

## **Malay Entrepreneurs' Narrative of Government Business Support Services (GBSS) Through the Approach of Phenomenology**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this study is to explore the factors that made it difficult for Malay entrepreneurs to obtain assistance from the government. The study used the phenomenological approach because it focused on the worldview of the entrepreneurs themselves in describing the phenomenon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. Results of the study showed that there are two main factors which made it difficult for Malay entrepreneurs to accept the assistance provided by the government. The first factor is the attitude of the Malay entrepreneurs themselves. The second factor concerns the lack of understanding between the Malay entrepreneurs and the government agencies at the implementation stage where the lack of expertise and knowledge among the government staff, the lack of response and feedback from the government, the bureaucratic attitude, political influence, and government policies that do not favour the Malay entrepreneurs all contribute to the difficulty in accepting government assistance.

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### ملخص

يتمثل الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة في استكشاف العوامل التي جعلت من الصعب على رواد الأعمال الماليزيين الحصول على المساعدة من الحكومة. وقد استخدمت الدراسة النهج الفينومينولوجي لأنه يركز على النظرة العالمية لأصحاب المشاريع أنفسهم في وصف الظاهرة. وتم جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات المتعمقة وملاحظات الأطراف غير المشاركة. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هناك عاملين رئيسيين جعلوا من الصعب على رواد الأعمال الملاويون قبول المساعدة المقدمة من الحكومة. ويكمن العامل الأول في موقف رجال الأعمال الملاويون أنفسهم. ويتعلق العامل الثاني بعدم التفاهم بين رواد الأعمال الملاويون والوكالات الحكومية في مرحلة التنفيذ حيث يوجد نقص على مستوى الخبرة والمعرفة بين موظفي الحكومة، ونقص الاستجابة والتجاوب من الحكومة، والموقف البيروقراطي، والتأثير السياسي، والسياسات الحكومية التي لا تحابي رواد الأعمال الملاويون وتساهم جميعها في صعوبة قبول المساعدة الحكومية.

### ABSTRAITE

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'explorer les facteurs qui ont rendu difficile pour les entrepreneurs malais l'obtention d'une aide du gouvernement. L'étude a utilisé l'approche phénoménologique car elle s'est concentrée sur la vision du monde des entrepreneurs eux-mêmes pour décrire le phénomène. Les données ont été recueillies par le biais d'entretiens approfondis et d'observations non participantes. Les résultats de l'étude ont montré qu'il existe deux facteurs principaux qui rendent difficile l'acceptation par les entrepreneurs malais de l'aide fournie par le gouvernement. Le premier facteur est l'attitude des entrepreneurs malais eux-mêmes. Le deuxième facteur concerne le manque de compréhension entre les entrepreneurs malais et les agences gouvernementales au stade de la mise en œuvre, où le manque d'expertise et de connaissances du personnel gouvernemental, l'absence de réponse et de retour d'information de la part du gouvernement, l'attitude bureaucratique, l'influence politique et les politiques gouvernementales qui ne favorisent pas les entrepreneurs malais contribuent tous à la difficulté d'accepter l'aide gouvernementale.

**Keywords:** Malay Entrepreneurs, Government Support, Rational Choice Theory, Small and Medium Enterprises

**JEL Classification:** C23, R41 (up to 5 codes)

## 1. Introduction

In July 2019, the government of Malaysia introduced the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (DKN2030) by sharing the concept of wellbeing to increase the number of qualified, viable, and resilient entrepreneurs as well as to enhance the capability of local entrepreneurs especially *Bumiputera* (native) entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is recognised as a key contributor to the economic development of the country and the wellbeing of the society, with entrepreneurs playing an essential role through the entrepreneurial activities which create job opportunities, innovation, and increase in productivity for the community members (Păunescu & Molnar, 2020). The field of entrepreneurship has the potential to contribute to the nation's socioeconomic development and productivity. A more equitable distribution of income will increase the standard and quality of life of the people, and this in turn, brings social benefits to the society. Sustainable economic development can be promoted through an innovative and creative entrepreneurial nation as well as through new economy and digital economy (Malaysia, 2019). To create successful and competitive entrepreneurs, various programmes have been organised by the government (Yusoff & Yaacob, 2010). The government has focused on the field of entrepreneurship through the New Economic Policy (1971-1990), the National Development Policy (1990-2000), the National Vision Policy (2001-2010), and the New Economic Model (2011-2020). Entrepreneurship has also been identified as one of the national priority areas under the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (RMKe-11). Therefore, the field of entrepreneurship is a key component and a strategic step for Malaysia to achieve the status of a developed and prosperous nation in 2030.

