THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

A New Model for Entrepreneurial Learning and Success in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract:
The government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has recently encouraged entrepreneurship. Institutions such as The Khalifa Fund, the Dubai SME 100, and the Dubai Entrepreneurship Academy are providing funding and consultation. Although entrepreneurial opportunities exist, many university graduates perceive that they lack the basic skills required to effectively engage in entrepreneurship.
This study uses survey research to measure attitudes and preparedness of 241 UAE university graduates with respect to entrepreneurship. Ninety percent respondents perceived that they lacked the required skills to engage in entrepreneurship. Only 4% of graduates were actively involved in entrepreneurship. Thus, the lack of perceived preparation is a major obstacle for individuals attempting to start their own business.
This paper provides policy recommendations for UAE government coordination with institutions of higher learning to adequately prepare students for entrepreneurship and develops a model that will be enhanced in future research.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial learning, educational collaboration

1. A New Model for Entrepreneurial Learning and Success in the United Arab Emirates

Creative industries can be described as "activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation" (Government of United Arab Emirates, Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 1999 p. 3). Creative industries "artistic" endeavors include music, dance, publishing, and newer digital software and design ventures. The growth of creative and media industries beyond government subsidy ventures is a result of "cultural entrepreneurship."

Whereas traditional industries have well-defined boundaries, creative industries are, according to Arthur and Rousseau (1996) defined by "boundarylessness." "Boundarylessness" requires that the industry must be personally navigated, which also implies that employment is not consistent or stable (Bridgstock, 2011; Cunningham &Higgs, 2010). According to Ball, Pollard, and Stanley (2010), less research has been conducted on graduate creative individuals than professional creative individuals. Ball (2003) and Blackwell and Harvey (1999) note that entry into the entrepreneurial field is difficult and often dependent on personal connections or networks.

In recent years, the UAE government has encouraged entrepreneurship through institutions such as The Khalifa Fund, The Dubai SME 100, and the Dubai Entrepreneurship Academy. The UAE has heavily invested in promoting entrepreneurship by providing funding and consultation to new startups. Although many new business venture opportunities exist for individuals, evidence shows that many graduates lack the basic skills necessary to effectively engage in entrepreneurship. Little is known about creative industries entrepreneurship. This study examines the skills necessary to become a successful creative industries entrepreneur in the UAE. The findings of this study are based on two surveys conducted with graduates of creative industries-related subjects. The majority of the participants were considering entrepreneurship at the time of their graduation.

Additionally, this study uses a literature review to develop a model to predict entrepreneurial achievement. The model represents an instructional mechanism for potential entrepreneurs addressing the factors required for a successful startup and is developed for use in the classroom and as a practical guide to entrepreneurs.

2. Literature Review

Entrepreneurial learning is a growing area of academic research. A major challenge facing entrepreneurial learning is that the skills necessary to succeed in this field are unknown. Lead beater and Oakley (1999) note that we cannot assume that traditional methods will be successful. Investigating the available literature and conducting original research can determine the skills necessary to succeed as an entrepreneur in the creative industries.

Creative industries consistently report lower employability compared to other fields. Also notable are consistent mismatches between the number of creative industries graduates and the number of individuals required in the workforce (Bridgstock, 2011). Cranmer (2006) and Mason, Williams, Cranmer, and Guile (2003) find no evidence that "key skills" programs transfer to practical real work scenarios. The difficulty in penetrating creative industries may be the reason that an equal number of creatives work outside and inside the industry (Bakhshi, Freeman, &Higgs, 2008) and industry challenges cause many creative to freelance or to start their own businesses.

Rae (2004) attempts to identify the processes and experiences of those engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Rae (2004) notes that some of the characteristics of the entrepreneurial environment include:

    1) Rapidly changing social and technological factors.
    2) Transient relationships.
    3) Intense competition.

Rae (2004) notes that the speed and effectiveness of the factors of entrepreneurial environment are critical to venture success. One challenge is that the learning processes involved in creative, entrepreneurial ventures have not been thoroughly explored by academics. Rae (2004) conducted a two-year study that focused on the learning processes of three entrepreneurial ventures. The methodology was social constructionist (Gergen, 1999). Rae (2004) notes that entrepreneurial ventures in the creative field are negotiated enterprises that include factors such as "engaging in networks" outside the field, changing roles over time, and negotiated structures and practices. Rae (2004) presents a three-way (triadic model) in which entrepreneurs learn.

The triadic model of entrepreneurial learning is comprised of contextual learning, negotiated enterprise, and personal/social emergence. Contextual learning entails practical theories of entrepreneurial actions, the ability to recognize opportunities through cultural partnerships, and learning through industry immersion. Negotiated enterprise implies negotiated meaning, changing roles over time, engagement in external relationship networks, participation, and joint enterprise. Personal and social emergences are composed of narrative construction of identity, the role of family, the role of practice, identity as practice, and the conflict between current and future identity.

According to Rae (2004), personal and social emergence implies that individuals must negotiate their personal and social identities and the way that they prefer to be recognized by others in their social setting. Narrative construction is the process by which entrepreneurs invent and reinvent themselves through the stories they recount. The role of families (birth families and social families) shapes the actions and identities of entrepreneurs. "Entrepreneurial stories are constructed with reference to personal relationships with spouses, parents, and children. In turn, relationships with family members change through entrepreneurship" (Rae, 2004). Identity in practice reflects changes in individuals as they discover the areas in which they excel. Tension between current and future identity occurs when an employee's role, for example, is defined by others. This often causes dissatisfaction, which leads the dissatisfied individual to initiate their own businesses venture. Contextual learning refers to the information that individuals obtain and apply while working in an industry. This occurs through immersion and recognizing opportunities by participating in cultures and theories developed through entrepreneurial action. Entrepreneurial actions represent activities that are effective for individual entrepreneurs.

