

# The Model of Bumiputera Graduate Lived Experiences Pursuing Entrepreneurship

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## Abstract

*This study examines the experiences of Bumiputera graduates who have chosen entrepreneurship as their path in Malaysia. Despite efforts to understand their motivations, these initiatives have not significantly increased entrepreneurial pursuits among this group. By using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, the study research involved interviewing seven Bumiputera graduate entrepreneurs, revealing diverse life experiences. The study offers fresh perspectives to the existing body of knowledge, enriching the literature on entrepreneurship. The experiences of Bumiputera graduate entrepreneurs shed light on the influence of Bumiputera culture, social status concerns, and various sociological factors as root causes for the limited number of Bumiputera graduates entering entrepreneurship.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, Bumiputera, Graduates, Lived experience*

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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian government is striving to encourage entrepreneurial activities among the Bumiputera community, offering additional incentives to promote the initiation of new businesses. Nevertheless, the progress of Bumiputera entrepreneurship in Malaysia remains sluggish, with a notable gap in understanding the root causes of these challenges (Hamidon, 2009).

Despite extensive efforts and research dedicated to understanding the motivations and intentions behind becoming entrepreneurs, it seems that these endeavours have not succeeded in significantly increasing the number of graduates or Bumiputera individuals entering entrepreneurship. Of nearly one million companies registered under the Suruhanjaya Syarikat Malaysia (SSM), only 40% are owned by the Bumiputera (Bernama, 2019). Meanwhile, there was a 5.8% decline in the number of graduates choosing entrepreneurship, dropping to 307,700 individuals compared to 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021b). Even the limited availability of job opportunities for graduates proved insufficient to prompt them to choose entrepreneurship, resulting in some individuals opting for

prolonged periods of unemployment (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). The government's excessive focus on the economic aspect became a compelling factor contributing to the failure to effectively promote entrepreneurship among the Bumiputera (Hamidon, 2009).

The configuration of economic incentives does not exert a significant influence on the emergence of entrepreneurs. It is crucial for the government to proactively delve into the understanding of an individual or society's sociological background. This deeper comprehension of human society and the social system can yield intellectual insights into entrepreneurship and aid in predicting entrepreneurial activities (Hamilton & Harper, 1994; Razalli & Kadir, 2021; Reynolds, 1992).

Hence, this present study has considered the importance of sociologists' perspectives. In particular, social status became the main interest of the present study and is discussed throughout the paper. Social status is one of the critical social factors that determine whether an individual will become an entrepreneur. The government needs to understand the determinants of social status to improve the rate of business start-ups, but it is largely

excluded from research (Engel, 2019; Lucio et al., 2018; Rokhman & Ahamed, 2015). Studies on social status and its importance are often from the fields such as sociology and psychology. However, existing studies on social status in relation to entrepreneurship have predominantly focused its effects at the venture level, thus addressing aspects in the later stages of the entrepreneurial process (Milanov, 2015).

The aforementioned points highlight a clear lack of comprehension regarding the sociological factors influencing individuals from specific societies in their pursuit of entrepreneurship. Moreover, there is a deficiency in understanding the significance of social status and its relevance to these societies. Addressing these gaps in existing literature could unveil fresh perspectives, ultimately paving the way for innovative approaches to encourage Bumiputera graduates to embark on entrepreneurial paths. This objective was accomplished by delving into the lived experiences of Bumiputera graduate entrepreneurs actively involved in entrepreneurial pursuits.

## 2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a cross-disciplinary concept and has been the focus of research in various disciplines like economy, management, psychology, and sociology (Hodzic, 2016). Different fields offer diverse viewpoints on the emergence of entrepreneurship, with none being entirely right or wrong. Entrepreneurship is influenced by numerous factors, making it a complex interplay of various elements encompassing socioeconomic and psychological aspects (Ebere, n.d.).

Although most economists think entrepreneurship is rare and not all individuals have the qualities to be successful as entrepreneurs (Butler, 2020), they perceive the supply of entrepreneurship as very flexible. Psychologists and sociologists acknowledge the limited availability of unique entrepreneurial qualities in the short and medium term, and economic incentives have a minor influence on entrepreneurial services. Therefore, economists should embrace psychological and sociological theories that align with economic concepts of entrepreneurship to broaden their analysis of entrepreneurial supply, including cultural factors (Hamilton & Harper, 1994).

