

Self-Leadership and Innovative Behavior Among Entrepreneurship Educators: The Mediating Role of Mindfulness

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship educators play a critical role in fostering innovation and creativity within higher education institutions. This study explores the relationship between self-leadership and innovative behavior among entrepreneurship educators, with mindfulness serving as a mediating factor. Self-leadership, characterized by self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and goal-setting, is essential for entrepreneurship educators to effectively guide students and promote an innovative learning environment. Simultaneously, innovative behavior involves generating, promoting, and realizing new ideas that can enhance educational practices. Recent studies suggest that mindfulness, defined as a heightened awareness and attention to the present moment, can enhance individuals' self-leadership capabilities and foster a conducive environment for innovation. This research adopts a quantitative approach, surveying entrepreneurship educators from various higher learning institutions in Malaysia. A structural equation modeling (SEM) method is employed to examine the direct relationship between self-leadership and innovative behavior and the mediating role of mindfulness. Preliminary findings suggest that self-leadership positively influences innovative behavior, with mindfulness significantly mediating this relationship. The implications of this research are critical for higher education policymakers and educators seeking to enhance innovative pedagogical practices in entrepreneurship education. By integrating self-leadership development and mindfulness practices, institutions can better equip educators with the skills and mindset necessary to drive innovation in their teaching methods. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on self-leadership and mindfulness, offering new insights into how these constructs can jointly enhance innovative behavior among entrepreneurship educators.

Keywords: self-leadership, innovative behavior, mindfulness, entrepreneurship educators, higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly shifting landscape of higher education, the capacity for innovation has become a vital quality for educators. Entrepreneurship educators, in particular, are instrumental in nurturing an innovative mindset among students, preparing them to navigate the complex and ever-changing world of business (OECD, 2019). With the demand for creativity and adaptability in educational environments continuing to grow, it becomes crucial to understand the factors that influence innovative behavior among these educators (Thurlings et al., 2015). This study focuses on the impact of self-leadership on innovative behavior, with mindfulness acting as a mediating variable. The investigation is timely and relevant, given the increasing recognition of how psychological attributes contribute to enhancing educators' personal and professional performance (Aljarrah, 2023).

Self-leadership involves the process by which individuals consciously direct their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to achieve their desired personal and professional outcomes (Rakib et al., 2023). Techniques such as goal setting, self-reward, and self-monitoring are core components of self-leadership, enabling individuals to manage their actions effectively (Jared & Chui, 2017). In educational settings, particularly for entrepreneurship educators, the ability to self-lead can empower them to engage in more proactive and innovative teaching practices. Despite being widely studied in various professional contexts, the role of self-leadership in fostering innovation among entrepreneurship educators remains relatively underexplored.

Innovative behavior refers to the actions involved in generating, promoting, and realizing new ideas within an educational or organizational setting (Loogma et al., 2012). For entrepreneurship educators, this is not merely about teaching students to be innovative but also modeling innovation in their teaching approaches. Innovative behavior is crucial for fostering an entrepreneurial mindset in students, enabling them to develop the creative thinking skills needed in modern business environments. While many factors influence innovative behavior, the role of personal psychological traits, such as self-leadership, is becoming increasingly recognized as crucial for driving innovation (Usmanova et al., 2021).

Mindfulness, defined as the practice of present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, has emerged as a powerful psychological resource that enhances various aspects of functioning in personal and professional contexts (Capurso et al., 2016). In education, mindfulness is associated with improved emotional regulation, reduced stress, and increased cognitive flexibility—attributes that contribute to more effective and creative teaching (Crain et al., 2017). Mindfulness can serve as a mediator between self-leadership and innovative behavior, enabling educators to better leverage their psychological strengths to foster innovation. The mediating role of mindfulness suggests that it amplifies the positive effects of self-leadership on innovative practices by helping educators maintain focus, reduce cognitive clutter, and approach challenges with a more open and adaptive mindset (Good et al., 2016).