Negotiated enterprise refers to the operational theories that individuals develop and apply in a business setting. "In creative enterprise, there is a distinctive and necessary engagement between the people and the business (Rae, 2004)." The negotiated enterprise is unique for each individual entrepreneur (Rae, 2004).

Engagement in external relationship networks refers to the development and maintenance of relations with individuals in a network to ensure a successful enterprise. An individual must maintain a brand and presence in the community in which they work. Whereas individuals who are employees of established companies can focus primarily on their assigned projects, entrepreneurs must also focus on marketing and networking (Rae, 2004).

2.1. Necessary Skills

Bridgstock (2011) examines the skills necessary for creative industries graduate success. Career management skills are necessary to obtain employment and build a career (Bridgstock, 2011). Bridgstock (2011) examines how "career management competence" impacts career outcomes." Bridgstock (2011) investigated the value of work motivation and career self-management skills in the early career success of graduates of creative industry programs. Bridgstock's (2011) was the first study to empirically support the notion that undergraduate students who report possessing better career management skills experience higher levels of employment success. In the study, age was positively related to the possession of career skills. There were also disciplinary differences. Performing and creative employees earned significantly less than digital/technical creatives.

2.2. Marketing

Paridon and Carraher (2009) argues that marketing is based on relationships. Everett defines marketing as "creating and maintaining relationships that an organization needs to operate." Everett explains that marketing incorporates five key actions: meeting client demands, 3) defining a clear agreement, 4) maintaining the agreement, and 5) keeping track of mistakes and successes. Everett notes that marketing is not linear but a continuous circular process.

Stephenson and Thurman (2007) emphasize seven principles of marketing that they claim are important to entrepreneurs. The first principle is selecting the right product. Entrepreneurs must conduct the necessary research to determine market demand. The second principle that the authors emphasize is selecting the correct price for a product or service. Effective promotion is the third principle.

Promotion entails explaining the product in a way that rendersit desirable. The fifth element of marketing is packaging, which represents the visual element of a product's presentation. The sixth element of marketing is positioning. Positioning refers to the place that a company holds in the hearts and minds of consumers. Finally, the seventh marketing elementis the hiring of individuals to promote the product.

Geho and Dangelo (2012) argue that traditional marketing is insufficient to maintain a business in current times. Internet use has grown from 0.4% worldwide in 1995 to 32.7% in 2012. The authors note that social media provides a viable marketing channel for entrepreneurs. The authors refer to the Nielsen State of the Media: Social Media Report (2012), which states that two-thirds of individuals who use digital media to conduct product research learned of a product via social media. Social media provides a way for entrepreneurs to level the playing field with larger brands. Geho and Dangelo (2012) argue that because social media marketing is becoming the norm, entrepreneurs cannot afford to ignore it. Moreover, the authors argue that the learning process for social media marketing is much easier and user-friendly, primarily requiring the investment of time to create relevant content.

2.3. Networking
Kuhn and Galloway (2015) note that personal networks are a vital resource for entrepreneurs. The authors explore the information-providing role of peer business networks. The authors note the knowledge-based view that proposes knowledge as the most valuable asset of a successful organization. "Entrepreneurial research on venture capital firms has long noted the importance of industry-specific expertise and specialized knowledge (e.g., Gupta &Sapiens, 1992)." In spite of the fact that the literature has revealed the significance of contextual knowledge in organizational success, minimal research examines the role of contemporaries in providing entrepreneurs with knowledge. The study finds that receiving advice and information from entrepreneurial peers is beneficial. Additionally, the authors note that entrepreneurial training may be missing the mark because it does not originate from entrepreneurs.

Ebbers (2014) notes that previous research has focused on network strength. Strong ties foster coordination and transactions while weak ties are useful in gaining new information. Ebbers focuses on individual networking behavior that leads to relationship formation. Ebbers finds a positive relationship between strategic networking and the number of entrepreneur client contacts. Ebbers distinguishes between two types of networking: 1) networking for personal gain and 2) networking for the mutual benefit of both parties. Both types of networking are beneficial to entrepreneurial success.

Staniuliene (2011) examines effective new venture networking and investigates the structure of entrepreneurial networks and the benefits of these networks. Staniuliene (2011) notes that networks are increasing in importance because of the "markets, information, technology and other resources" that they provide. The study emphasizes that entrepreneurs should allocate time for planning and monitoring networking activities. Moreover, the time and money invested in networking should create stronger networks. However, the author notes that time and finances in addition to the environment and entrepreneurial skills are influencing factors.

2.4. Summary of the Literature Review
The literature review highlights several factors important for entrepreneurial success. Environmental factors, marketing, networking, and competition all contribute to entrepreneurial outcomes. The following section discusses the UAE government efforts to boost entrepreneurship, which forms the basis for the contextual background of this study.

3. Historical Context for the Study of UAE Students
The UAE government has been encouraging startups by offering incentives such as funding and consultation (McCrohan, Erogul, Vellinga, & Tong, 2009, p. 13; Parmar, 2011). The Emirates have experienced an increased rate of startups as reported by McCrohan et al. (2009) from 8.44% to 13.25% in 2007 and 2009, respectively. The evidence suggests that the UAE has potential for entrepreneurial activity growth. While the government is actively encouraging startups, the country is experiencing difficulty boosting entrepreneurship because many potential entrepreneurs lack the appropriate skills. This current study examines the problem facing graduates in the UAE who want to become entrepreneurs and considers the issues and challenges they are facing and the reasons for these problems.

3.1. The Role of the United Arab Emirates Government
In October 2014, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE announced the Emirates' intention to be one of the most innovative nations in the world. This intention was echoed by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan (Newland, 2015). Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs, indicated that the government would be launching seven educational initiatives to promote innovation. The government had previously instituted initiatives to promote entrepreneurship. The Dubai SME100 Initiative was launched in 2011, for which Sheikh Al Maktoum was the patron. The purpose of the initiative is to identify and rank the best performing small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) based on financial and non-financial standards (Dubai SME, 2013). The non-financial considerations include the development of human resources, innovativeness, corporate governance, and the ability to take advantage of the international platform. The best 100 SMEs benefit from the government through development programs that cater to diverse needs including corporate governance, business valuation, the development of human capital, and education in smart investment, risk management, insurance, and innovation.