Various efforts have been implemented by the government to assist entrepreneurs especially Malay entrepreneurs in doing business in various sectors including agriculture, plantation, livestock, industry and fisheries. The involvement of the government through various ministries and agencies has resulted in the creation of a wide range of entrepreneurship programmes that covers the initial stage of starting the business to the stage of retaining the business in the market. According to the National Entrepreneurship Policy, to date, there are 14 ministries and more than 60 government agencies that are responsible for coordinating the entrepreneurship development programmes in this country. Based on the SME Integrated Action Plan (SMEIPA) report, 153 entrepreneurship

development programmes have been introduced, involving a total of RM13.7 billion and a total of 637,808 beneficiaries (Malaysia 2020).

The diversity of the entrepreneurship development programme implemented is aimed at supporting the development of entrepreneurs by creating resilient and sustainable enterprises. The aim is to optimise performance and create opportunities for the entrepreneurs to grow and develop their business through market expansion, innovation, and increased productivity. The programmes offered can be categorised according to several areas of focus. Such areas of focus include financing, research grants, training and capacity building, infrastructure, business premises and equipment, technology, market access, social enterprise, and internationalisation. Among the government agencies involved in realising the goals of the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 are *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (People's Trust Council), Business Entrepreneur Group Economic Fund (TEKUN National), National Institute of Entrepreneurship (INSKEN), SME Corp., SIRIM Berhad, and various others (Malaysia, 2019).

However, the findings from studies conducted by Malaysian researchers indicated that Malay entrepreneurs do not seem to fully utilise the assistance provided by the government (Nor Hakim Yusoff & Anwar Zainol, 2014; Shamsuddin et al., 2017; Shamsuddin et al., 2020; Yusoff & Yaacob, 2010). Nonetheless, there is still a lack of in-depth research examining the rejection factors of government business support services especially from the perspective of the worldview of the Malay entrepreneurs themselves. Therefore, to unravel the questions surrounding the rejection of government's business support services from the worldview of the Malay entrepreneurs, an in-depth study using in-depth interview method should be carried out to explain the social phenomenon at the micro level (Malay entrepreneurs) and its relationship at the macro level (government institution). This is in line with the essence of the rational choice theory operating at the individual or micro level as the foundation or basis to explain the macro level phenomenon described by Coleman. Thus, the objective of this study is to identify and analyse the factors of rejection of government business support services among the Malay entrepreneurs. This study aimed to examine if each action and decision made by the Malay entrepreneurs is influenced by rational choice, focusing on costs and advantages of each decision taken in business.

## 2. Literature Review

The field of entrepreneurship requires entrepreneurs to confront and deal with challenging environments. Entrepreneurs need to identify the resources that can be utilised for business activities. Limited skills, knowledge and capital make it difficult for entrepreneurs to develop and expand their business. One of the reasons for SME entrepreneurs to continuously lack technical skills in conducting business is the lack of external support (Mole et al., 2017). Therefore, entrepreneurs need to seek business support from various sources such as business support services from the government or private sectors. Keeble et al. (1991) defined business support as all activities that provide expertise and services to an organisation and business. Services include those that begin from the production of a product up to the services of expertise covering aspects of accounting, marketing research and organisational management activities that involve the government and private sectors. Entrepreneurs can seek business support advice and assistance from the business network in the form of financial advice, financial management advice and business advice. At the same time, this could also help entrepreneurs who are facing problems in business. The frequency of seeking business support such as financial advice is crucial for business growth and it significantly improves the performance level of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Grimmer et al., 2017; Park et al., 2020). The viability and sustainability of a business does not just depend on financial support factors alone; entrepreneurs also need to prepare themselves by improving their knowledge and functional skills in managing a business (Yusoff et al., 2021; Yusoff et al., 2018) by utilising government business support services that can improve their skills, knowledge, and capability (Shamsuddin et al., 2020). This is because business support is assistance that comes from an individual or organisation that has the advantage and capability to assist entrepreneurs improve their business activities (operation, management, marketing and so on) with the aim of developing the business and its potential to compete in the market.

