking, Public University

### 1. Introduction

For many years, significant effort has been expended towards promoting and supporting entrepreneurship among individuals who have the confidence and desire for entering into
this field, especially university students. There are many reasons why students are attracted to venture into the field of entrepreneurship. First and foremost is acquiring entrepreneurial knowledge or knowledge of entrepreneurship. The difference between entrepreneurs having acquired knowledge in business and a person without such knowledge is apparent. Without having adequate knowledge and skills, an entrepreneur will be unable to venture into starting a new business, operating and managing the business and gain profits from investing their time and effort. As such, the business would fail to expand or remain sustainable longer term.

On the other hand, having sufficient and vast knowledge, an entrepreneur will be able to create a business while creating employment opportunities and expanding the business. Indeed, entrepreneurship does not only originate from acquiring a business background but also relies on the person’s attitude and resilience. The information acquired through undertaking this study has shown that science and technology students have the intention and desire to become entrepreneurs in the future (Jati Kasuma et al. 2019).

For instance, professionals and researchers in the field of business management have regarded the successful establishment of a new company as evidence of a person’s educational background (Kennedy & Drennan, 2001). Secondly, as the unemployment rate among fresh graduates is increasing year on year, students are seeking other opportunities to establish themselves, such as entrepreneurship. In Malaysia, all students at public higher-level institutions (HLS) are required to enrol in an entrepreneurship course to enhance their entrepreneurial skills. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has also adopted this initiative realising the value of entrepreneurship in education towards fostering the growth of entrepreneurship, thereby leading to less unemployed graduates and increasing business opportunities for fresh graduates (Harian, 2006).

The International Institute for Management Development’s (IMD) ‘World Competitiveness Rankings’ has shown that Malaysia’s ranking fell in 2010, from 10th to 16th in 2011 (IMD records the 2011 World Competitiveness Rankings and the outcome of the “Administration Performance Gap,” 2011). Previous literature has revealed that an organisation’s entrepreneurial activity is affected by different social and personality factors (Gurol & Atsan, 2006). The social factor or demographic factors reflect the gender, family, and personal history, etc., while the personality factor, also known as the trait model, focuses on the personality traits of an entrepreneur. The model assumes that a businessperson has particular intrinsic qualities, desires and attitude that differentiate them from others. In today’s competitive environment, work and unemployment have become a popular subject, in which unemployment has continued to rise, and will continue to do so if not managed appropriately.

On the other hand, entrepreneurial skills will become one of the main determinants of sustainable revenue. Parvaneh and Korosh (2010) argued that contextual conditions, such as informal and formal networks, influence entrepreneurship among university students. Therefore, the goal of this research is to determine the relationship between university students in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, in addition to examining the strength of educational support, institutional support, informal support and formal support towards entrepreneurship, and to determine which of the above-mentioned independent variables has the most significant impact.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurial Intention
Entrepreneurs can be described as those individuals who are persistent and utilise their skills and competencies to put their ideas into action, innovate and manage a business venture within an ever-changing business environment and economy (Chuah, Ting, Alsree, & Cheah, 2015). Further, it is the act of making or implementing novel ideas while anticipating the risks and rewards (Hisrich, Peters, & Shepherd, 2008). Entrepreneurship scholars believe that entrepreneurs serve as a catalyst for innovation and contribute to economic growth and development of an economy by incentivising those around them in managing their business given their expertise and ability in producing and delivering goods and services within respective markets. Given entrepreneurship’s important role in economic and social growth, it has also become a key concern for scholars and policymakers alike (Brancu, Guomundsdottir, Glogor, & Munteanu, 2015).

Intention is an important predictor of behaviour in whether to act. However, intention does not necessarily mean that an individual will act or behave in certain ways, rather, it just a tendency that someone may act in a certain behaviour based on factors leading to their intention. The term ‘intention’ has been used to describe a sign or predict how someone will act in a certain way or behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Ajzen (1991), suggested that the target was an immediate antecedent of behaviour, further assuming that behaviour was not performed thoughtlessly but instead, learned objectively and predictably from behaviour-relevant experiences, reinforced by rewarding events, and undermined by driving events. In other words, once the formation of intentions occurs, actual behaviour is expected. For example, individuals desire to be self-employed by transforming entrepreneurship into a suitable profession which assists them to achieve their personal ambitions, initiate projects, and enjoy financial benefits (Barringer & Ireland, 2010; Davidsson, 1995).