The Dubai Entrepreneurship Academy functions under a permanent accreditation from the Knowledge and Human Development Authority with the mandate of creating a generation of entrepreneurs that can head successful international projects (Dubai SME, 2013). The Academy assists individuals by providing them with the skills and knowledge required to become future business leaders.

The goal of the program is to position graduates as world leaders capable of affecting power balance, SME development, responding to SME training needs, and offering innovation training for entrepreneurs.

The authorities in all major Emirate cities encourage young people to start businesses and offer funds through programs such as the Khalifa Fund for Enterprise Development in the capital city Abu Dhabi and Dubai SME, which is part of the Department of the Economic Development in Dubai. Major funding agencies in the UAE include Afkar. me (with a focus on digital business), TURN8 (which examines logistics and supply chain companies), and the Dubai Silicon Oasis Authority (that offers up to $80,000 in funding).

The UAE has multiple accelerators tasked with facilitating funding for business startups, but the biggest challenge is a disjointed approach that implies poor coordination between the different entities involved (Siddiqui, 2014). The startup accelerators have options for the coordination of business opportunities. For example, Al Bader hosts annual events to encourage competition and bring new ideas with Bank Audi offering 100,000,000 Lebanese Pounds to winners of the event (Moreau, 2015). Another example is Wamda, which offers entrepreneur training for startup companies in Dubai, Jordan, and Lebanon. The seed startup offers $20,000 for 20% equity in the businesses it supports. The incubator emphasizes community development, media, research, and advisory services, and the accelerators focus on particular sectors, such as IT and digital media.

The UAE government has three target services: the Dubai Department of Economic Development, the Mohammed bin Rashid Establishment for Young Business Leaders, and TECOM Investments (Davis, 2012). The economic department oversees the registration and management of businesses and provides trade licenses, while the Establishment offers administrative, incubation, funding, and training to small businesses for mainly Emirati-owned businesses. TECOM offers regulatory and managerial services for the free zones in areas such as Media City, Internet City, Knowledge Village, and Studio City. The beneficiaries must rent office space.

3.2. Information and Training Gap

In spite of championing SMEs in the UAE, evidence suggests that individuals still use personal savings to finance their businesses – as many as 80% – while only 23% seek loans (Jagannathan, 2015). The UAE has a considerable lack of connectivity between investors and entrepreneurs. Those most challenged by the government's inefficient policies are the expatriates, who represent approximately 95% of the UAE SME sector. The vast majority of funding for entrepreneurs is only available for Emirate nationals (AG Reporter, 2015). The gap between funding and those who would put the funding to use demonstrates poor coordination in the UAE's plan to boost entrepreneurial activity.

The identification that 95% of the UAE SMEs are owned by expatriates shows that the Emirates, despite having considerable advantages in funding, are yet to exploit opportunities. A concern in the Emirates is that too many nationals continue to seek corporate career paths within established organizations and fail to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities. Emirate citizens have not yet realized the potential of self-employment and the potential of becoming a job creator (UAE Academy, 2015). Engaging Emirate nationals in entrepreneurship would have a multiplier effect that would promote successful ventures for the economy and society. The UAE Academy recognizes that the only way to seal this gap is to engage aspiring entrepreneurs and provide them with the business skills, guidance, coaching, and resources required for a robust and viable business venture that ultimately becomes a successful business.

Lack of entrepreneurial training is also a challenge in the UAE. A study conducted by Wamda finds that startups experience three main problems: funding, red tape, and a lack of skills and talent (Radcliffe, 2014). The study reveals that over half of the 65 investors studied identified a lack of strategic planning and decision managing skills among entrepreneurs, and others identified a lack of financial literacy skills among entrepreneurs and poor business idea pitching skills. Raybould and Sheedy (2005) note that graduates should consider whether they possess the right skills if they intend to establish future businesses.Raybould and Sheedy (2005) argue that many graduates may only have obtained generic skills that are insufficient for piloting a business. The basic skills that many university graduates obtain from higher education are not necessarily helpful in starting a business because they focus on preparing an individual to be an adequate employee, not a pioneering entrepreneur (Clanchy & Ballard, 1995; Gray, 2010; Harvey, 2000; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997).

3.3. The Need for Entrepreneurship in the United Arab Emirates

Graduates in the UAE are facing expanded workforce requirements and non-traditional employment situations and thus require diversified skills. Additionally, some graduates are choosing to start their own businesses rather than pursue employment in specific companies. Therefore, universities must expand services to help build skills for students interested in becoming entrepreneurs regardless of their core program or department.

Competition for available employment positions is considerably high. Opportunities to work for major corporations are more difficult to find. The intensity of competition has caused an increase in graduates who are reassessing their career options, and there has been an increase in graduates seeking entrepreneurial career paths as a result of the current competitive environment (Hopwood, 2013). The UAE youth are motivated to make an impact on the world. The younger generation seeks greater autonomy in their work, which is limited in the traditional job market. The entrepreneurial platform provides such independence, the ability to be innovative, and the creation of new solutions for society and culture. However, a challenge facing the younger generation is explaining their products effectively to the consumer market, how to attract funding, how to properly market their products, and how to ensure continued growth in a highly competitive global market with a myriad of companies including startups and established firms.

A report on the nature of startups in the UAE shows that more than 73% of people are sufficiently confident to start a business of their own. Many individuals in the UAE consider that they have the necessary skills to start their own business and have a relatively low fear of failure at 31.3% (McCrohan et al., 2009, p. 13). However, the actual startup rate does not correspond with the confidence level as shown in participation rates. The rates included 6.5% for start-up business, 7.38% for young business, 13.25% for the total entrepreneurial activity rate, 5.3% for established business, and 3.72% for business shutdown. This current study recognizes that the UAE may have a foundation for building entrepreneurship through funding; however, nationals have not realized such benefits because of existing challenges, primarily the gap in relevant education. This current study recognizes from the personal experience of the researcher and the presented data that the problem is widespread. The purpose of this study is to determine the skills required for entrepreneurship in the UAE.