Entrepreneurship is recognised as a key contributor to the economic development of a country and the wellbeing of the society, with entrepreneurs playing an essential role in creating job opportunities, innovation, and increase in productivity for the community members through the entrepreneurial activities (Păunescu & Molnar, 2020). Therefore, due to this significant economic contribution, governments

consistently support business ventures by providing assistance (financial and non-financial) as well as improving, promoting and providing training to SMEs with the hope that the SMEs would progress and the business would develop (Hong & Lu, 2016; Wren & Storey, 2002). Berry et al. (2006) explained that business assistance has a positive impact on the growth rate of SMEs. Meanwhile, Xiao and Fu (2009) clarified that contributions from professional and quality government employees as well as network and references (verbal) from the government are of great help in business. This is supported by Eberhard and Craig (2013) who remarked that establishing a formal network through cooperation with the government can help in bringing the business to the level of the international market.

Nevertheless, previous studies have revealed that entrepreneurs prefer to seek financial assistance from close individuals such as family members, friends, and other informal sources rather than seeking financial support assistance from the government (Elston et al., 2016; Staniewski et al., 2015; Stevenson et al., 2019). A study conducted by Boter and Lundström (2005) involving 1002 entrepreneurs in Sweden found that 70 per cent of the entrepreneurs established connection with the private sectors compared to only 10 per cent with the government sector. Curran and Blackburn (2000) identified five causal factors for entrepreneurs to lack confidence in the implementation of programmes by government agencies and these factors are poor marketing strategies, expensive participation fees, poor content and services including bureaucracy, lack of confidence in the services from the government particularly when political interference exists, and programmes and trainings that do not meet the needs of the entrepreneurs. Audet and St-jean (2007) in their study explained that programmes formulated by government agencies are often perceived as unbeneficial to entrepreneurs' business needs and difficult for entrepreneurs to understand. At the same time, the lack of information on the contents of a programme results in the entrepreneurs not being aware of the existence of government introduced programmes. This finding is supported by a recent study by Shamsuddin et al. (2020) who found that SME entrepreneurs were not even aware of government business support services in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, the government provides business support service assistance for entrepreneurs especially Malay entrepreneurs. Malay entrepreneurs often find it difficult to succeed without the assistance of the government

particularly for entrepreneurs who have no experience in business. Malay entrepreneurs require guidance and assistance not only during the early stages of business but also at the stage of business retention in the market. In fact, it could be argued that without government assistance, it would be very difficult for Malay businesses to grow. Mohd Rifin et al. (2021) explained that business support services from the government is a form of business network between the entrepreneurs and the government institution that creates two forms of business network value, namely (1) tangible value in material form such as raw materials, financial resources and grants, and (2) intangible value in non-material form such as advice, guidance, information, intermediary to obtain business opportunities and a source of reference in discussing business problems. Nonetheless, despite the government of Malaysia launching various schemes and paying more attention to the development of Malaysian SMEs for the past 20 years, such schemes and programmes have not been fully utilised by SMEs (Shamsuddin et al., 2017). In their study, Yusoff and Yaacob (2010) found that the business support services provided by the government were not fully utilised by the SMEs especially among the micro-sized SMEs. Similar findings were also found by Nor Hakimin Yusoff and Anwar Zainol (2014) in their study where it was discovered that a total of 49.7% of the entrepreneurs in their sample did not use the support services from the government. The results of the study also revealed that entrepreneurs who did not use the support services from the government reported being satisfied with their business performance and were even more successful compared to the entrepreneurs who used the business support assistance from the government. In a recent study by Shamsuddin et al. (2020), the researchers found that the SMEs in Malaysia were not even aware of the business support services available and that the level of awareness depended on the company's current need for utilisation of the government business support services. The point that such an issue emerged clearly indicates that there exist weaknesses and shortcomings in the business support services provided by the government. The study conducted by Shamsuddin et al. (2017) found that selecting government support services that fits the type of business plays an important role in the performance of the SMEs. Therefore, a comprehensive study needs to be carried out to explore the factors that cause Malay entrepreneurs not to take advantage of the assistance of the business support services provided by the government and subsequently examine the behaviour and decision based on rational choice. In order to

answer all the questions posed in this study, Coleman's theory of rational choice formed the basis of the discussion.

