

The Level of Business Management Practices of the Malay Women Entrepreneurs and its Relationship with their Business Performance

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Abstract: Many studies found that business performance has relationships with the entrepreneurs' ability to manage. The purpose of this study was to determine the level of business management practices of the Malay women entrepreneurs and its relationship with their business performance. The study also aimed to distinguish the differences between the level of business management practices based on the level of education, entrepreneurial courses attended and previous working experience among them. The sample consists of 103 women entrepreneurs who are operating their businesses in the District of Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The management skills were limited to the four functions namely planning, organizing, leading and controlling. A survey design was employed using a questionnaire. The study found that the level of business management skills among women entrepreneurs was high. The result also showed that there is a positive and strong relationship between organizing skills and the business performance. The findings indicated significant differences between organizing, leading and controlling skills based on their level of education. The entrepreneurial courses attended showed significant differences between planning and leading skills. Furthermore, the study found that previous working experiences contributed to the differences in the level of business management practices. Implications of this study suggested the importance of education, entrepreneurial courses and trainings in ensuring entrepreneurial success.

Key words: Business management, business performance, women entrepreneurs, functions, significant, questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

The United States Small Business Administration websites says, the word entrepreneur originated from the French word *entreprendre* which means to undertake. Moore (1990) defines an entrepreneur as someone who takes an active role in the decision-making and risk-taking of a business in which she or he has the majority ownership. According to McMullan and Long (1990), an entrepreneur is a self-employed person who has to face uncertainty and will never tied down to the traditional ways of making deals. Entrepreneurship comprises small and medium businesses and is an activity greatly encouraged, since it contributes to economic growth. A woman entrepreneur is therefore, defined as a woman who owns and manages an enterprise ranging from small to medium scale businesses.

In today's world, there is quite a significant number of women who choose entrepreneurship as their career. In the United States itself, women started businesses >3, the men did in 1992. In the same year, 18-30% of

self-employed workers in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand were women. In China, women made up 25% of entrepreneurs while in Japan, five out of six new businesses were owned by women (Licuanan, 1992). In Malaysia, women accounted for about 46.5% of the total labor force in 2001 (Department of Statistic, 2002). In manufacturing sector, 43.4% of the total labor force in 1995 were female workers and this had increased to 46.4% in 2000. In the wholesale, retail trade, hotel and restaurant sectors, 37.6% of the total labor force were women in 1995 and 46.5% in 2000. Similarly, the proportion of female workers increased from 40.3% in 1995 to 46.5% in 2000 in other sectors such as finance, insurance, real estate and business services. The formulation of the National Policy for Women (NPW) by the Malaysian government reflects her commitment and encouragement to women to play active role in the Malaysian economy. In general, the boom in entrepreneurship among women in Malaysia, recently has been the result of a new awareness and willingness among them to take risks in their economic lives. This is

very much related to an increased level of education among women to take control and better their living standards (Ismail, 1999). More women are starting new businesses, largely because they have a strong desire to control their time, future and financial destinies. Other motives for owning a business among them include self-determination, financial independence and the belief in a better way to earn a living (Friar and Meyer, 2003). Although, the role and contribution of women in business is widely recognised in Malaysia there were very few studies done on their management practices. With regards to management practices, Lowden stresses on the need for an entrepreneur to have good skills in planning, organising, leading and control in running their businesses. The planning skills include establishing goals, allocating resources, formulating direction of the company and making good and non-routine decisions. The organising function includes integrating the activities of the various units in the organisation and providing unity of action towards pursuing a common goal. As a leader, the entrepreneur is responsible for implementing decisions, creating favourable organisational climate and developing the employees through training. The controlling function refers to establishing performance standards, assessing performance and taking corrective action where necessary (Gallaway and Brown, 2000).