4. Method

4.1. Participation Selection
This study selected UAE university students as participants. I conducted two surveys, one at the time of graduation and a follow-up survey eight months after graduation. The sample for the initial study was composed of 241 students in their fourth year as undergraduates of creative arts or digital and technical arts programs. The participants were selected from four separate universities. In each case, I obtained approval from the school department deans to contact their final year students.

I selected university seniors to determine if educational institutions equipped potential entrepreneurs in the creative arts field with the skills necessary to start and run their own businesses upon graduation. The selection criteria for the four UAE universities incorporated two components. First, the criteria were based on leading educational institution reviews in the UAE for arts, design, media, and technology fields from media, press, positive public opinions (deans, educationalists, professors, etc.), and social media.

Second, the selection criteria were based on local, regional, and international academic rankings. I used data from QS rankings, the Times, US News, and the World Report for international rankings on arts, design, media, and technology subjects and categories.

I used data from US News and World Report for Best Arab Region Universities rankings on arts, design, media, and technology subjects and categories, Webometric rankings for web visibility, the number of published research papers, and their quality (Aguillo, Bar-Ilan, Levene, & Ortega, 2010; US News and World Report, 2014). The above-mentioned websites provide rankings for universities and colleges for both graduate and undergraduate programs. The ranking sites provided ranking by category, including national and international rankings. This made it easier to choose the best-ranked universities in 2014, the year of the research. Additional considerations were positive reviews of educational institutions from the public, positive reviews from students and graduates from the respective educational institutions, positive reviews from students from other educational institutions, and positive reviews from deans, educators, and professor from other local universities. The third and last consideration was the number of students expected to study media, arts, design, software, technology, and subjects related to creative industries education.

4.2. Research Procedure
The first survey focused on students' ambitions after graduation and determined whether the participants of the study intended to start their own business or find employment at an established firm. I also examined whether the educational institutions encouraged students to be entrepreneurs; this inquiry was included in the second survey. The follow-up survey was conducted eight months after the original study. The study occurred in two phases:
1) First Phase: The first survey was conducted with 241 final year student participants. The respondents were asked to provide their contact details for the second phase.
2) Second Phase: The second survey was conducted with 216 graduates eight months after their graduation.

4.3. Data Collection Tools
Both surveys were composed of questionnaires including open and close-ended questions. The two questionnaires are presented in the Appendices and included an introduction that identified the purpose of the study, the intended use of the collected data, and assurances of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The first tool was composed of three sections. First, the demographics section included questions concerning the desire to start a business or work in an established company. The second section asked the participants if they had begun any entrepreneurial work or were involved in internships. The third section focused on the skills required to start a business and questions to determine if the students considered that they had the skills necessary to start a business.

The second tool was a follow-up and repeated some of the questions asked in the first survey, but with a focus on the post-graduation experiences of the participants. The tool had two sections. The first section focused on where the participants were working, whether they had started a business, and their work experiences. The second section of the survey focused on the skills that the creative arts graduates required to do business and the challenges they experienced. The survey also captured the role of institutions of higher learning in equipping the students with the skills needed to enter the entrepreneurial sector in creative industries. The advantage of having open and close-ended questions was the opportunity to capture the feelings of the participants based on a predetermined scale, but it was also beneficial to have explanations where relevant. The open-ended questions offered the respondents an opportunity to offer in-depth information concerning their experiences and the issues and challenges they faced, starting a business in the UAE and the skills they would recommend those pursuing a similar path to obtain.

5. The Results and the Model

This segment of this paper is divided into three sections: 1) the results, 2) theoretical model, and 3) policy recommendations. The results section discusses the key findings from the survey and how the information can improve the understanding of successful entrepreneurship. Additionally, I use the findings from the survey along with the literature review to develop a theoretical model that can be used to explain the factors that lead to entrepreneurial success. I present a model that can be used to teach and study entrepreneurial success. The current research on entrepreneurial success lacks models that can explain the environment in which entrepreneurs and startups operate. Many schools are training potential entrepreneurs with basic business management skills. However, basic business management skills are insufficient to prepare new entrepreneurs for the vastly different experience they encounter when transitioning from employee to entrepreneur. Finally, I conclude this section with the future implications of this study and discuss future research that, based on the findings of this study, can develop the model.

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

The study participation during the first survey totaled 241 respondents, but there was a 10.37% decline in the second phase to 216 respondents. The largest category of participants were international or immigrant students representing 74%, and Emirati nationals represented 26% of respondents. The number of respondents declined in number during the second phase of the study because 25 of the original respondents did not participate in the second survey. Fourteen individuals that choose not to participate did so because they were no longer working in the field. The other 11 individuals decided to withdraw from the survey for one of the following reasons: they left the country, or they did not fulfill the university graduation requirements and were still enrolled at their respective universities.

Many of the respondents at graduation chose different employment options than those identified in the first survey. The first questionnaire noted four work possibilities:

1) To work for an established company.
2) To start a company and work full-time.
3) To work as a freelance employee.
4) To start a company and work for that company part-time.

The second survey identified that only 2% of graduates became full-time entrepreneurs. The first survey demonstrated that 3% of students intended to start their careers as part-time entrepreneurs. These individuals planned to work full-time for an established company, learn the skills needed to become an entrepreneur, and then become full-time entrepreneurs after graduation. When contacted eight months after graduation, 2% of participants confirmed that they were operating their businesses full-time. One percent of graduates were part-time entrepreneurs. This group noted that they continued to work part-time for their businesses while working full-time at an established company. Some graduates working for established companies were working in companies in fields unrelated to their education specialties.