### 2.2. The Sociological Perspectives and the Entrepreneurs' Emergence

Besides economic aspect, psychological and sociological aspects, for instance, also play an essential role in understanding entrepreneurs' emergence. The term sociology refers to the study of people living together, known as society (Tirapani, 2020). However, unlike psychological aspects, which refer to the need for achievement, the propensity to risk, and the locus of control (Garaika & Margahana, 2019; Rokhman & Ahamed, 2015), sociological aspects refer to family history, educational system, and social status. Sociological theory is the third vital theory of entrepreneurship (Simpeh, 2011).

Understanding sociological background aids in comprehending human society and its social systems. Additionally, it clarifies how material aspects, like money, influence society and culture (Pringle, 2019). Socio-cultural norms affect the degree of the acceptableness of entrepreneurial activities among the members of society (Vatavu et al., 2022).

### 2.3. Graduates Unemployment

In Malaysia, graduates' unemployment is often attributed to the government's inability to bring in more foreign investors, which is supposed to create more employment opportunities in all fields (Bing, 2018). On the other hand, it is also because, public colleges and universities have been unable to prepare them for the market. The graduates were also assumed to lack critical thinking and English proficiency, which are very important to be successful, and this also contributed to the problem (Bakar, 2018; Farhan, 2019; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015).

The graduates are also at fault for choosing courses not in demand by the available employers (Millar, 2014). In a particular field, they do not have the required knowledge besides being very choosy on the positions, locations, and the low monthly average salaries offered. These graduates only prefer the glamorous parts of the job (Danial, 2019; Farhan, 2019; Halik et al., 2009). The finding from the study by Lim & Duan (2015) supported the claim that unemployed Malaysian graduates prefer to be unemployed instead of going with self-employment or seeking part-time or full-time employment that does not commensurate with qualifications. One could conclude that graduate unemployment in Malaysia is voluntary.

These factors seem applicable not just in Malaysia but also throughout the world, such as India (Gupta et al., 2020) and South Africa (Mncayi, 2016).

## 2.4. Entrepreneurship as a Career Choice

Studies on whether entrepreneurship is a career choice among graduates always receive mixed results. The perception of occupations has the capacity to impact students, influencing them in the direction of pursuing their desired career choices (Nghah et al., 2012). However, findings show that graduates who participated in entrepreneurship programmes are inclined to business start-ups. The reason is that entrepreneurship education has a moderating effect on the relationship between self-esteem, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention, which means the effect of self-esteem on entrepreneurship is enhanced when students take entrepreneurship education, which can lead to the pursuit of entrepreneurship (Abbassi & Sta, 2019; Hunady et al., 2018; Singh, 2020; Song et al., 2021). However, Bustamam et al. (2015) found that graduates have high effort toward entrepreneurship activities even though they do not have an educational background related to entrepreneurship.

Most graduates, although they have a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship, they were reluctant to become entrepreneurs unless they do not have any other employment options (Hodzic, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Pinto et al., 2020). Instead, the less educated individuals or those who had lower grades are most likely to indicate their choice to pursue entrepreneurship (Akor-Robaro, 2012; Bartos et al., 2015; Dawson et al., 2021; Israr & Saleem, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2014).

## 2.5. The Bumiputera Ethnic Group

Ethnic is defined as race, common culture, or both, depending on the country, as individuals from different countries perceive and describe the term differently (Hamer et al., 2020). The term Bumiputera proves useful when enacting policies that favour the indigenous people of Malaysia. Nevertheless, the term Bumiputera is frequently associated primarily with the Malay community (Malay Mail, 2017). Both words are often used interchangeably, like in the work of Hamidon (2009). This fact is predictable since the Malays constitute not only one of the most significant segments of the Malaysian population but also form the majority within

the Bumiputera community. (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021a).