The integration of self-leadership and mindfulness presents an interesting dynamic for fostering innovative behavior among entrepreneurship educators. When educators lead themselves effectively and maintain present-moment awareness, they are better equipped to think creatively, manage stress, and navigate the complex demands

of modern teaching environments. This study seeks to fill the gap in existing literature by examining how self-leadership directly influences innovative behavior among entrepreneurship educators, with mindfulness acting as a critical mediator in this relationship. By gaining a deeper understanding of these relationships, higher education institutions can develop targeted strategies to cultivate these psychological traits among educators, thus fostering a more innovative and dynamic educational environment (Puspitadani et al., 2022). The findings of this research have the potential to inform both theoretical frameworks and practical interventions that support a culture of innovation in education.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role that self-leadership and mindfulness play in enhancing innovative behavior among entrepreneurship educators. By fostering these psychological attributes, higher education institutions can empower educators to drive meaningful innovations, contributing to a more effective and forward-thinking educational ecosystem.

Innovation is essential for the advancement and success of educational institutions, particularly in fostering a dynamic learning environment. However, the relationship between educators' self-leadership and their capacity for innovative behavior remains underexplored. Existing research has primarily focused on external factors influencing innovation, while the internal drivers, such as self-leadership, self-efficacy, and mindfulness, have not been sufficiently examined. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how self-leadership, self-efficacy, and mindfulness collectively contribute to the innovative behavior of educators, thereby providing deeper insights into the mechanisms that promote innovation in educational settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing complexity of the educational landscape necessitates that entrepreneurship educators adopt innovative behaviors to foster creativity and innovation among their students. The relationship between self-leadership, self-actualization, and innovative behavior is particularly significant in this context. Mindfulness, as a potential mediator, offers a nuanced understanding of how these factors interact to influence educators' innovative behaviors. This literature review aims to examine the existing research on these constructs, synthesizing findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of their interrelationships.

A. Self-Leadership and Innovative Behavior

Self-leadership, which involves guiding oneself toward self-motivation and self-direction, as described by Manz (1986), has been recognized as a crucial element in enhancing innovative behavior among educators. According to Houghton et al. (2012), self-leadership strategies, including setting personal goals, rewarding oneself, and self-monitoring, enable educators to take the initiative, explore new ideas, and

adopt innovative teaching methods. This connection is further supported by recent research, indicating that educators who actively engage in self-leadership are more inclined to demonstrate innovative behaviors, especially in dynamic and challenging environments (Carmeli et al., 2006; Yıldız et al., 2014). Additionally, Shaemi Barzoki & Teimouri (2008) assert that self-leadership not only fosters individual creativity but also enhances the overall capacity for innovation within educational institutions.

Continuing to build on this foundation, recent studies have highlighted the ongoing importance of self-leadership in nurturing innovative behavior among educators. Research by Houghton et al. (2012) elaborates on the positive relationship between self-leadership and creative problem-solving, as well as the implementation of innovative teaching strategies. This relationship is particularly significant in contexts that require high adaptability and continuous improvement. Further investigation by Amundsen and Martinsen (2015) reveals that self-leadership not only stimulates individual creativity but also promotes team innovation by fostering a culture of self-initiative and proactive learning. Rubera & Kirca, (2017) support these findings, emphasizing that educators who practice self-leadership tend to cultivate more dynamic and engaging learning environments, thereby contributing to a broader culture of innovation in educational settings. These studies collectively reinforce the pivotal role of self-leadership as a driver of innovative behavior, particularly in educational contexts where creativity and adaptability are paramount.