Other graduates outside of the initial 3% also began full-time entrepreneurship. The additional number came from the 9% of students who were part-time freelancers at their universities. Some became full-time entrepreneurs after graduation when contacted eight months after graduation during the second survey. Among the graduates, 5% confirmed that they run their businesses full-time, 3% confirmed in the second survey that they are still part-time entrepreneurs and struggle to operate their own businesses full-time, but noted that they worked full-time for an established company.

Table1 identifies the relationship between the research variables and the responses with respect to the universities' ability to teach the required skills.

Variable	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Obtained Skills	241	60.90	5.8
Able to Start the Business	241	11.37	5.87
Started the Business	216	18.44	9.72
Continued in Internships	216	20.24	6.50
Chose Employment	216	9.90	4.51

Table 1: Relationship between the research variables and responses regarding universities' ability to teach the required skills

Another group identified in the first survey was the 19% of participants that were participating in an internship program. Among this group, 14% confirmed that they obtained full-time jobs in the field related to their program, and only 4% indicated that they still worked part-time. The final 1% confirmed via the survey that they held jobs unrelated to their field of expertise. The final year students that undertook internships, freelancing, and entrepreneurship represented 31% of the sample. The other 69% of participants had no career experience upon graduation (Figure 1).
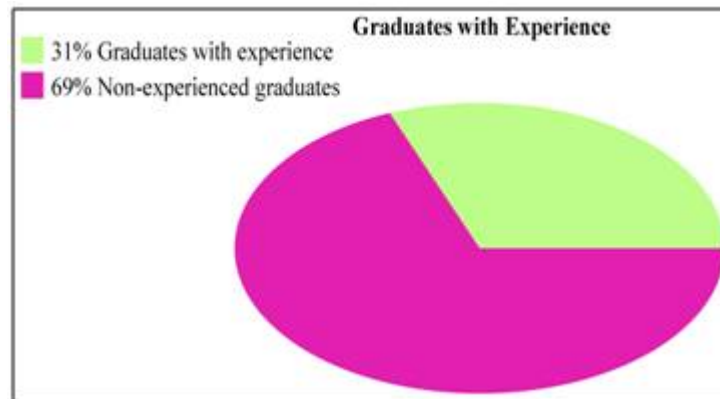
Figure 1: Percentage of graduates with experience

5.2. Key Findings: Entrepreneurial Capability Challenges

The differences in career choice and the results after graduation depended on some of the challenges experienced by the students. The survey participants were asked to indicate the issues that they deemed to be the most critical challenges for success. The question was open-ended with no prompts. The results showed that creative graduates face three main issues – a lack of networks, a lack of marketing skills, and competition.

5.3. Networking

The results indicated that 54% of graduates consider that they lack the networks and connections necessary to succeed. This response confirms the literature that states that networking plays an important role in the entrepreneurial process. These participants noted that growing a business and reaching a larger clientele is a result of networking and making connections in the community with other established businesses. The final year students expressed that they lacked the connections and the skills required to pursue new networks.

5.4. Marketing

The second most significant barrier to entrepreneurial success was a lack of marketing skills. The number of graduates who claimed that a lack of marketing capability was a significant factor affecting success was 36%. The problem participants described was a lack of experience and knowledge in such areas as the ability to persuade potential customers and the public, reaching out to potential clients, and the ability to effectively conduct market segmentation, specifically, behavioral segmentation and psychological segmentation. Other related challenges the graduates faced were effectively demonstrating their services in the marketplace, identifying better and effective ways to promote their brand and the services they provide, skills for Internet marketing, brand management, advertising strategy, sales promotion, and noting the most effective and affordable marketing campaigns. There was a plethora of marketing skills that the students did not possess but that were necessary for a successful business venture. A lack of knowledge was articulated by respondents who indicated they planned to become graduate entrepreneurs. Graduates who intended on becoming business owners perceived that their lack of knowledge would affect their capacity to open a business.

5.5. Competition

The third most significant factor that survey participants mentioned was competition. Ten percent of the survey participants considered competition a major barrier to becoming involved in entrepreneurial endeavors. The participants noted that this gap could be addressed by engaging students in courses that provide technical expertise or coaching (Figure 2).
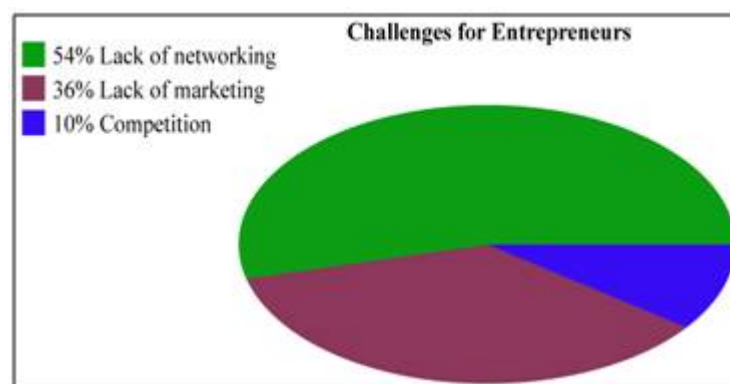

Figure 2: Challenges faced by entrepreneurs

5.6 Summary of Findings

The descriptive analysis showed that the students identified three areas that they considered significant to their skills gap and that affected their opportunities in the marketplace or in starting a business. These problems emerged in the first survey. The second survey highlighted some challenges experienced by the graduates and provided a background for the skills required at graduation. The findings showed that the graduates perceived a lack of skills required to reach potential clients. Additionally, graduates expressed their lack of knowledge concerning increasing awareness of their businesses. Although students wanted to pursue entrepreneurial activities, they were hampered by a lack of business competence. Another finding indicated that graduates did not possess sufficient practical skills to develop an effective business plan. Graduates perceived that they did not possess the capacity to identify the appropriate target audience necessary to expand a business.