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) has long been recognised as the main predictor of new venture creation (Krueger, Reilly, & Casrud, 2000). According to Bae, Qian, Miao, and Fiet (2014), EIs signify a desire to initiate entrepreneurship (Krueger et al., 2000) or the likelihood that someone would like to have their own business (Crant, 1996). Other scholars describe entrepreneurial purpose as the ability of individuals to conduct entrepreneurial activities, participate in entrepreneurial action, be self-employed or establish new business ventures (Dell, 2008; Dohse & Walter, 2010). Indeed, it typically includes inner heart, determination and the sense of standing on one’s own feet (Zain, Akram, & Ghani, 2010). In social psychology, intention is seen to be the most direct and significant precursor of behaviour (Sheeran & Abraham, 2003).

Entrepreneurial purpose (EP) is also described as a mental process which facilitates and directs the decision-making process of individuals, as well as the implementation of business plans (Bird, 1988; Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Gupta & Bhave, 2007). Moreover, it is an important factor in encouraging the creation of new businesses and has a significant effect on the success, sustainability, and development of companies. Bird (1988) proposed that a deliberate cycle always begins based on personal interests, ideals, preferences, behaviours, and beliefs of an entrepreneur. Similarly, scholars have empirically demonstrated that entrepreneurial motive is a reliable indicator of entrepreneurial behaviour since company behaviour often falls into the category of intentional behaviour. Studying entrepreneurial intent provides useful insights for researchers to understand entrepreneurial processes better and to predict entrepreneurial behaviour by identifying context-based knowledge of entrepreneurial intent (Ismail, Khalid, Othman, Jusoff, & Rahman, 2009).
The findings by Kolvereid and Isaksen (2006) on 297 ‘Business Founders’ using longitudinal data revealed that self-employment intentions later determined self-employment. The target is mediation (Krueger, 2007). Moreover, individuals do not normally start a business as a reflex action, but they do it intentionally, rather than by accident (Krueger et al., 2000; Krueger, 2007). Intention acts as a mediating factor between entrepreneurial behaviour and possible exogenous influences such as demographics, expertize, social, cultural and financial support (Krueger, 2007). Further, they suggest that entrepreneurial intent helps to explain why some individuals wish to start their own business before reviewing the opportunities or settling on the type of business and market they wish to participate in.

2.2 Informal Network

The findings from a paper issued in 2000 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on internal networks highlighted that business people have learned to use distinctive kinds of connections or networks that meet different complementary needs continually. Informal networks (IN) mainly comprise of social connections, family, companions and neighbours. Birley and Stockley (2000) mentioned that entrepreneurs at an early stage of entrepreneurship rely heavily on INs, such as the neighbourhood’s relatives and social contacts, to obtain the resources they need to start their business.

Aldrich and Cliff (2003), mentioned that the role of family members during the early stages of the development of a venture is crucial and therefore deserves more prominence in the context of entrepreneurship. Also, the relationship among family members in a new venture provides a strong tie in an entrepreneurial network (Zafar et al., 2012). Importantly, the family can become a source for financial support as well as moral support for the nascent entrepreneurs. In other words, families offer assistance in both a professional and non-professional manner, which ultimately affects the behaviour of an entrepreneur (Anderson, Jack, & Dodd, 2005). Akinbola et al. (2013), stressed that INs have a significant impact on the EP of university students. This result is consistent with previous studies by Greve and Salaff (2003) and Moore (2006) stressing the family as an important factor affecting university student’s career choices. Raijman (2001), examined the role of social networks (SNs), in which this outcome is also supported. Here individuals are embedded in predicting entrepreneurial intent. The study also found that an individual might be interested in being self-employed if he or she has a relative who engages in entrepreneurship.

According to Sasser and Leonard-Barton (1984), proprietor supervisors understand the network’s noteworthiness in which entrepreneurship is both obliged and promoted by linkages between the assets and opportunities created through the entrepreneur’s interpersonal organisation. By opening doors and networking informal organisations that are important to entrepreneurs, business people are building successful businesses (Birley & Stockley, 2000). On the other hand, our understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour has been more informed by the substance of system sources, especially those associated with the distinction between opening business doors. Here, the network offers an approach to linking data to entrepreneurial execution as a selective logical variable (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). Along these lines, problems related to the qualification between managerial and entrepreneurial abilities, the explanations for particular ethnic gatherings involving
comparative organisations, and the ambiguity of unique attribute profiles that give rise to distinctive results may be better explained (Brockhaus & Horwitz, 1986).

In 1986, Aldrich and Zimmer proposed that an innovative company would be part of an informal partnership that would play a selective role in the business cycle. Interpersonal organisations, in the broadest sense, are defined by the arrangement of performing artists (people or associations) and the arrangement of links between on-screen characters (Brass, 1992). Research on the growth of small firms by (McGhee, Dowling, & Megginson, 1995) confirm the value of entrepreneurial groups that expand the company’s network of contacts and provide the parity of aptitude needed to benefit from various types of satisfying behaviour (Birley & Stockley, 2000). Likewise, businesses having extensive social and INs can draw upon more capital and are more likely to be profitable compared to those having small structures (Shaw, 1998). Indeed, some connections are planned, some are accidental, and some are arranged for coordinated events, such as ‘Chambers of Commerce’, which help to fuel entrepreneurial expansion.