B. The Role of Mindfulness in Enhancing Innovative Behavior

Mindfulness, characterized as an active and open awareness of the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2013), has garnered increasing attention as a key mediator in the interplay between self-leadership and innovative behavior. Baer et al. (2008) emphasize that mindfulness enhances cognitive flexibility, enabling educators to tackle problems with fresh perspectives and generate creative solutions. In a study conducted by Khan et al. (2022), mindfulness was found to be instrumental in translating self-leadership strategies into innovative behaviors by diminishing cognitive rigidity and fostering openness to new experiences. Similarly, Sutcliffe et al. (2020) posits that mindfulness deepens the connection between self-actualization and innovative behavior by cultivating greater self-awareness and encouraging the exploration of novel ideas.

Recent studies continue to emphasize the critical role of mindfulness in nurturing innovative behavior, particularly within educational contexts. Research by Moore & Malinowski (2017) indicates that mindfulness not only enhances cognitive flexibility but also improves emotional regulation, both of which are essential for creativity and innovation. Their findings suggest that mindfulness practices help educators manage stress more effectively, thereby sustaining a positive and open mindset that is conducive to

innovation. Additionally, Amina et al. (2021) reveal that mindfulness can bolster psychological safety within teams, enabling educators to take risks and experiment with new teaching methods without fear of judgment. This supports the notion that mindfulness fosters a collaborative environment where innovation can thrive. Shapiro, Wang and Peltason (2015) further argue that mindfulness acts as a buffer against the pressures of performance expectations, allowing educators to stay focused on long-term creative goals without being overwhelmed by immediate challenges. Collectively, these studies affirm the indispensable role of mindfulness in facilitating innovative behavior, particularly when integrated into daily educational practices.

C. Integration of Constructs: Self-Leadership, Mindfulness and Innovative Behavior

The combined influence of self-leadership and mindfulness creates a robust framework for understanding the factors that drive innovative behavior among entrepreneurship educators. Self-leadership is fundamental in cultivating the self-awareness essential for personal and professional growth. When mindfulness is integrated with self-leadership strategies, educators become more attuned to their intrinsic motivations, enhancing their ability to navigate the complexities of the educational environment (Guajardo, 2020). The interaction between mindfulness and self-leadership further strengthens educators' innovative capacities by fostering a growth-oriented mindset and improving their adaptability to changing circumstances (Burmansah et al., 2022).

In recent years, the importance of self-leadership has become increasingly evident as it empowers educators to take initiative, set goals, and regulate their behaviors in ways that promote innovation. As noted by Tenschert et al. (2024), self-leadership is a key psychological mechanism that enables individuals to manage their own cognitive, emotional, and behavioral states effectively. This is particularly crucial in the dynamic field of entrepreneurship education, where educators are required to model the innovation and adaptability they teach to their students. Mindfulness, defined as the practice of present-moment awareness and acceptance, has emerged as a complementary factor that enhances the effectiveness of self-leadership (Sutcliffe et al., 2020). When entrepreneurship educators practice mindfulness, they are better able to regulate their emotions, reduce stress, and focus their attention on innovative problem-solving.

Recent studies have reinforced the significance of combining self-leadership and mindfulness as critical drivers of innovation among educators. Jia et al. (2024) highlight that mindfulness enhances the effectiveness of self-leadership by promoting emotional regulation and reducing stress, which creates a conducive environment for innovation. This is echoed by Lindsay and Creswell (2017), who found that mindfulness practices significantly improve educators' capacity to engage in creative thinking by deepening their awareness of personal values and goals. Furthermore, Walker et al. (2021) demonstrated that educators who integrate mindfulness with self-leadership exhibit enhanced problem-solving abilities and adaptability, leading to more innovative teaching practices.