Another challenge noted was a lack of knowledge concerning strategic plans to make their services unique and different from other business. The skills required to conduct basic marketing schemes such as providing special offers and discounts for certain periods or certain products were alien to the survey respondents. While offering incentives is an important marketing approach, the graduates also recognized the need for sound methods to attract customers without placing the business at risk.

The results also showed a lack of networking. The participants complained of a lack of wider networks and connections with other businesses because of a lack of communication skills and inexperience in this area.

The graduates considered their educational institutions were offering insufficient guidance to prepare students for a career in business. Most of the respondents felt that the educational materials were limited in direction. The courses provided by the university were viewed as preparation to go into the workforce. However, the respondents did not feel that universities were preparing its students to truly understand markets or to have the competency to start their own businesses.

Combining the two largest responses from this question, 90% of respondents perceived that they did not possess the required skills to engage in entrepreneurship. Only 4% of graduates were actively involved in entrepreneurship although 86% of graduates in the original survey claimed that they wanted to start their own business. The results indicate that a lack of perceived preparation is a major obstacle to individuals starting their own business (Figure 3).
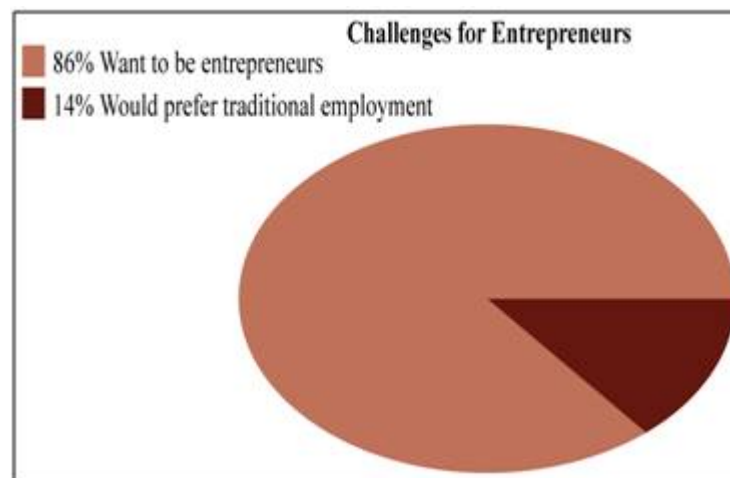

Figure 3: Employment plans after completing graduation

The respondents noted that university courses or workshops did not provide the necessary skills for entrepreneurship. The survey indicated that the final year students considered the universities to be lacking in entrepreneurial training. The results indicate that networking is the primary area where university programs are failing to prepare students. However, over one-third of the respondents stated that they were not adequately prepared with respect to marketing. Networking is not always taught to undergraduates; however, marketing is a core skill/focus of business curricula. These results may indicate that business marketing courses in the UAE are not sufficient to for engagement in entrepreneurship. Overall, the findings are useful because the respondents list factors noted in the literature as crucial for success. The following section draws upon the literature to develop a basic model that explains entrepreneurial success.

5.7 Entrepreneurial Success Model

The business and organizational performance literature has developed numerous models to predict success. The findings discussed in this paper indicate that 90% of the graduates in creative arts programs did not perceive themselves as adequately prepared for entrepreneurship. The curricula are lacking. Models are required that can be used to demonstrate strategies for entrepreneurial success and that research the intricacies of the associated variables. Simply analyzing business and organizational success models is inadequate for the prediction of entrepreneurial success. This section develops a model to predict organizational outcomes. It is the author's intention to develop this model overtime adding intricacy and detail by studying each of the variables in this model as research permits.

A review of the literature shows five factors that are key to organizational success. The five factors that the literature identifies as important to entrepreneurial success are:

1) Business management skills.
2) Marketing skills.
3) Networking skills.
4) Team (personal network) strength.
5) Competition.

Literature on business management skills focuses on the basic skills required to obtain and maintain employment such as time management communication and budgeting. These skills are necessary for an employee or an entrepreneur, but the presence of these skills are insufficient to predict the success of an entrepreneurial project. Another factor mentioned by the literature is marketing. However, marketing is often grouped with basic management skills. This study argues that a different or more thorough understanding of marketing is necessary when studying entrepreneurial pursuits. Entrepreneurs typically are responsible for marketing functions and, therefore, require a different understanding of marketing than an individual with traditional employment.

Networking is also a factor in the entrepreneurial literature, and one that is often confused with marketing. This study argues that networking and marketing represent two separate and distinct concepts. Whereas marketing represents the process of framing a product by selecting the right market, pricing, and packaging, networking consists of building relationships with business, vendors, and customers. Network strength refers to the strength of the entrepreneur's network. The entrepreneur's network includes the inner circle of family, friends, and investors that support the individual starting the business. Finally, competition is noted in the literature as a factor that influences entrepreneurial success. After reviewing the literature, this study presents the following model (Figure 4):

$$Ea = Bs + Ms + NS + Ts = C$$

Where Ea = Entrepreneurial Achievement

Bs = Business Skills

Ms = Marketing Skills

Ne = Networking Skills

Ts = Team (Network) Strength

C = Competition

Figure 4: Model for entrepreneurial success

The model is not complete. However, it is a start, and the primary focus for future research will be adding detail by examining the literature and testing this model on entrepreneurs to determine the variable intricacies. The following section discusses the future implications of the model.

6. Conclusion, Future Implications, and Policy Recommendations

The new model can be applied to future research. The following are some of the research questions that will be investigated with the model:

1) What types of marketing skills, and for which channels, are most important to entrepreneurs (radio, email, or social media)?
2) What skills have a greater impact on entrepreneurial success –marketing or networking?
3) What are the differences between marketing and networking in entrepreneurial settings and the context of established organizations?
4) Which is more valuable to networks – business knowledge or capital investment?

This model will also provide educators with an educational tool for undergraduates. Through an awareness of the factors that influence entrepreneurial success, potential entrepreneurs can hone the skills required to start their own business.