Knowing one's social background is crucial because it helps determine the extent to which the individual can go (Reynolds, 1992). Sabiu et al. (2017) found that Bumiputera strives to achieve the need for achievement. Besides being innovative, they persistently overcome challenges and remain competitive with other races. However, apart from unfavourable economic conditions, such as lack of business capital, they also have negative attitudes and mindsets, such as lack of initiative, wanting to get rich easily and quickly, and splurging on consumption goods and personal pleasures rather than spending on their business. Malaysia's education system is unable to encourage the Bumiputera to have an entrepreneurship culture and skills among them. They still prefer stable, paid jobs, not just because they have risk-averse attitudes but also because their parents prefer their children to be employees instead of entrepreneurs (Hamidon, 2009).

## 2.6. Social Status

Social status is an individual's position within a social hierarchy or ranking (Engel, 2019). Anderson et al. (2015) noted that everyone cares about status, whether they are aware of it or not. Status is considered universally important because it can influence how people think and behave. Outside the economic theory, there are also such cases whereby observable cues such as appearances can determine an individual's social status (Rahal et al., 2021). Additionally, high social status is often associated with having a higher education level (Noel, 2018; Posselt & Grodsky, 2017) and occupying high-status positions that usually require high speciality and authority (Zulfiqar, 2021).

The Bumiputera community places a significant emphasis on social status, exhibiting a heightened awareness of public perceptions. However, their assessment of an individual's social standing is not solely based on personal achievements or wealth but extends to the level of assistance or contributions made to society. When it comes to career choices, parents within the Bumiputera community often prefer their children to pursue high-status occupations with specialisation or significant authority. Moreover, the Bumiputera society regards educational attainment as a pivotal factor in determining occupational status. There is a typical

inclination to encourage their children to aspire to positions such as public servants or professionals, reinforcing the importance of educational levels in perceived occupational prestige. (Hamidon, 2009).

## 2.7. Social Status in Entrepreneurship

Social status has a vital role in entrepreneurship, especially in predicting individuals' entrepreneurial intentions. Foremost, Engel (2019) found that individuals' social status significantly affects their choice to transit to entrepreneurship. Occupational status can also predict entrepreneurial intention because it is an important aspect when considering any employment position (Fershtman et al., 1996; Oncu et al., 2022). Modern society has shifted towards placing greater weight on work as a marker of the individual's identity, which significantly affects one's social status (Reneflot & Evensen, 2014). However, occupational status is diverse in different societies as the perceptions of the social status of entrepreneurs are viewed differently. Entrepreneurs have high social status in countries such as Finland (Wahlbeck, 2008), United Arab Emirates (Jabeen et al., 2019), and Africa (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018). However, entrepreneurs are not respected in countries such as Germany (Kalden et al., 2017). The Germans themselves are risk-averse, and reservations about failed entrepreneurs tend to intensify as misunderstandings about the true nature of entrepreneurship become more pronounced (Kuckertz et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurs have good social status in Malaysia. However, 69.9% of Malaysians extend the high status to successful entrepreneurs (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018). Hence, similar to what Hamidon (2009) stated that there is a lack of recognisable role models, the author of this study contends that graduate entrepreneurs lack sufficient role models with whom they can identify, particularly in terms of whether these entrepreneurs were previously unemployed, faced challenges pursuing entrepreneurship, and similar aspects. This is an essential piece because having role models can make them feel more positive and safer about the journey in entrepreneurship by having shared experiences (Hodzic, 2016).

## 2.8. Social Status and Unemployment

Besides the financial strain of not securing any source of income during unemployment, being in such a state may also take away non-monetary rewards related to work, which can go beyond monetary and tangible costs (Pohlan, 2019; Winkelmann, 2014). Unemployment will also bring a particular dishonour and feelings of embarrassment and uselessness. It also hampers the achievement of psychosocial needs like social status. The perception of possessing a lower social status may well reflect the loss of social status of the unemployed individuals (Bollo et al., 2018; Garaika & Margahana, 2019; Mortimer et al., 2016; Pettersson, 2012; Pohlan, 2019; Rani et al., 2016; Reneflot & Evensen, 2014; Rokhman & Ahamed, 2015; Winkelmann, 2014).