2.3 Formal Network

In contrast, a formal network (FN) also influences an entrepreneur’s intention. Before an individual becomes involved in entrepreneurship, they may need to contemplate how FNs that includes such parties as banks and organisation and trade unions will assist them in gaining access to the resources they need. According to Casrud and Johnson (1989), they not only receive help from their direct contacts but also from numerous potential relationships with lawyers, banks, venture capitalists, accountants, professional advisers, scholars, consumers, suppliers, or trade unions for an entrepreneur to convert their ideas into profits. Greve (1995), argued that when entrepreneurs begin their business venture, they tend to have a limited idea on how to operate their venture; thus, they need assistance from an organisation that is already operational. The organisation here refers to those institutions that provide incentives for different types of economic activity (Estrin, Aidis, & Mickiewics, 2007). Having links with academia and culture-related disciplines is beneficial for entrepreneurial activity and will lead to social networking (Kanney & Goe, 2004). Also, establishing a network with an agency or organisation will allow entrepreneurs to directly market and provide better communication between entrepreneurs (Nicolaou & Birley, 2003). However, in reality, individuals in starting a new company, often consider it burdensome, costly and time-consuming, bureaucratic, with limited subsidies and high taxes and involving a considerable amount of time in acquiring permits. These factors often deter entrepreneurs from finding opportunities as this just adds to the current challenges and difficulties, and risks inherent during the start-up phase. Likewise, limited knowledge of rules and regulations, personal conflicts, how to develop a business plan, inability to gain access to finance, limited support from formal institutions that dissuade individual intentions to become an entrepreneur also add to the list of challenges (Ismail et al., 2009).

In the context of Malaysia, numerous departments, organisations, and programmes are available to assist people to engage in entrepreneurship such as MARA, SMIDEC, MITI and MIDA (Juri, 2009), and banks where loans are provided to entrepreneurs. Access to expertise and information concerning start-up processes and small business management indicate the country’s level of entrepreneurial intent (Busenitz, Gomez, & Spencer, 2000). Likewise, many government agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) provide training and information to those people interested in entrepreneurship and help to stimulate and inspire
interest among people to engage in entrepreneurship.

Access to finance is also important in establishing a new business venture. Hence, they need to access and establish FNs in gaining financial support. There are often three reasons why entrepreneurs need to gain access to finance: to diversify start-up risks, add to their existing capital, and to expand their business. As such, limited access to finances is a significant issue towards enhancing the growth of entrepreneurship (Aftab & Naveed, 2013). Research conducted by Asad, Mohd Sharif & Alekam (2016), discovered that access to finance had a significant impact on entrepreneurs’ performance with networking as the moderator. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Table 1: Hypothesis

| HYPOTHESIS                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|
| H1  There is positive relationship between informal network and entrepreneurial intention |
| H2  There is positive relationship between formal network and entrepreneurial intention |

3. Methodology of Study

In this study, quantitative data-based research was adopted, also utilising a survey questionnaire as the instrument in collecting and analysing the data received respondents, which consisted of bachelor degree students in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak. A non-probability sampling approach was employed for collecting the data in which G-Power analysis software v.3.1.9.2 was used to evaluate and identify the minimum sample size of this study. The effect size of “f square” 0.15, m-error prob 0.05, power (1-β err prob) 0.8 with four predictors, based on the G*Power test, indicated that a sample size of 68 respondents was the minimum size. The ideal sample size, as suggested by (Hair, 2010) is between 100 and 300, while, Roscoe (1975) suggested that the sample size greater than 50 and less than 500 is acceptable. Therefore, a total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among the target population, with only 250 survey questions returned. A five-point Likert scale was also used to determine the degree of consensus between the respondents of this study.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Profile

Table 1: Respondents’ Demographic Profile (N = 250)

| Items               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| **Gender**          |           |                |
| Female              | 97        | 38.8           |
| Male                | 153       | 61.2           |
| **Marital status**  |           |                |
| Single              | 229       | 91.6           |
| Married             | 21        | 8.4            |
| **Age**             |           |                |
| 20 and below        | 6         | 2.4            |
| 21-30               | 236       | 94.4           |
| 31-40               | 8         | 3.2            |
| **Race**            |           |                |
| Malay               | 142       | 56.8           |
| Chinese             | 6         | 2.4            |
| Iban                | 39        | 15.6           |
| Bidayuh             | 27        | 10.8           |
4.2 Relationship between Informal Network and Entrepreneurial Intention

Table 2: Correlations Table of Informal Network and Entrepreneurial Intention

| Correlations       | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N   |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Informal Network   | .813**              | .00             | 250 |