This paper contributes to the current literature in two ways: 1) It provides insight into the preparation and attitudes of UAE creative industries graduates that seek entrepreneurial opportunities, and 2) the paper presents a model to investigate entrepreneurial success. However, if entrepreneurial success is to be fully understood, the research must be distinguished from traditional business research. The current study provides empirical evidence emphasizing the need for entrepreneurial learning in the UAE. The government and agencies in the UAE are providing encouragement but most of the support for entrepreneurs has originated from established funds and mentoring groups. However, individuals graduating from the best art schools remain unsure of how to start a business because they lack certain skills including marketing, networking, developing business plans, and strategic planning. This study shows that many final year students considered themselves capable of starting a business but few did start a venture. This study highlights the need for the UAE government and its public universities to develop strategies that will facilitate the efficient equipment of students and graduates for an entrepreneurial career.

The percentage of students willing to embrace entrepreneurship in the digital and media arts and creative arts implies the need for a concerted effort by educational institutions to prepare students for alternative careers. Institutions mainly equip students with skills that they can use when employed but not for entrepreneurship. Previous literature has shown the importance of marketing skills or other non-traditional skills such as networking, management, and communication (Carey & Naudin, 2006; Gray, 2010; Kavanagh & Drenman, 2008; Maes et al., 1997; Richards, 2005; Whiteside, 2003). Based on the current findings, the UAE should identify and facilitate the required skills for developing a group of young entrepreneurs that can start and succeed in business. This study shows a willingness for such endeavors, but a lack of skills to start an effective venture. Higher learning institutions will be instrumental in ensuring the UAE achieves such an endeavor.

Additional research can define appropriate curricula for students. The current study identifies the education gap concerning entrepreneurial skills for students and the challenge this presents in the creative arts industry. However, research can determine education strategies using internships or theoretical frameworks. The existing model provides internships where students can understand the standard framework for entrepreneurial skills, but a theoretical basis is still required.

The UAE government has made substantial financial investment to promote entrepreneurship. However, funding alone is not sufficient to equip a new generation of entrepreneurs. This study suggests four ways that government agencies and universities can close the skills gap in the UAE.

1) Create liaisons between agencies that promote small business development and the public universities.

2) The UAE government should fund the creation of entrepreneurial studies programs at public universities that focus all research and training on the best ways to prepare graduates for entrepreneurship upon graduation.

3) The government should coordinate with public universities to create startup incubators within public universities that are open to all qualified applicants. Students would be able to apply for admission to incubators, and a certain amount of spaces would be reserved in the incubators for non-students, graduates of the university entrepreneurial and business programs, and active students. This would provide non-student applicants access to top academic experts in business and entrepreneurial students while providing students the opportunity to work with other entrepreneurs before graduating.

4) Universities should offer undergraduate students marketing internships in place of the generic business internships previously offered to students. This would provide students with the required product marketing tools for their own businesses.

These policy recommendations would alter the government efforts and educational output. Combining government and business resources with student/teacher time and ingenuity is a pragmatic approach to closing the knowledge gaps. Coordination between all stakeholders would improve outputs and reduce financial and time waste.

The lack of data concerning UA Eentrepreneurs represents another hurdle. This study examined potential entrepreneurs; however, there are several established family-owned and small businesses operating in the UAE. Government research should target such established startups to determine the methods of achieving success. Both quantitative and qualitative studies and short-term and longitudinal studies are necessary to close the information gap and develop theoretic models.

The world continues to rapidly evolve. UAE entrepreneurs must compete with their national counterparts and entrepreneurs worldwide. The same system that offers exponential growth and opportunity also offers exponential competition and complexity. The future will belong to those who prepare adequately today. The UAE has the intention and financial resources to become a world leader in entrepreneurial business. Appropriate research and scientific application are necessary to make this intention a reality.

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Annexure

1. Survey 1

Questionnaire

My name is Yaser Hadi. I am a researcher from Blinks Studios. I am conducting a study examining the issues and challenges experienced post-graduation by graduate students in creative arts and digital and technical arts. The research seeks to identify the experiences of the graduates when starting a business and the factors that facilitate a decision to become an entrepreneur. The findings will contribute to entrepreneurial learning institutions' understanding of higher education in the UAE.

I invite you to participate in this study by responding to the following survey, which will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Please note that the information provided will be used for the stated academic purpose and for no other purpose. The information may be provided to supervisory agents by request, but it shall not be accessible to any other party. I assure you that I will also not release your identifiable information to unauthorized parties during and after the data collection and reporting.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Note that you will not receive tangible benefits for taking part in the study, but I highly appreciate your willingness to respond to my questions. I request that you provide complete and honest responses. You are free to terminate your participation at any point. You may also choose not to respond to a question.

To participate in the study, I require your outright agreement that demonstrates your understanding of the purpose of the study and that you are participating without coercion or expectation of a reward. Please provide contact information because I may invite you to participate in a follow-up study in approximately eight to 12 months after your graduation. All information will be treated confidentially. Thank you for your participation.

Participant:

Signature:

Contact information (email/telephone/fax number):

Date:

Time:

1.1. Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Nationality (circle the most applicable)
    a. Emirati
    b. International / immigrant student
2. What course are you undertaking?
    a. Creative arts: Creative writing and visual arts
    b. Digital and technical arts: Media production, communication design, film and television, animation, sound design, game design, multimedia, fashion, interior design
3. What is your work arrangement at the moment?
    a. Working part-time
    b. Not working
    c. Participating in a full-time internship
    d. Other: Please explain ………………………………………………….
    If you are working or in an internship program, is this within your area of specialization? Yes / No
4. What is your work decision after graduation? (Indicate if you plan to work for an established company, start your own company, work as a freelance employee, or plan to combine different work possibilities. Circle as appropriate).
    a. I plan to work for an established company.
    b. I plan to be a business owner (entrepreneur).
    c. I plan to start my own company – full-time work.
    d. I plan to work as a freelance employee.
    e. I plan to work for my company part-time.
    f. Other: Please explain..…………………………………………………………………………………

1.2. Section 2: Plan for Work or Business

5. Have your started your own business (prior to graduation).
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I plan to start my own business.
6. If your response to question 5 was "yes" or "I plan to start my own business," what obstacles did or are you facing in starting the business. Be as specific as possible.
    a. ………………………………………………….
    b. ………………………………………………….
    c. …………………………………………………
    d. …………………………………………………..