Studies related to business management skills and performance: Ahmad (1994) in his study found out >60% of businesses that performed well had to do with their managers who are skillful in planning, administering, directing, motivating, controlling and evaluating. He concluded that a good businessman should have three basic skills such as technical, soft and conceptualizing skills. Those technical skills include specific knowledge and techniques in marketing, accounting, engineering and application of computers, etc. The soft skills include the ability to work in a team, the ability to motivate employees and cooperatives in doing some tasks. The conceptualizing skills include the ability to see the business as a whole and integrate all of the activities to achieve the business goal. Mohd Yusop's study support Khaliq's findings that entrepreneurs need to master necessary business knowledge in order to compete with others. Some of those knowledge are business management, financial management, accounting and vocational skills. Haswell and Dan Holmes (1989) reported in their studies that businesses failed due to inefficient organizational management and lack of experience in running a business. Some of the weaknesses related to the inefficient management are bad keeping records of financial transactions, limited information

received and lack of clear guidelines in certain procedures. Beaver (2002) in his study also found that small industries failed because of financial problems, non-strategic business management, non-contemporary marketing practice and awareness of competitors' strengths. Beaver's view is by Yusuf (1998) studied small business owners in six different countries of the South Pacific region found that one of the most common reasons for business failures is bad management skills.

Ludher *et al.* (1993) studied business women's problems in running their businesses found out that most of them were weak in management aspects and supervising their staffs. These business women also lack of awareness on the importance of doing planning for the future of their businesses. Instead, they tend to perceive that doing business is a way of contributing to the society besides doing welfare work. Rosnani on the other hand found out that most of the Malay small business owners did not have adequate financial management skills. Their record keeping performance was not up to even the minimum requirements. In short, these business owners did not care about keeping their business transactions record properly, even though the simplest one such as how much money spent and earned for the day. Halimah in her study among the Malay business owners found out that their attitude towards good financial record keeping is very poor. This poor attitude had been there for a long time when referred to the many earlier studies. The same attitude also occurred among the muslim indigenous entrepreneurs in the town of Sri Aman, Sarawak. The failure of these entrepreneurs was not due to the size of their businesses as they always claimed but due to their poor business management and financial skills. Pihie and Elias (1997) also found out in their studies that most business failures was due to not knowing how to manage. Mohd Zabid studied the management practices of the women entrepreneurs in the Klang valley found out that leadership was the most important function in ensuring their business success followed by organizing and planning functions. In conclusion, the above studies showed that appropriate management practices by the entrepreneurs are the most important determinant of business success.

In terms of the level of education and its relationship with good management practices, Panda (2002) found out that there was a relationship between business success and entrepreneurs' level of education. This level of education could come from the school education, parents' education background, previous experiences and entrepreneurs' ability to manage their businesses. Rosnani agreed with the importance of education in determining the good performance of a business.

Ludher *et al.* (1993) and Yusof (2000) who studied women entrepreneurs in the town and rural areas found out that most of them had low level of education such as high school. Teo (1996) in his his studies of women entrepreneurs in Singapore found out that the successful ones had a higher level of education than those who were not successful. Among those who were successful, 70% of them had a university degree whereas those who were not successful only 23% of them had a university degree. In contrast with Fauziah's findings, she found out that women entrepreneurs in Malaysia who had only high school education or low education level were usually successful in their businesses due to their strong entrepreneurship traits or attitude, high determination and high achievement oriented. Nor Hasma's findings supported Fauziah's findings in terms of academic achievements alone did not determine one's success. Smallbone (1999) who studied entrepreneurship success in the United Kingdom also agreed with Fauziah and Nor Hasma. He concluded that education alone was not a guarantee of success for entrepreneurs even though, it was an advantage. Rahmah and Zaini who studied 22 Vendor Development Program in Malaysia reported that 77.7% of the Malay entrepreneurs from the Small Medium Enterprise (SMEs) group were university graduates and 22.2% of them were professionals. On the other hand, those who were from the small business group, 62.5% of them were from high school education level, 25% were from the diploma level and only 12.5% of them were considered professionals. In comparison between these two groups both of them were successful even though at the different level of business sizes. The determining success factors were management and technical skills that they had acquired through trainings. In another study by Suraidi relating education to business success on 350 small entrepreneurs in the state of Kelantan found out that education had no correlation with their success. Conclusively, education or academic achievement is not the only determining factor for business success or involvement in business.