## 2.9. Social Identity Theory

The current study is grounded in Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, which encompasses concepts such as social categorisation and social groups. Social categorisation serves to organise the social world and offers a framework for self-reference. Additionally, it plays a role in creating and defining an individual's position within society. On the other hand, social groups afford their members a means of self-identification in social terms. These identifications are often relational and comparative, shaping how individuals perceive themselves in relation to members of other groups. According to this theory, when individuals find their social identity unsatisfactory, they may endeavour to leave their existing group and join a more positively distinct group, enhance the positive distinctiveness of their current group, or pursue both strategies. The concept of individual mobility represents one of the responses to negative or threatened social identity, where individuals may attempt to disassociate themselves from their current group. This strategy typically involves individual efforts to achieve upward social mobility, transitioning from a lower to a higher status group. (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

## 3.0. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Purposive and Snowball Sampling

The present study employed one of the popular sampling strategies, the purposive sampling technique (Mack et al., 2005). Purposive sampling is a non-random or nonprobability sampling technique that involves the judgment of an expert in selecting participants or choosing participants with specific objectives in mind (Neuman, 2014). The key principle behind purposive

sampling is to include all possible cases that meet the defined criteria (Merriam, 2009). In this study, participants with specific crucial criteria were sought: Bumiputera graduate entrepreneurs who have completed their studies at a higher education level and are currently engaged in business in Klang Valley.

Additionally, the study incorporated the snowball sampling technique alongside the purposive sampling technique. According to Mack et al. (2005), snowball sampling is advantageous in identifying and recruiting individuals who may be challenging to reach through traditional methods, enabling the researcher to locate the required research participants easily. This technique involves multiple stages, commencing with one or a few participants and expanding based on connections to the previous participants (Neuman, 2014). However, it is essential that the referred participants meet the same criteria established during the use of the purposive sampling technique. Through the snowball sampling technique, graduate entrepreneurs recommended their acquaintances who also qualify as graduate entrepreneurs.

### 3.2. Interview Protocol

The interview protocol is a list of interview questions. It is also a procedural level of interviewing. To support the development of an inquiry-based conversation, a researcher may also prepare a script as part of the interview protocol. The script includes what will be said before and at the end of the interview. It also reminds the researchers, as the interviewers, to get informed consent and collect necessary information from the participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Based on the guidelines given by Creswell (2009) and Jacob & Furgerson (2012), the researcher carefully developed and followed the interview protocol in sequence: Introducing the researcher and the study, asking warm-up questions, asking study-related questions, and finally, concluding the interview sessions.

### 3.3. Data Management

When the interviews with all participants were completed, the qualitative data analysis software NVivo version 10 by QSR International was used to manage all the data gained from the interviews. After that, the researcher continued the process by analysing the data. Analysing the collected data was crucial so that the researcher could report the findings of the study.

## 3.4. The Demographics of the Participants

The study involved seven participants, identified as P1 to P7, all of whom were male, as indicated in Table 1. Five participants fell within the age range of 20 to 29 years, and two belonged to the 40 to 49 years age group. During the interviews, four participants were already married, and the remaining three participants were still single. Notably, one participant was engaged in three distinct business sectors, another in two sectors, and the rest were exclusively associated with either the service or trading sector.

## 4.0. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Theme One: The Meaning of Social Status

Various societies have distinct interpretations of

Table 1 The Demographics of the Participants

Participant	Gen.	Age	Marital Status	Business Sector
P1	Male	40-49	Married	Service, Manufacturing, Trading
P2	Male	20-29	Married	Trading, service
P3	Male	20-29	Married	Service
P4	Male	20-29	Single	Trading
P5	Male	20-29	Single	Trading
P6	Male	20-29	Single	Service
P7	Male	40-49	Married	Trading

social status. It functions as a non-verbal mode of communication and can only be understood by those acquainted with the concealed symbolic connotations within a particular cultural context (Saputra, 2020). This theme came to the forefront during the participants' responses to questions regarding their feelings about their social status upon graduation or when faced with unemployment.

#### 4.1.1. View of Oneself

Participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P6) often described social status in terms of their self-views. In the case of unemployment, it is linked to feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. This can lead to negative self-perceptions, sensitivity to criticism, and a sense of being "useless" in society. Social status can also affect how individuals interpret and react to various situations, including criticism and their self-worth (Sissons, 2022; Wilson, 2022).