Entrepreneurship educators, tasked with preparing students to navigate an unpredictable and complex business world, benefit greatly from fostering innovation in their teaching methodologies. Innovative behavior, defined as

the generation, promotion, and implementation of novel ideas, is essential in creating an educational environment that reflects the fast-paced nature of modern entrepreneurship (Messmanna et al., 2010). Educators who exhibit innovative behavior are not only able to inspire creativity in their students but also ensure that their teaching practices remain relevant and effective in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

The integration of self-leadership and mindfulness presents a powerful combination for fostering innovative behavior. Self-leadership equips educators with the tools to set and achieve personal goals, while mindfulness ensures that they remain present, adaptable, and responsive to the challenges of the educational environment (Tenschert et al., 2024). By fostering these psychological attributes, higher education institutions can empower entrepreneurship educators to drive meaningful innovations, contributing to a more effective and forward-thinking educational ecosystem.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sample and Procedure

This study employs a quantitative research design using structured questionnaires distributed among 618 entrepreneurship educators across 20 public and private universities in Malaysia. A final dataset of 231 usable responses was analyzed after screening for outliers. The population of entrepreneurship educators in Malaysia is 1,573. Based on stratified random sampling, 309 educators were targeted (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), and PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling) was used to analyze the data. The questionnaire measured self-leadership, self-efficacy, self-actualization, mindfulness, and innovative behavior using established scales that were adapted from Self-Leadership: Houghton et al. (2012), Mindfulness: Baer et al. (2008), Innovative Behavior: Janssen (2000).

B. Measuring Sampling

A diverse range of public and private universities were included, with the sample stratified by the number of academic staff involved in teaching entrepreneurship programs. Out of the 618 distributed questionnaires, 283 responses were received, with 231 remaining after screening for outliers using the Mahalanobis distance method (Ghorbani, 2019). The study used SPSS for descriptive analysis and SmartPLS for PLS-SEM analysis. Reliability and validity were confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Path coefficients were analyzed using the bootstrapping method to test hypotheses.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Measurement Model

Cronbach's alpha for all constructs exceeded the 0.7 threshold, indicating good internal consistency (Taber, 2018). By conducting hypothesis testing using bootstrapping technique they hypotheses as below were found:

H1: Self-leadership significantly influences innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.494$, $p < 0.05$).

H2: Mindfulness significantly predicts innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.857$, $p < 0.05$).

H3: Mindfulness mediates the relationship between self-leadership with innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.314$, $p < 0.05$).

PLS-SEM analysis begun with the testing of measurement traits of the outer model (Hair et al., 2019; Ringle et al., 2020). The measurements that can be churned out by the Smart PLS ranges from the Cronbach's alpha to t-values. To test the router model, the constructs and their indicators were tested to establish the relationship between them. Indicators with loadings below 0.70 were eliminated after the examination of loadings was carried out (Hair et al., 2014). The items were deemed reliable as it achieves a significance level ($t > 1.96$) indicated by the standardized outer loading between 0.848 and 0.872. The internal consistency of the constructs was also deemed adequate as the composite reliability value was between 0.938 and 0.977, all above the minimally acceptable level of 0.70. An item's standardized loading is 0.70 or greater, it is considered reliable (Hair et al., 2017).

On the other hand, convergent validity was also confirmed as the measurement model recorded an average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.60 for all constructs with a cut-off of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014). As for the confirmation of discriminant validity, all AVEs were reported to have a higher value compared to the squared inter-construct correlations according to the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Henseler et al., 2009). The AVE square root for each construct was larger than the off-diagonal correlation, indicating clear discriminant validity which IB= 0.872, Mindfulness = 0.861 and Self Leadership 0.848. These values confirmed the significance of the discriminant validity for all the indicators in this study.

V. CONCLUSION

The study highlights that self-leadership and mindfulness significantly influence innovative behavior, with mindfulness serving as a mediator in the relationship between self-leadership and innovation. This suggests that fostering mindfulness can amplify the positive effects of self-leadership on innovation. These findings highlight the importance of nurturing both self-leadership and mindfulness to drive innovation. Future research should examine these dynamics in varied contexts to further validate and expand the understanding of their impact. The insights gained from this study are valuable for organizations and policymakers, offering guidance on how to cultivate a culture of innovation through targeted training and development initiatives.

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