It is a common knowledge that training play a very important role in assisting an entrepreneur to be more efficient and skilled. There are many studies which had looked into this. For example, Hassan Basri had studied the influence of trainings in improving a company's strategies, management and marketing approach on 65 Malay entrepreneurs in the state of Selangor. He found out that there was a significant correlation between trainings attended by those entrepreneurs and their companies' performance in terms of revenue. Henry *et al.* (2005) also studied the same effect on 100 entrepreneurs in Europe. He compared two groups of

entrepreneurs in which one group attended a series of trainings and another group did not attend any training. This study was a longitudinal study which took 3 years to complete. He concluded in his study that entrepreneurship programs or trainings benefited entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs admitted that the trainings that they received had helped them a lot in running their business more efficiently. Ludher *et al.* (1993) in their study found out that women entrepreneurs need trainings in technical skills, management skills, accounting, store management, time management and in fact doing planning. Intan in her study on 191 Malay Women Entrepreneurs who registered with the Malay Women Entrepreneurs Association found out that these entrepreneurs need trainings in various management areas to run their business. Collisan and Quinn in their study also found out that industries admitted they need training to increase their knowledge in developing their businesses. Humam who studied 200 entrepreneurs found out 68.5% of the entrepreneurs agreed that they need adequate knowledge to manage their businesses while 57.5% believed that the success of their businesses depended on the amount of training attended.

However, Wintertone (2002) disagreed on the great importance of training in alleviating business performance. He said training played a small role in influencing entrepreneurs' business performance. The reasons were he said; trainings were always conducted in a very short time, the contents were limited, the teaching deliveries were straight forward, involved more theories than practicality and finally were not relevant most of the time to the individual needs. Zaini studied 150 small scale entrepreneurs of the different races in Malaysia found out that they also disagreed with the role of trainings in helping their businesses to perform. The reasons, they gave were similar to that of Winterton's such as the duration of each course was usually too short with the contents usually too brief. Based on these aspects, the entrepreneurs said short course or training thus confused them further.

Research conceptual framework: This study adapts two models of entrepreneurship development proposed by Nik Abdul Rashid and Tan Kim Meng. According to Nik Abdul Rashid, education backgrounds, work experience and skills training received by an entrepreneur are important factors for his entrepreneurship development.

The beginning of an entrepreneurship development is from his or her educational environment and family. An entrepreneur receives his education from the school until the higher learning institution. In addition, he or she gets

education from attending courses at various training institutes relating to business studies. Then when he or she works somewhere he or she keep receiving informal education through work experiences. On the other hand, Tan Kim Meng proposes factors such as economic situations, psychology, sociology and business skills acquisitions would influence an individual's entrepreneurship development. At the same time, entrepreneurship traits or characteristics are being built from within an entrepreneur-to-be. These traits are important in ensuring the continuity of an individual effort to be entrepreneur and keep sustaining his involvement in a business. These two models combined provide a mixture of factors or variables that would ensure the success of a business venture. Lowden suggests that for entrepreneurs to be successful, he or she has to have the skills of planning, organizing, leading and controlling a business. Lowden's view can be explained by a theory of management which was introduced by Henry Fayol (1841-1925), a well renown expert from France.

Fayol listed down the functions of management such as planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and lastly controlling. Jennings and Beaver (1997), Panda (2000) and Utsch and Rauch (2000) pointed out that to determine whether or not an entrepreneur is successful or not is based on the amount of profit he make and the number of workers he or she employs.

Based on all these elements, Fig. 1 shows the relationships between the demographic factors such as the level of education, number of business skills trainings attended and previous work experiences; the practise of business management principles such as planning, organizing, leading and controlling and finally the business performance which is referred to profits.

The demographic factors are the independent variables while the practice of business management principles are the dependent variables. However for the business performance which is the amount of profit made by the women entrepreneurs, the practice of business management principles become the independent variables.