#### 4.1.2. *Feeling of Satisfaction*

Social status has been shown to predict life satisfaction (Connolly & Seva, 2018). The participants (P1, P6) described social status in terms of their satisfaction when responding to the researcher's inquiries about their social status. They felt quite satisfied upon graduation because they had completed their studies. Conversely, when individuals are unemployed, it is expected that their level of frustration will increase (Goldsmith & Diette, 2012). In this regard, they were frustrated with their unemployment period.

#### 4.1.3. *Getting Attention*

Research has consistently shown that the size and scope of one's social network are positively linked to one's social status (Cao & Smith, 2020). A robust social network and gaining recognition may explain why individuals with high social status are often perceived as role models within society (Saputra, 2020). Participants (P1, P7), in general, felt content and delighted to have a diverse group of friends, including those from higher social strata, with whom they could easily connect without constraints. Those with higher social status tend to engage in multiple social circles, resulting in a more extensive range of social connections. Additionally, they often garner respect and admiration from others when they possess specific skills or authority (Cao & Smith, 2020; Gregg et al., 2018).

### 4.2. **Theme Two: Sociological Aspects Impacting the Business Endeavour Among Bumiputera Graduates**

The data analysis revealed that there was a limited number of sociological factors influencing business endeavours among Bumiputera graduates. These sociological factors included the initial motivation for attending university to secure employment, the prevalent non-entrepreneurial culture within the Bumiputera community, the transition from work experience to entrepreneurial pursuits, and the significance of social status in achieving business success.

#### 4.2.1. *The Reason for Getting into University is to Be Employed*

The participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7) expressed that societal influences, particularly their parents, had ingrained in them the belief that attending

university was essential to access lucrative job opportunities with high salaries. Parents particularly, tend to promote the idea of seeking employment, and these social norms, parental expectations, and the influence of others shape young people's aspirations for the future. This pressure to meet expectations is documented in studies by Kiddady (2018), Lipscomb (2022), and Millar (2014).

#### 4.2.2. *The Bumiputera Non-entrepreneurial Culture*

Entrepreneurship is not a favoured career choice within the Bumiputera community, with parents often preferring specialised or authoritative roles (Hamidon, 2009). During unemployment, the participants' (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6) parents generally encouraged seeking traditional employment. P6 also had to terminate a romantic relationship as the partner opposed his decision. The participants also faced challenges due to limited business visibility and profits, leading to misconceptions about their employment status.

#### 4.2.3. *Work Experience Leading to Business Endeavour*

The participants (P1, P3, P7) indicated that their past work experiences significantly contributed to their decision to start their businesses. Previous work experience can catalyse starting a business, which is consistent with findings from Minarcine & Shaw (2016) and Khan et al. (2016). Challenges and dissatisfaction experienced in prior employment can push individuals towards entrepreneurship as an alternative (Alba & Kalluci, 2021; Kohar, 2013). Furthermore, participants emphasised that their decision to pursue entrepreneurship was influenced by the valuable knowledge and insights they had gained from their previous work experiences, which validated the importance of work experience as a motivator for entrepreneurship.

#### 4.2.4. *Social Status for Business Success*

Participants generally recognised the significance of social status in achieving business success (Milanov, 2015). Although they thought that social status imposed restrictions on their freedom and denied its essential role in their lives, they understood the need for entrepreneurs to establish themselves in the eyes of others, gain peer confidence, serve as sources of inspiration, and build social networks.

### 4.3. Theme Three: The Determinants of Social Status

The determinants of social status are a combination of multilevel variables that collectively establish an individual's social status within a specific context (Schultz, 2019). This theme emerged during the researcher's inquiries into how the participants perceived society's views on graduates, unemployed individuals, and entrepreneurs. Understanding these determinants of social status can aid the government in developing more effective strategies for promoting entrepreneurship (Lucio et al., 2018).

#### 4.3.1. *The Level of Education*

The study revealed that society generally holds a positive attitude and perception of graduates, regarding them as intelligent individuals with a promising future in securing good job opportunities. Higher education plays a role in reinforcing social stratification, as individuals with a higher level of education are often seen by society as having higher status and enjoying greater economic rewards (Posselt & Grodsky, 2017; Zhou, 2021). The participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7) noted that in their family's view, not pursuing a university education was associated with a lack of intelligence, and they were even willing to take out loans to send their children to university. They also acknowledged that society shows respect and celebrates graduates.