The essence of Coleman's theory of rational choice is that humans act purposively towards a goal, where the goal (and therefore the action) is shaped by values or preferences (Coleman 1990: 13). Two important elements in Coleman's theory are the actors and resources. Resources are the things that can be controlled by the actor and is of interest and advantage to the actor. Each actor possesses and is able to control certain resources. To obtain resources from other actors, the actor needs to engage in activities that involve other actors. It is for the purpose of attaining their resources of interests in this structure that a person needs to build relationship with other actors (Coleman 1990: 29). In the context of SMEs in this study, the actors (Malay entrepreneurs) were aware of their limitations and capabilities in acquiring resources. Therefore, the Malay entrepreneurs in this study involved other actors apart from the business support services from the government to help them acquire and control part of the interests (production resources, technology and expertise) that could not be controlled by the Malay entrepreneurs. Subsequently, in making a choice, the Malay entrepreneurs would consider the costs and the benefits to be received before making any decision. According to Coleman, the theory of rational choice operates at the individual or micro level as a basis for explaining the macro level phenomenon and in this regard, the approach of the rational choice theory is able to explain the relationship between the micro and macro level. Thus, this paper discusses the study's findings on the factors of rejection of government business support services and also the evaluation of the decision through action (goals) made using the rational choice approach that could explain the relationship between the micro level (Malay entrepreneurs) and the macro level (government institution) as a whole.

### **3. Methodology**

This study is a qualitative study using the phenomenological approach to explore the factors of rejection of government support services among entrepreneurs in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. Kuala Terengganu was chosen because the state is a focal point for business among Malays and thus would be able to represent the population of Malay entrepreneurs. The main focus in this phenomenological approach is to explain and describe the experiences and knowledge of the social actors about a



concept based on their worldviews and not the views and perceptions of the researcher. The interviews between the researcher and informants focused on the factors that made it difficult for the Malay entrepreneurs to accept the assistance provided by the government according to their worldviews and the extent to which the influence of rational choice has an impact in the process of making decisions.

A total of 20 Malay entrepreneurs were involved in the in-depth interviews and non-participatory observations which were conducted using the purposive and snowball sampling methods. The snowball sampling method enabled the researchers to reach potential informants with the help of available informants who introduced the researchers to business partners they know. At the same time, this method provided the opportunity for the researchers to investigate the Malay entrepreneurs' business network. The researchers had set the criteria that the entrepreneurs qualified to be informants in this study should hire at least five employees with minimum annual revenue earnings of RM300, 000. It should be noted that the different company sizes and the type of business of the Malay entrepreneurs which did not focus on one specific business were not an issue in this study as the study sought to examine the social and entrepreneurial system. These differences provided an advantage in examining the management system in the micro, small and medium companies. The different types of business opened up the opportunity to examine interesting cultural patterns in the different business sectors. The in-depth interview method using audio-tape recording was implemented in this study because this method could stimulate lengthy conversations by providing the informants the opportunity to freely express their experiences and opinions. All the interviews were transcribed and formatted for inclusion in the ATLAS.ti database and were used to generate categories and data indexes. This method also enabled the researchers to categorise the themes rigorously and systematically and allowed the processing and analyses of data to be carried out meticulously. It should be noted that to protect the informants' personal information, the informants' names were replaced with identifiers, namely P (participant) and a number.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

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#### 4.1. Informant Profile

Table 1 shows the profile of all the informants of this study. A total of 20 Malay entrepreneurs were involved in this study, comprising 14 male entrepreneurs and 6 female entrepreneurs. The youngest age of the informants for this study was less than 30 years old while the oldest age was more than 61 years old.