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

The finding in Table 3 indicates that the IN and business intent had a positive association with r = 0.813. The intensity of the relationship between each dimension is moderate, and the positive correlation (p-value = 0.00) is important at the 0.01 (2-tailed) level. This implies this study’s objective has been answered indicating that the IN network drives entrepreneurial intent. Thus, hypothesis 1 is accepted. This finding was supported by Birley et al. (2000) that the IN relies significantly on friends, family members and social contacts from the local neighbourhood in gathering relevant data at an early stage of enterprise development. Also, Nazly Zaqwan et al. (2016) mentioned that familial factors which consist of gaining knowledge, skills, and networks are needed for women entrepreneurs to be sustainable in their business ventures.

4.3 Relationship between Formal Network and Entrepreneurial Intention

Table 3: Correlations Table of Formal Network and Entrepreneurial Intention

| Correlations       | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) | N   |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Formal Network     | .728**              | .00             | 250 |

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

The result in Table 4 indicates that the FN and business intent have a strong and positive association with r = 0.728 indicating the strength of the relationship between each dimension is low, and the positive correlation (p-value = 0.00) at 0.01 level (2–tailed) is important. As such, the goal of this study has been answered, and the result shows that the FN has influenced entrepreneurial intent. Hence, hypothesis 2 is accepted. This finding was also supported by Birley et al. (2000) stating that entrepreneurs would extend their network to include bankers, accountants, lawyers, suppliers, government agencies, customers, and consultants in establishing a legitimate business. These findings are also supported by Abol Kasim Adai et al. (2015) mentioning that networking is one of the factors contributing to the success of Chinese entrepreneurs.
4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was employed in this study to evaluate the overall effect of the IN and FN on EI (or how well the four dimensions predicted enterprise intention) and to assess the relative value of the individual dimensions. In other words, it was carried out to investigate the impact of the IN and FN on EI.

Table 4: Regression Analysis
Model Summary

| Model | R    | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|------|----------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| 1     | .529 | .280     | .268              | 4.44554                   |

a. Predictors: (Constant) Mean Formal, Mean Informal
b. Dependent Variable: Mean Entrepreneurial Intention

The model’s linear regression check, as presented in Table 5, shows that the model’s R Square is 0.280. As such, this illustrates that 28.0% of the variance in EI was explained by the IN and FN in this research, while the remaining 72.0% could not be explained. As such, this means that other factors can explain EI.

Table 5: Standardized Coefficient Based on Beta Value

| Model 1 | Standardized Coefficient | t     | Sig.  |
|---------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
|         | Beta                     |       |       |
| (Constant) |                          | 3.257 | .001  |
| Mean Informal Network | .230      | 3.706 | .000  |
| Mean Formal Network    | .141      | 2.376 | .018  |

a. Dependent Variable: Mean Entrepreneurial Intention

In the above table, the result shows that all independent variables had a relationship with the dependent variable. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), the traditional levels in social science research are widely accepted as important below p < 0.05. Therefore, the result indicates the p-value for the IN and FM is below 0.05. Also, based on the standardised coefficients, the variable named IN signifies the highest Beta Value (BV) of 0.230 and 0.141 for FN. This BV calculation notifies the amount of increase in entrepreneurial intent for one unit increase in the predictor, respectively. As such, INs and FNs can be expected. It also shows that informal networking among students leads to the most critical size of the effect on entrepreneurial intent.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendation

This research was undertaken given the increasing needs of young entrepreneurs in Kota Samaraha, Sarawak, Malaysia. The results show that both IN and FN are positively related to EI among university students. The study has also highlighted a number of factors that impact EI among university students in Kota Samarahan Sarawak. Overall, it was shown that the IN has the most influence in motivating university students to venture towards entrepreneurship. However, after completing this study, the researcher found that there are some areas which could be investigated in order to improve the quality of this study in the future. For instance, the accuracy and reliability of the results could be improved by
expanding the sample size. Additionally, the time frame in conducting the survey could be extended in order to allow sufficient time in distributing and collecting data from a vast number of respondents.

For future study, the researcher could increase the scope of the study to include other states in Malaysia like Sabah or in West Malaysia in employing a larger sample size of public universities with EI. Lastly, it is anticipated that future research in this field of study could:

- Examine the entrepreneurship education programmes and their effect on entrepreneurs such as EI, a record of accomplishments, venture creation and survival. The studies should address variables such as the number of resources utilised by the extent of student involvement, the scope and impact of the business idea;
- Identify the critical success factors (CSFs) for entrepreneurship education programmes to increase EI among university students; and
- Determine the factors that may influence the intention of non-business faculty-students on entrepreneurship.

Aside from that, future research could employ a qualitative research method in collecting more reliable and precise data.

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