#### 4.3.2. *The Wealth*

The participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6) generally recognised that wealth plays a significant role in determining social status (Manstead, 2018; Zhou, 2021). Society often perceives entrepreneurs as wealthy, particularly prominent ones. They noted that material possessions like big houses and expensive cars symbolise success and social status (Pojani et al., 2018; Spacey, 2018), with money being both a result and a symbol of success (Barasch et al., 2022). The participants stated that money communicates success effectively and garners credibility from others, leading to changes in social treatment. The participants who claimed to run a small business and have a lack of business success did not feel their social status was alleviated.

#### 4.3.3. *The Occupation*

The final determinant of an individual's social status is their occupation. Apart from wealth, one's chosen occupation also significantly impacts their social status. Occupying roles with high social status can contribute to elevating an individual's social standing (Zhou, 2021; Zulfiqar, 2021). The participants (P2, P3, P5, P6) highlighted the prestige associated with certain occupations that people have been familiar with since their school days. Occupations like doctors, lawyers, and others have traditionally been considered preferable to being an entrepreneur.

### 4.4. Theme Four: The Social Stigma Towards Unemployed Graduates

The participants were asked questions related to why they were unemployed, why some graduates remained jobless for extended periods instead of pursuing entrepreneurship, and whether they had encountered instances of blame directed at graduates for their unemployment. The data analysis identified two prevailing social stigmas associated with unemployed graduates: attributing blame to the graduates themselves and placing blame on their families.

#### 4.4.1. *The Graduates' Fault*

The participants (P1, P2, P5, P6, P7) believed that society often views unemployed graduates as demanding and lazy. Laziness is a common stereotype attributed to the Bumiputera community (Rojudin & Muhammad, 2020), and being overly selective in job choices is a prevalent reason for graduate unemployment in Malaysia (Bob, 2021). Some participants shared these perceptions and admitted that they had difficulty finding jobs because they were demanding and selective in their job choices. Indeed, impractical salary and benefits expectations among Malaysian graduates are significant factors contributing to their unemployment (Bahrim et al., 2019; Bob, 2021; Hossain et al., 2018; Kadir et al., 2020).

#### 4.4.2. *The Families' Fault*

The participants (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7) acknowledged that graduates might be jobless due to their association with the wrong social circles and receive financial support from families. Some of their friends were neither employed nor pursued entrepreneurship because their families were wealthy. Rather than offering comprehensive support for graduates to pursue entrepreneurship, parents tend to provide financial

assistance. This financial support can be detrimental, as it discourages graduates from seeking employment opportunities or starting businesses. It is a known trend, and this made them unable to be financially independent (Edwards, 2019; Edwards & Wenger, 2019; Khaliq, 2020).

**4.5. Theme Five: The Source of Confidence**

The final theme was elicited from the participants’ responses to questions regarding why they ventured into entrepreneurship and what factors bolstered their confidence to do so. Research has established that confidence positively influences entrepreneurial intention (Mujahid et al., 2020; Pauceanu et al., 2019). Through data analysis, the study identified three sources of confidence that propelled individuals to start their businesses.

*4.5.1. The Anticipated Opportunity*

The participants (P4, P5, P7) mentioned that they initiated their businesses because they recognised the potential within the specific business they intended to pursue. These individuals can be classified as opportunity entrepreneurs, as they actively seek to seize the opportunities in the markets they wish to enter (Garcia-Lorenzo, 2018). The perceived opportunity bolstered their confidence to pursue their business ventures.

*4.5.2. The Knowledge and Skills Related to the Business*

Participants (P1, P3, P6) generally recognised that entrepreneurs with prior work experience bring valuable industry knowledge to their businesses (Minarcine & Shaw, 2016). This knowledge is seen as a foundation for confidence in starting a business. Besides interest and knowledge, having an initial customer base also has boosted their confidence to pursue entrepreneurship.