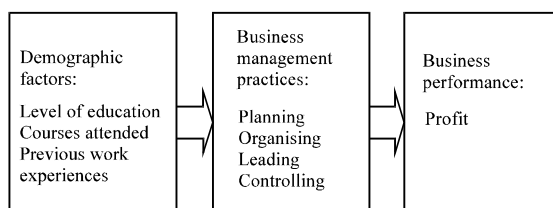


Fig. 1: Research conceptual framework (Nik Abdul Rashid and Tan Kim Meng)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A woman entrepreneur was defined by Lavoie (1985) as the female who has taken the initiative of launching a new venture who is accepting the associated risks, the financial, administrative and social responsibilities and who is effectively in-charge of its day-to-day management of a business. In this research, however a more general definition is adopted as a female who is an owner-manager of a business.

In other words, a woman entrepreneur is defined as one who is a key decision maker actively involved in the management of her enterprise. She must also bear some of the risk of the enterprise by owning at least half of the equity capital or shares of her business. Based on the previous studies by Ainol Azlan and Zaleha, a questionnaire was developed.

The sample were asked about their personal and entrepreneurial characteristics such as types of enterprise, reason for venturing into entrepreneurship, length of involvement in entrepreneurship, workers employed, business ownership, previous job experience, problems they faced at the start-up and growing stages and their net profit for the year ended, 2004. Questions on the management practices covering the areas of planning, organising, leading and controlling were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from those who strongly disagree (1) to those who strongly agree (5).

A list of prospective sample was generated from various sources such as the memberships of women organisations such as Malaysian Business Women Association (PENIAGAWATI) and Women Entrepreneurs Association (USAHANITA) from Negeri Sembilan branches.

Out of 150 questionnaires sent, 103 completed set were returned. Due to time and budget constraints, a larger sample size was not possible. These sample were selected at random and located in the District of Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. The survey was conducted over a period of 3 months with the following objectives:

- To determine the level of management practices (planning, organising, leading and controlling) among the Malay Women Entrepreneurs
- To identify the differences between the level of management practices and demographic factors (level of education, entrepreneurial courses attended and previous job experience) among the Malay Women Entrepreneurs
- To identify the relationship between the level of management practices and the business performance among the Malay Women Entrepreneurs

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics: Table 1 shows the personal profile of the Malay Women Entrepreneurs. About 58.3% were at the age of 26-45 years old and 96.1% were married. About 65% had tertiary education (diploma, degree and higher) and 24.3% with school certificate. Since, the sample came from the urban area it could probably explained why many had tertiary education background. The data also shows these Malay Women Entrepreneurs were still young which implies that most of them were from families which were still expanding and thus demand high expenses for their children's education. The finding appears consistent with the finding of Lee-Gosselin and Grise's that categorized a woman entrepreneur as someone usually between the age of 31-45 years and with an average of 12 years of schooling. Most of them had a spouse with an average of 7.4 children. In comparison with a study done by Burdette, she described female entrepreneurs as mostly under the age of 51, married with few children and were highly educated. This study's findings also supported Ismail (1999)'s study who found that women entrepreneurs started their businesses at an early age and possessed high education level. With regards to the entrepreneurial courses attended, majority (54.4%) of the sample stated that they had never attended any entrepreneurship course whereas 45.6% stated that they had attended some entrepreneurship courses between 1-3 times a year. The study found out that 75.7% of the sample had acquired work experience before they started their business.

Business profile: Table 2 shows the business profile of the Malay Women Entrepreneurs. Examining the age of firms of these women entrepreneurs, it was found that 48.6% had been in operation for ≤ 5 years while another 45.6% were in existence for 6-11 years. Only 6% were in operation for >12 years. About three quarter of the businesses were sole proprietorship while 17% were operated on a partnership basis. Only 9% were operated on private limited companies. This study also found that 48% of the Malay women entrepreneurs were involved in service-oriented businesses which include auditing and accounting firm, tailoring, saloon and clinic; 35% in retail business such as boutiques, mini-market, gift and souvenir shop and furniture and 17% involved in education-related businesses such as kindergarten and tuition centre. The enterprises of these women entrepreneurs were generally small and tended to keep small pay roll with 76% of them having five employees or less. When the Malay women entrepreneurs were asked