**Table 1: Informant Profile**

Items	Percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	70
Female	30
Age	
Less than 30	5
30 to 35	10
36 to 40	30
41 to 45	5
46 to 50	15
51 to 55	10
56 to 60	15
Above 61	10
Business Sector	
Food	35
Livestock	20
Services	25
Handicrafts	20
Number of Employees (persons)	
More than 30	20
5 to 30	80
Level of Education	
SPM	35
Certificate	10
Diploma/STPM	30
Bachelor's Degree	10
Master's Degree	10
PhD	5
Previous Type of Employment	
Self-employed in the field of business	30
Self-employed in a non-business field	25
Working in a government agency	15
Working in a private agency	25
Unemployed	5

Background of parents who are involved in business	
Both parents	20
Father only	30
Mother only	-
Not parents	50
Type of Business	
New business	90
Family business	10
Type of Business Ownership	
Sole proprietorship	25
Partnership	75
Experience in Business (year)	
Less than 5 years	15
5 to 10 years	25
11 to 15 years	20
16 to 20 years	10
21 to 25 years	5
26 to 30 years	20
More than 30 years	5

In terms of the business sector, 35 per cent of the informants were in the food sector, 25 per cent in the services sector and 20 per cent in the livestock and handicraft sectors, respectively. It should be noted that the types of business engaged by the entrepreneurs which did not focus on specific areas of business is not an issue in this study because the aim of the study was to examine the factors of rejection of government business support services among the Malay entrepreneurs. In relation to the number of employees, this was categorised based on the definition of the official size of small and medium enterprises as referred from the official website of SME Corp Malaysia. According to the definition of SME Corp. Malaysia (2020), businesses that own less than 5 employees are categorised as micro enterprises, while those with employees within the range of 5 to 30 are categorised as small enterprises and those having more than 30 employees are categorised as medium enterprises. In this study, the majority of the informants reported having between 5 to 30 workers which is referred to as small enterprises (80 per cent) while 20 per cent of the informants had more than 30 employees, indicating medium enterprises.

In terms of informants' level of education, the lowest level of education was SPM while the highest level of education was PhD. This suggests that the informants' level of education ranged from the school level up to the university level. Having good education level facilitated the informants in looking for information and receiving business knowledge consistent with

the level of education acquired. In fact, education is one of the key factors that influences success in any business. Concerning the informants' business background, the results showed that the majority of the informants (70 per cent) were not previously involved in business while the rest (30 per cent) were involved in business. This clarifies that the majority of the informants developed their business without having experience in managing a business. This makes it interesting to examine how the informants in this study manage their business without having sufficient knowledge in business. This is because a successful business requires the entrepreneurs to equip themselves with strong business knowledge to manage their business effectively and to be able to remain competitive in the market. In terms of family background, half of the informants came from family with background in business activities. However, only 10 per cent from among the informants run family-owned business activities. Having the background of the family being involved in business plays an important role in the formation of a person's entrepreneurial personal traits. This is because it is easier for business information sharing and guidance from family members to occur to develop and form a successful entrepreneur. Concerning types of business ownership, the majority of the entrepreneurs (75 per cent) reported being joint business owners. Only 5 per cent of the informants were sole proprietorship type of business owners. Additionally, 15 per cent of the informants in this study reported having less than 5 years of experience in running a business and only 5 per cent reported having experience of more than 30 years in running a business. Managing business for a very long period of time gives advantage to the informants in running their business compared to an entrepreneur who is just starting a business. This is because the entrepreneurs who have acquired sufficient business knowledge are able to identify risks, obtain raw materials from various sources, and are capable of planning and designing successful business modules as a result of the experience they have. Thus, in the context of this study, the diverse profile of the informants makes it interesting to investigate the factors of rejection of government business support services among the entrepreneurs.

#### **4.2. Government Support Services Rejection Factors**

There are two main factors that made it difficult for the Malay entrepreneurs to accept the assistance provided by the government. The first factor is the attitude of the Malay entrepreneurs themselves who

made the decision not to deal with the government. As for the second factor, it refers to the existence of problems between the Malay entrepreneurs and the government agencies at the implementation level.

#### 4.2.1. Attitude of Malay Entrepreneurs

The government strives to assist entrepreneurs from the business planning stage up to the business retention stage in the market. Numerous efforts are made in formulating various programmes such as making available courses and training aimed at providing guidance and advice in running a business. However, the results of this study showed that there are informants who did not accept assistance from the government because of the factors of not being daring enough to take the risks, wanting to run business on a small-scale, unattractive government entrepreneurship programmes and training, and huge expenses required to participate in the entrepreneurship programmes.