*4.5.3. The Social Support*

Participants (P1, P2, P3), in general, highlight social support as a key source of confidence when venturing into entrepreneurship (Hodzic, 2016; Kaur, 2022). Even without having any financial assistance, they gained the confidence to proceed with their business endeavours when their spouses, family, and friends supported them.

**5.0. DISCUSSION**

Figure 1 below illustrates the model of Bumiputera graduate experiences pursuing entrepreneurship. In general, the graduates had to face two phases of life before entering the stage in which they became entrepreneurs. In each phase, it was plausible that they were trying to cope with one of the determinants of social status deemed essential at that particular phase. Achieving the determinant of social status for each phase would change

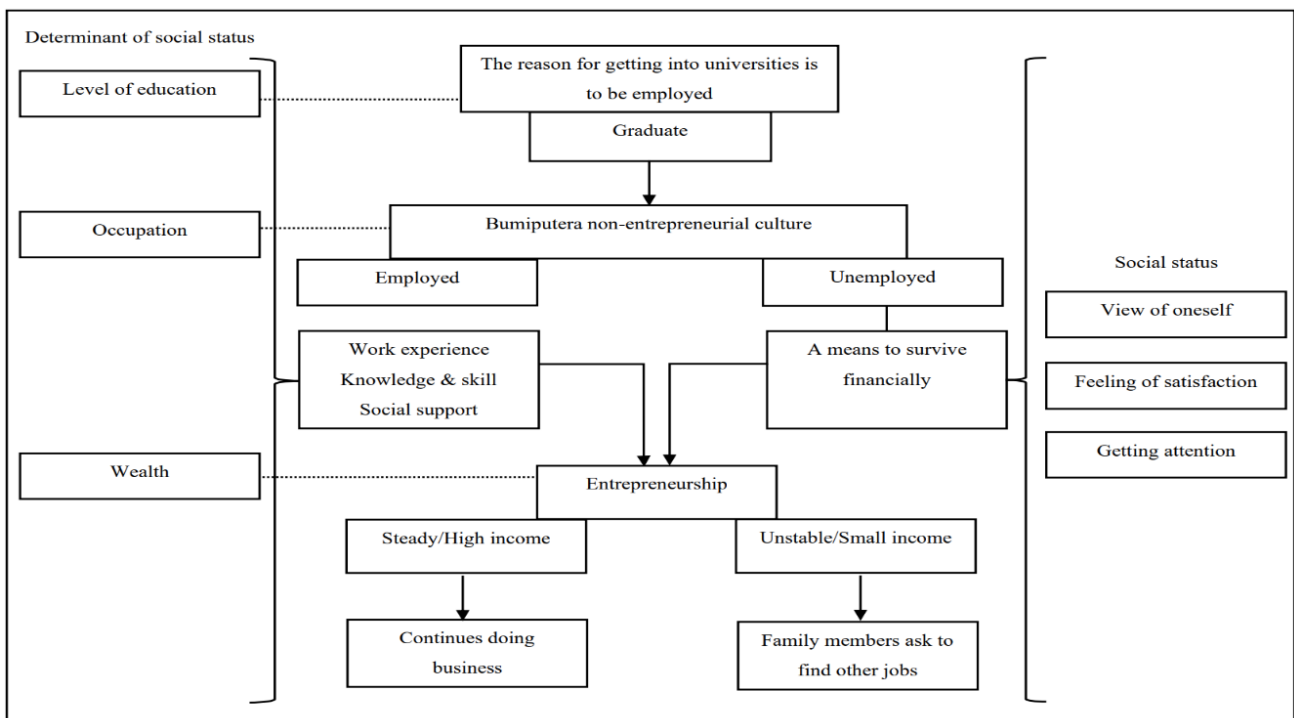


Figure 1: The Model of Bumiputera Graduate Lived Experiences Pursuing



how they view themselves, their feeling of satisfaction, and the attention they receive from others.

Firstly, the Bumiputera graduates had to meet society's expectations of getting into universities. The reason for that was that the level of education determines an individual's social status. They felt proud when they graduated, at least because they held the 'graduate' title. Besides getting attention from others, they also felt satisfied with their achievements because they considered studying was not an easy task to do. Having all these traits could also mean that their social status was high at that time.