Table 1: Personal profiles of Malay Women Entrepreneurs

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
<25	8	7.8
26-35	25	24.2
36-45	58	26.3
46-55	12	11.7
Marital status		
Married	99	96.1
Single (unmarried/widowed/divorced)	4	3.9
Highest qualification		
Degree and higher	55	55.3
Diploma	12	11.7
Certificate	11	10.7
STPM/SPM/PMR	25	24.3
Entrepreneurial courses attended		
Once a year	36	34.9
More than twice a year	11	10.7
Never	56	54.4
Previous job experience		
Yes	78	75.7
No	25	24.3

Table 2: Business profile of Malay Women Entrepreneurs

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Age of business (years)		
<2	14	13.6
3-5	36	35.0
6-8	33	32.0
9-11	14	13.6
>12	6	5.8
No. of employee (people)		
<5	78	75.7
6-10	16	15.6
11-15	9	8.7
Types of business ownership		
Sole proprietorship	77	74.8
Partnership	17	16.5
Private limited	9	8.7
Nature of business		
Service-oriented business	49	47.6
Retail business	36	34.9
Education-related business	18	17.5
Sources of capital		
Personal saving	80	77.7
Loans: Family	6	5.9
Banks	15	14.6
Government agencies	2	1.8

about their sources of funds for their capital, 78% of them revealed that personal savings were their main sources of capital. Apart from that the next most important sources of funds was loans from commercial banks (15%), 6% was loans from family members and only 2% was loans from government agencies such as MARA. The findings also support past research (Maysami and Goby, 1999; Dinis and Helms, 2000) that the personal savings were the main sources of capital for women entrepreneurs especially in small businesses.

Reasons for starting business: About 83% of the Malay Women Entrepreneurs stated that it was their own idea for

Table 3: Main reasons for venturing into business

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Freedom	78	75.7
Opportunity to increase income	73	70.9
To use my knowledge, talents and skills	71	68.9
To achieve personal growth and recognition	59	57.3
Influenced by family, relatives or friends	34	33.1
To take over family business	10	9.7

*Total percent will not add up to 100% because some sample indicated >1 reasons

starting the business. These results support findings by Maysami and Goby (1999) and Muir (1999). When asked what had motivated them to go into business, the women cited the following main reasons for venturing into business (Table 3). Most of the sample said, they had gone into business because they need freedom of having control over their working lives (76%), opportunity to increase income (71%) to use their knowledge, talents and skills (69%) and also to achieve personal growth and recognition (57%). From the list of reasons for venturing into business quoted by the Malays Women Entrepreneurs, it seemed that internal factors such as a personal belief in one's ability and effort had motivated them more than external factors such as influences from family and friends. This showed that the women were internally motivated to pursue entrepreneurship. Besides the factors that had motivated them to start their own businesses, the Malay Women Entrepreneurs felt that family and friends' influence (33%) and taking over family business (10%) did not play an important part in motivating them to go into business. It appears that these unimportant factors were all of external origin. It confirmed out the earlier observation that the women were more motivated by internal factors and less motivated by external factors when considering an entrepreneurial career.

The findings appear consistent with the study done by Rashid (1996), Teo (1996) and Ismail (1999) that job satisfaction and economic reasons were the motivating factors for venturing into entrepreneurship. This in general reflects women's desire to have more control over their work and working environment.

The need for greater independence suggests that the motivating force is not directly related to material needs alone but other intrinsic reasons such as personal autonomy and self-interest.