7. Are you planning on working for the business part-time and learning full-time?
   a. Full-time work.
   b. Part-time work.
   c. Full-time student.
   d. Part-time student.
   e. Combination of a and d.
   f. Combination of b and c.
   g. Other: Please explain. ………………………………………………………………………..

1.3. Section 3: Skills Base
8. What skills do you feel you require to start a successful business in creative and digital arts?
   a. ………………………………………………….
   b. …………………………………………………
9. Has your university been able to effectively prepare you for starting the business? Do you feel that the university has taught you the required skills?
   a. Yes. Explain ………………………………..
   b. No. Explain …………………………………
10. Does your university offer marketing training for creative and digital arts students?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other. Explain ……………………………………
    If your answer is "Yes," are the skills provided in the course sufficient to start and succeed in a business? Please explain …………………………………………………….
11. How can universities prepare their creative and digital art students to become successful entrepreneurs?
    a. ………………………………………………………………
    b. ……………………………………………………………….
    c. ………………………………………………………………
12. What skills are required for entrepreneurship by creative and digital arts students?
    a. …………………………………………..
    b. ………………………………………….
    c. ………………………………………….

2. Survey 2
Questionnaire

My name is Yaser Hadi. I am a researcher from Blinks Studios. Approximately eight months ago, you participated in my survey that examined the issues and challenges experienced by graduate students in creative arts after graduation. You were asked to identify your choice with respect to starting a business, working for a company, or working as a freelance employee. Thank you for participating in the first survey and for providing your contact information to enable future contact. This questionnaire is a follow-up to assess whether your decision has changed and to gain insight into your post-graduate professional experiences. The goal of this follow-up is to understand the skills that you found important with respect to entrepreneurship in the creative arts industry and the role of the university in developing these skills. The information provided will be used to complete the academic project initiated with the first survey. Any information you provide will be confidential.

Note that your participation is voluntary, and you will not receive any tangible benefit from your participation. I appreciate your willingness to respond to the second survey. The questionnaire will require 20 to 30 minutes for completion. Please provide accurate and complete responses. You may terminate your participation in the study at any point. You may also skip any question that you consider intrusive.

To take part in the study, please indicate your agreement by signing this form. The signature is evidence that you understood the purpose of this follow-up and its relationship to the first survey and that you are willing to provide the additional information required. Your signature also shows that you willingly agreed to participate without expectation of a reward at the completion of the questionnaire. I do not require you to present personal information in this round because this is the final survey for the research. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

Participant:
Signature
Date:

2.1. Section 1: Work-Related Information

1. What is your area of specialization?
   a. Creative arts: Creative writing and visual arts.
   b. Digital and technical arts: Media production, communication design, film and television, animation, sound design, game design, multimedia, fashion, interior design.
2. What was your work plan after graduation?
   a. To work for an established company.
   b. To start my own company – full-time or part-time.
   c. To work as a freelance employee.
   d. To work for my company part-time.
   e. Other: Please explain. …………………………………………………………………………….
3. Have you reached your goal as stated in question 2?
   a. Yes. Please explain……………………………………………………
   b. No. Please explain…………………………………………………….
   c. Somewhat. Please explain …………………………………………

2.2. Section 2: Job Skills

4. What skills have you found important when entering the job market?
   a. ……………………………………..
   b. ……………………………………..
   c. ……………………………………..
5. Was the university adequately able to prepare you with these skills?
   a. Yes. Please explain …………………………………………………
   b. No. Please explain …………………………………………………..
6. Are there more skills that you felt the university could have taught? Please explain …………………….
7. What problems have you faced in your career that you attribute to a lack of skills preparedness?
   a. …………………………………………….
   b. …………………………………………….
   c. …………………………………………….
8. Did you start your own business after graduation?
   a. Yes (proceed to question 9).
   b. No (proceed to question 12).

2.3. Section 3: Entrepreneurial Skills

9. What skills did you find important in starting your business?
   a. …………………………………………….
   b. …………………………………………….
   c. …………………………………………….
10. What were the main challenges that you faced?
    a. …………………………………………….
    b. …………………………………………….
    c. …………………………………………….
11. Do you feel that university prepared you adequately to start and succeed in your business?
    a. …………………………………………….
    b. …………………………………………….
    c. …………………………………………….
12. What is the role of marketing skills in your business? Did you experience any shortcomings based on a lack of such skills?
    a. …………………………………………….
    b. …………………………………………….
    c. …………………………………………….
13. What courses, if taught at the university, would have had a greater impact on the success of your business?
    a. …………………………………………….
    b. …………………………………………….
    c. …………………………………………….
14. What is your recommendation for entrepreneurial learning for creative and design arts students in the UAE?
    a. …………………………………………….
    b. …………………………………………….
    c. …………………………………………….

2.4. Section 4: This Section Is for Individuals Who Have Started Their Own Businesses.

1. Did you face difficulties reaching potential customers? If so, please name them.
2. How do you plan to reach those potential customers in the future?
3. How do you promote your business?
4. How do you currently reach your customers?
5. Do you conduct marketing campaigns? If so, please briefly describe them?
6. What challenges do you face promoting your service/s?
7. How do you strategize your business promotion?
8. How do you convince customers that your service/s is the best choice for them?
9. How do you differentiate your business from competitors?
10. How do you convince customers that your service/s differs from other competitors?
11. How do you locate your target customers?
12. What other challenges do you face in promoting your business?