Secondly, they had to meet society's working culture after graduation. In this phase, the occupation determines an individual's social status. The Bumiputera considered certain occupations noble and preferable, and entrepreneurship was not in the list. When they were unemployed, they felt useless and frustrated, and they were treated negatively. Unlike the graduates who successfully secured stable jobs, it could also mean that the social status of unemployed graduates was low then.

The last and most crucial phase was the phase where the Bumiputera graduates became entrepreneurs. The previously unemployed graduates had to pursue entrepreneurship as a means for them to survive financially. As for the previously employed graduates, despite the imminent working culture among the Bumiputera, their work experiences made them want to pursue entrepreneurship. The skills and knowledge they had and the social support they received made them pursue the journey.

Any reason for becoming entrepreneurs both previously employed and unemployed graduate entrepreneurs, needed to earn wealth from their businesses. Their achievements in successfully conducting the business made them feel proud, and they felt good because they could prove to others that they could do it. With the wealth they earned, others treated them better and with respect. Hence, having a good view of themselves, feeling satisfied, and receiving attention from others could mean that their social status was good at that time. With good social status and good earnings, they received no objections in continuing with their business activities. However, for the graduate entrepreneurs who could not gain stable or high income, their family members asked them to find other jobs.

## 6.0. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study's results offer fresh perspectives to the existing body of knowledge, enriching the literature on entrepreneurship. The experiences of Bumiputera graduate entrepreneurs shed light on the influence of Bumiputera culture, social status concerns, and various sociological factors as root causes for the limited number of Bumiputera graduates entering entrepreneurship. These findings hold significance for policymakers, indicating the need for diverse strategies beyond mere financial support and conventional entrepreneurial programs to encourage Bumiputera graduates to embark on entrepreneurial paths. Additionally, the insights from this study can benefit Bumiputera graduate entrepreneurs, equipping them with a deeper understanding of social status, its determinants, and its significance.

## 7.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

Nevertheless, the sluggish advancement of entrepreneurship within the Bumiputera community and its graduates indicates the presence of opportunities for enhancements. Foremost, it is crucial for the government to assess the effectiveness of its existing initiatives and implement necessary adjustments (Zreik & Marzuki, 2023) SME Corporation Malaysia (SME Corp. Malaysia) can introduce an additional focus area related to public relations. They can expose Bumiputera graduates to commendable entrepreneurs, as individuals tend to develop entrepreneurial intentions when presented with a positive image of entrepreneurs (Chamorro et al., 2020). The absence of recognisable role models and societal inspiration can impede a positive perception of business start-ups among graduates (Shanka, 2016). Instead of highlighting controversial celebrity entrepreneurs who may portray negative images, the government should introduce graduates to role models facing similar challenges and concerns. These role models do not necessarily have to be affluent or highly profitable; rather, they should share similar profiles, specialisations, and backgrounds relevant to the graduates, serving as inspiration for them to emulate. Moreover, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) should actively discourage negative messages from detrimental entrepreneurs. Additionally, instead of exclusively spotlighting successful entrepreneurs, due

recognition should be extended to those making smaller contributions involving all stakeholders.

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in fostering the development of future entrepreneurs (Jami & Gokdeniz, 2020; Zreik & Marzuki, 2023). While they have contributed in instilling an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates by incorporating entrepreneurship education into the curriculum, a study discovered that higher education institutions did not exhibit a significant relationship with entrepreneurial intentions (Husna et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there are alternative ways these institutions could offer assistance. They should communicate the advantages of higher education to aspiring entrepreneurs and outline potential business opportunities associated with each course before students enrol.

Graduate entrepreneurs, both existing and prospective, should prepare not only for the initiation of business ventures but also for unforeseen circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, they ought to grasp the importance of social status, capitalise on determinants influencing social standing, actively broaden their social networks, and share experiences through various social media platforms.

Enthusiastic future researchers could replicate this study by employing improved methodologies and posing more high-quality questions. Furthermore, they could explore the realm of graduate entrepreneurs from diverse races, religions, and genders. Alternatively, they may choose to concentrate on a singular experience and conduct quantitative research for a more in-depth analysis.

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