Problems encountered by Malay Women Entrepreneurs:

In Table 4, problems encountered by the sample are shown. The problems encountered by the women entrepreneurs are categorized into problems at the start-up stage and the growing stage. For both stages, finance-related difficulties were cited as their greatest problem at 73 and 35%, respectively and those related to

Table 4: Problems encountered by Malay Women Entrepreneurs

Problems	Start-up stage (n = 103)		Growing stage (n = 103)	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Finance	75	72.8	39	34.9
Workers	29	28.1	21	20.3
Lack of knowledge, skill and experience	26	25.2	8	7.8
Clients	25	24.3	8	7.8
Administration/management	24	23.3	16	15.5
Marketing	17	16.5	11	10.7
Competition	13	12.6	21	20.4
Location	9	8.7	9	8.7

*Frequency and percentage are non-additive

Table 5: Mean score of management practices

Management practices	Mean	SD
Controlling	4.30	0.34
Planning	4.25	0.44
Leading	4.15	0.26
Organising	4.07	0.52

workers 28 and 20% (related to recruitment, skills and high turn-over). Other major problems at the start-up stage were lack of knowledge, skills and experience in business (25%), getting client (24%), administration (23%) and marketing (17%) were cited as their main problems.

The level of management practices: In the analysis of each management functions, a mean score of 3.67 and above on a 5-point Likert scale was taken to represent functions that were in high level of practices. The analysis produced the following results in descending order of mean scores (Table 5) controlling function shows the highest mean score followed by planning, leading and organising. This finding shows that the Malay Women Entrepreneurs practiced most of the controlling function in ensuring the success of their businesses. This finding contradicts the finding in a study done by Rashid (1996) among the successful business women in Klang valley. Rashid (1996) found that these successful business women usually practiced leading function followed by organizing, planning and controlling. The difference between these two studies is due to the different groups of entrepreneurs which came from the different area of business and education backgrounds. Mohd Zabid's studied the small scale entrepreneurs who most of them were lowly educated.

Differences between level of education and management practices:

Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference between planning function and level of education [$F(3,99) = 2.29, p > 0.05$]. The result implied that the women entrepreneurs practiced planning functions regardless of their level of education. This study consistent with the earlier observations made by

Table 6: ANOVA test between level of education and management practices

Functions	Source	df	Sum of squares	Mean ²	F	Sig.
Planning	Between group	3	1.25	0.42	2.26	0.09
	Within group	99	18.25	0.18		
	Total	102	19.50			
Organising	Between group	3	8.97	2.99	15.60	0.00
	Within group	99	18.96	0.19		
	Total	102	27.93			
Leading	Between group	3	2.30	0.77	15.76	0.00
	Within group	99	4.81	0.05		
	Total	102	7.10			
Controlling	Between group	3	5.74	1.91	28.28	0.00
	Within group	99	6.70	0.07		
	Total	102	12.45			

Table 7: Scheffe Post-hoc test between organising, leading and controlling function and level of education

Functions	(I) Categories	(J) Categories	Mean±SD	Sig.
Organising	Degree	Secondary	0.49±0.11	0.00
Leading	Degree	Secondary	0.30±0.11	0.00
Controlling	Degree	Secondary	0.32±0.06	0.00

Table 8: ANOVA test between courses attended and management practices

Functions	Source	df	Sum of squares	Mean ²	F	Sig.
Planning	Between group	2	3.74	1.87	11.85	0.00
	Within group	100	15.76	0.16		
	Total	102	19.49			
Organising	Between group	2	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.99
	Within group	100	27.92	0.28		
	Total	102	27.93			
Leading	Between group	2	1.78	0.89	16.77	0.00
	Within group	100	5.32	0.05		
	Total	102	7.11			
Controlling	Between group	2	0.30	0.15	1.24	0.29
	Within group	100	12.15	0.12		
	Total	102	12.45			

*Significant level of 95%

Fauziah (1990) who found that one quarter of the Malay business women were not highly educated. Studies done by Smallbone (1999) in United Kingdom also indicated that the level of education did not play a significant role in ensuring the success of a business. However, Table 7 shows that the results for organising [F(3,99) = 15.60, p<0.05], leading [F(3,99) = 15.76 p<0.05] and controlling practices [F(3,99) = 28.28, p<0.05] showed that there were significant differences between these functions and the level of education. To determine which functions are significant, Scheffe Post-hoc test was conducted.