*I did not take up the government assistance because I wanted to run my own business with my own capital. Apart from using my savings in the business dealings, my father and brother also helped by lending their money for this business. (P1)*

The statement above explains that the entrepreneurs chose to run their business using their own capital without expecting assistance from the government. The entrepreneurs run their business using their own capital and help from their family members without making loans from the government especially during the early stages of starting their business. Previous studies have revealed that entrepreneurs prefer to seek financial assistance from close individuals such as family members, friends, and other informal sources rather than seeking financial support assistance from the government (Elston et al., 2016; Staniewski et al., 2015; Stevenson et al., 2019). One of the factors for the entrepreneurs' refusal to accept loan assistance from the government (*Agro Bank, Bank Rakyat, PerbadananUsahawan Nasional Berhad (PUNB), SME Bank and Amanah Ikhtiar*) is because they do not want to be in debt. This is in line with the statement made by informant P20 who explained that:

*I have never taken out bank loans. I do not borrow from banks because I do not want to be in debt. Apart from that, I want to avoid risks because my livestock is not that much. It's a risk if*

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*I could not afford to pay back. Even more with the current economic situation. Customers buy less of local meat and have switched to imported meat. If I take on loans, I feel I wouldn't be like I'm now because I'd always be thinking of the debt that I'd have to settle. I'm not highly educated, so I'm scared of being scammed or the like. Agro Bank wanted to give me a loan, but I didn't want to. The package offered was already a soft loan, but I still wanted to avoid unwanted risks. (P20)*

Informant P20 voiced his apprehension if he were to take on a loan with the bank. The unstable economic situation and the declining demand as a result of competition in the market further reinforced informant P20's decision not to cooperate with banks. For informant P20, his decision not to take on any bank loan can help him avoid from risks and problems in the future. In addition to avoiding risks in business, the entrepreneurs in this study also avoided from risks that involved their families and prioritised their families over business.

*At the moment, I do not want to go far even though the government is willing to help me. My purpose for doing business is because of interest, not to chase after wealth or popularity. But when my child got older, I went back to the nature of life; I asked myself what the purpose of life is, so I gave the opportunity to the young ones, I taught them how to do business. One of the things I did was to resign from my post as the food truck chairman to give young people a chance. So now I am giving more attention to my only child and continuing my business at a modest scale. (P8)*

Informant P8 uttered her concern for the family if she were to expand the business they owned. The priority for the family became the impetus for informant P8 to choose not to be actively involved in business even though the government is willing to help expand their business. The rationale was that in the context of profits, informant P8 values the family as the main priority that is more rewarding and lucrative compared to chasing after business profits. Therefore, informant P8 chose to prioritise the family over expanding the business despite the government's willingness to provide assistance. The statements of informants P1, P20 and P8 are in line with the statement by Curran and Blackburn (2000) who stated that entrepreneurs who run a business without expecting any help

from outsiders are able to determine the direction of their own business and many of them often refuse to expand their business because of the worry that they would not be able to control the business. In this regard, the informants in this study acted rationally in making choices in determining the future of the business they owned by avoiding from cooperating with any parties to avoid any risk of loss in the future. Thus, the entrepreneurs chose not to expand their business and decided to run their business moderately. Moreover, the more the business grows, the higher the risks faced by the entrepreneurs. As a result, all the efforts of the government to help the entrepreneurs to expand their business could not be realised.

The government seeks to assist entrepreneurs by providing various programmes aimed at training and guiding the entrepreneurs so that they can build successful businesses. However, the programmes provided by the government appear not to attract the interest of entrepreneurs. According to the informants in this study, one of the factors for them to reject the programmes provided by the government is the content of the programmes' activities which they felt was not suitable with the type of business they run. The following is the grievance expressed by informant P10 towards the courses and training provided by the government:

*I did not participate in any expos organised by the Entrepreneur Development Foundation (YPU) because I feel that they are not beneficial since I only sell perishable goods. Moreover, I do not have any problems in marketing my products. The existing customers are more than enough and sometimes I am unable to fulfil the requests of my customers.*  
(P10)

The above statement clarifies that informant P10 did not participate in the programmes organised by the government since the programmes did not benefit their business. For the entrepreneurs, the goal of attending the programmes is to look for opportunities, information and guidance that could help them run their businesses better. Additionally, informants P6 and P2 shared the same opinion as informant P10 in that they felt that the quality of the programmes provided by the government did not help them in running their business. The following narrations are their explanation on the matter:

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*The course that I attended was for a basic course only. If we followed what they taught, the product would not turn out well. After knowing the basics, I'd look for other people. So, there are a lot of opinions and knowledge that I gained before I truly found the most suitable recipe. I tried so many times until it really turned out well. Some of the information I obtained from the government agency was incomplete. In fact, even the government officer came to see me to ask certain things. The officer asked my opinion for him to share with others. (P6)*

*It is difficult for the government to provide assistance like the courses that food suppliers provide; the government only provides courses that give the basic guidance only. Even the government officers learn from me. (P2)*

The statements above clarify that the programmes provided by the government are merely basic programmes. This results in the informants not getting the additional guidance and knowledge they needed from the entrepreneurship programmes organised by the government. The business support services offered by the government are not the ones desired and needed by the entrepreneurs in their business (Curran & Blackburn, 2000). As a result, the outcome of the programmes and training organised by the government does not align with the wishes and requirements of the entrepreneurs (Zin & Ibrahim, 2020). In fact, the study conducted among entrepreneurs in Sabah by Noraini et al. (2018) found that non-financial support such as training assistance from the government did not have an impact on the entrepreneurs' performance. According to the study carried out by Shamsuddin et al. (2017), selection of entrepreneurship programmes from the government is important in influencing business performance where the programme should be implemented well and has an impact on the business. Therefore, the selection of quality entrepreneurship programmes can provide benefit and additional knowledge to the entrepreneurs and simultaneously help them to successfully run their business. Since the entrepreneurship programmes provided by the government did not meet their business demands and needs, as described by informants P10, P6 and P2, the entrepreneurship programmes organised by the government therefore did not gain good reception among the entrepreneurs in this study. At the same time, the lack of expertise from the government agencies that are supposed to function as a source of reference for the entrepreneurs when facing



problems in business led to the loss of value of reliance and trust towards the government agencies among the informants. The rationale is that there is a lack of need to participate in the programmes organised by the government as there are no benefits and additional knowledge to be gained from the programmes that can be applied in their business. In fact, the informants in this study chose to learn the business knowledge on their own through electronic media and printed media as they could easily access the knowledge on websites. This can be explained through the statements made by informants P12 and P10, respectively:

*I did not participate in any course or training. But I read a lot about successful entrepreneurs. I like to learn on my own. Now, everything is easy to learn because of the computer. There is a lot of information from the internet. Everything is there. (P12)*

*Lack of knowledge of the government agencies regarding white prawn farming. Sometimes the fisheries officer himself comes to see me and asks things related to white prawn farming. I had to search for knowledge on my own from YouTube or Google. He learns from my experience; in fact, he even sends their staffs and practical students to gain knowledge from me. The Fisheries Department will pay me throughout the period of course and training that I provide. But if there is no payment, I will not accept because I have a business to run. I look at all aspects such as time, costs, and others in handling these practical students. For me, each second of time is money. (P10)*

Informants P12 and P10 shared similar opinion in that knowledge and information related to business can be obtained from reading materials available on the internet. Media social applications like YouTube, Facebook and Google provided the informants various knowledge and information that they needed to help them run their business and solve the problems they faced. The rationale is that the informants' action came about as a result of the lack of expertise in government agencies in solving the problems faced by the informants. The government is thus not seen as a source of reference for the informants in solving the problems they faced. Consequently, the informants acted rationally by searching for reliable and effective sources through readings on the internet. In addition

to saving time and energy, the informants also gained profit as a result of the readings when they get paid by the government who invited them to provide guidance and share their knowledge with participants and government staff who attended the government programmes.

Not all programmes provided by the government are free or subsidised as there are also programmes that require the entrepreneurs to pay a portion of the programme cost. This is described by informant P10 who mentioned that not all programmes organised by the government are free; in fact, some of the programmes organised by the government require huge expenses to be borne by the entrepreneurs themselves. Informant P11 also mentioned the same in his statement:

*I was once offered to participate in an exhibition overseas. After discussing with my friend because my friend had participated in the exhibition, my friend did not encourage me to join the programme because of the huge expenses. The very least RM12k. The agency only helps with half of the cost. Because I have to take into consideration the cost of accommodation including my employees, food and drink and others, I did not participate in the programme. (P11)*

The statement above clarifies that some of the programmes organised by the government require the informants to fork out huge expenses. The findings of this study are in line with the study carried out by Curran and Blackburn (2000) who reported that the price of the support services provided by the government is costly. This makes it difficult for informants to participate in the programmes organised by the government. The informants need to take into account the cost incurred to participate in the government-organised programmes. Based on the statement of informant P11, the informants need to pay a large sum for expenses because the government only pays for half of the total cost of the programme. Hence, these programmes which require the informants to fork out huge expenses to participate do not attract the interest of the informants.