The results in Table 8 show that the difference appear between degree level and secondary level. This could be because their university education had equipped them with advanced management knowledge and techniques. It had then made them more aware of the realities of the business world and more receptive to using their learned abilities to manage their businesses better (Ismail, 1997). Alternatively, it could be that their higher opportunity costs had made them push harder to succeed.

Table 9: Scheffe Post-hoc test between planning and leading function towards courses attended

Functions	(I) Categories	(J) Categories	Mean±SD	Sig.
Planning	Once a year	Never attend	0.43±0.11*	0.00
Leading	Once a year	Never attend	0.29±0.05*	0.00

*Significant level of 95%

Table 10: t-test for management practices towards previous working experience

Functions	Mean±SD	t-test	Sig.
Planning			
Experience	4.31±0.43	-2.24	0.03
No experience	4.09±0.42		
Organising			
Experiences	4.17±0.55	-3.62	0.00
No experience	3.76±0.26		
Leading			
Experience	4.19±0.27	-3.35	0.00
No experience	4.00±0.20		
Controlling			
Experience	4.38±0.36	-7.57	0.00
No experience	4.05±0.72		

Differences between courses attended and management practices: Table 9 shows that there is no significant difference between organising [F(2,100) = 0.01, p>0.05] and controlling [F(2,100) = 1.24, p>0.05] function based on courses attended. This means that regardless of the courses attended, the women entrepreneurs still practiced organising and controlling functions.

However, there is a significant difference between planning function [F(2,100) = 1.85, p<0.5] and leading function [F(2,100) = 16.77, p<0.05] based on courses attended. This study confirmed the findings of Ganesan *et al.* (2002) that courses attended have an impact on their business management practices. The Scheffe Post-hoc test is carried out to determine which categories of have attended courses were significant. Table 10 shows that both categories once a year and never attend had significant differences on whether or not the women entrepreneurs will practice planning and leading functions.

Differences between previous working experience and management practices: Table 10 shows that previous working experience makes a significant difference towards practising planning, organising, leading and controlling functions by the women entrepreneurs. Thus, having working experience is an advantage to them in providing them with the knowledge of how to manage.

DISCUSSION

In view of the importance of the development of Malay Women Entrepreneurs as an integral part of the Malaysian economic progress, it is essential to study their characteristics, specific strategies and skills they used in

their businesses. Thus, this study looked into their management skills and what are the factors that would influence them. Overall, these women entrepreneurs usually owned small businesses and were usually of young age (between 26-45 years old). Most of these women entrepreneurs had tertiary education background and tend to practice controlling function of the four management categories. This finding is not consistent with the finding of Rashid (1996) which found that women entrepreneurs practiced leading functions more than the other three management functions. In terms of the influence of education, the function of planning is not influenced by the education level of the women entrepreneurs compared to other management functions. However, work experience is a value added element in helping the women entrepreneurs to manage their businesses better.

Apart from that comprehensive and clear guidelines need to be legislated that lucidly delineated to prepare them in facing varied market challenges emerging in the 21st century. A more comprehensive path need to be charted to transform female entrepreneurs to be more dynamic and effective. Networking and support channels must be given extra emphasis for this will create a more conducive commercial environment for these entrepreneurs in handling their day to day business operations. To further enhance their entrepreneurial skills, training must be provided to fully prepare these individuals when handling issues of management, marketing and finance as these are critical aspects that ensures the success of the their commercial pursuit. Studies have revealed that academically successful entrepreneurs display a higher level of business proficiency through more systematic and effective business practice. Business efficiency is important in ensuring business potency and the best testament of this is in the annual revenue generated by each individual company. This only shows that implanting entrepreneurial skills through education is important to create a strong and rooted business ability at early stages. To inculcate business acumen is not easy for it encompasses a wide package that includes management skills and an amicable personality supported by an education that is based on a more real business environment. A broader educational approach should begin at schooling level and continue all the way to the tertiary stage which will awaken business awareness and business competency. This is why, it is important for relevant quarters or individuals to properly seek and identify potential entrepreneurs at the most early stage, inculcate business values and guide them all the way through to be more resilient and globally competitive (Othman *et al.*, 2004).

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