#### 4.2.2. Lack of understanding between Malay entrepreneurs and government agencies at the implementation stage

The second factor refers to the problems that exist between the Malay entrepreneurs and the government agencies at the implementation stage which comprised issues of lack of expertise and knowledge among the government staff, the dearth of feedback or responses from the government, bureaucracy, political influence, and government policies that do not favour the Malay entrepreneurs.

The programmes which have been planned to assist the entrepreneurs in Malaysia are seen to have potential to achieve their goals. However, in planning the entrepreneurship programmes either at the state level or the national level, leakages exist at the implementation stage between the government agencies and the entrepreneurs, and this makes it difficult for the goals of the programmes to be accomplished. The results of this study clearly indicate that problems exist between the informants and the government agencies at the implementation stage. The following statements are the informants' account regarding the matter:

*For sick chickens, I buy my own medicine; the veterinarians do not provide medical assistance for my livestock. In fact, it is the Veterinarian Office that asks me the appropriate medicines for sick chickens. The veterinarians do not provide assistance but only conduct monitoring at the farm and jot down information or records regarding the number of livestock and the number of sales. The veterinarians also do not solve the problems faced by the farmer if there are any. (P2)*

*The actions or decisions made at the government agencies are not appropriate to the needs of the livestock that I farm. For example, to eradicate the poultry disease, the Veterinarian Office used methods that were not suited to the actual situation and as a result, the disease did not lessen when using the methods suggested by the Veterinarian Office. So, I resorted to using my own way that was able to lessen the problem of the poultry disease. (P20)*

Informants P2 and P20 had the problem of differences of opinion with the government agencies in resolving the problems faced by both informants. This situation occurred because of the lack of expertise and knowledge from the government agencies in finding a solution to the problems encountered by the informants. The government agencies simply monitored and recorded the problems that the informants experienced. As a consequence of their experience, the informants no longer deal with the government agencies if they run into problems and choose to solve the problems that they face in their own way.

*20 per cent of my chickens died. I solved the problem in my own way and did not get in touch with the Veterinarian Office. If I contacted the Veterinarian Office, it would only create even more problems when they conduct further inspection. I have reared chickens for a long time, I already know how to deal with sick chickens. (P2)*

Informants P2 and P20 in their statements explained that they resolved the problems they faced on their own without expecting assistance from the government. According to the informants, if they get in touch with the government agencies, their problems would be exacerbated once the government agencies conduct further inspections. This would add to the burden of the problems that the entrepreneurs have to face. This caused the informants to no longer consider the government agencies as an agency that could solve their problems if they were to face any. The government is seen as not having the experience nor the skills in guiding the entrepreneurs on how they should conduct their business (Curran & Blackburn, 2000). This clarifies that the informants in this study no longer have full confidence and trust in the government in resolving the problems that they encounter. The impact is that the entrepreneurs find it hard to involve themselves in the entrepreneurship programmes organised by the government. In this regard, the informants in this study acted rationally by no longer being in contact with the government agencies should they encounter any problems and resolved the problems they faced on their own. The rationale is that no benefit can be expected from the government agencies, and the problems would be exacerbated further when the government agencies conduct further inspections. Thus, the informants chose to solve the problems in their own way without expecting any assistance from the government.

Additionally, the government agencies also do not provide feedback or responses to the applications for assistance requested by the entrepreneurs. The types of assistance that can be applied are advertised by the government agencies and they require the entrepreneurs to first make an application before the assistance is channelled. However, once application is made, no feedback is given by the agencies to the entrepreneurs' application. This situation happened to informant P20. The following is informant P20's account on the matter:

*I had once asked for grant assistance from the Agricultural Office but until now I have not received any answers. I asked the Veterinarian Office to assist me in writing a paper work but still have not received any news from the Agricultural Office. I expect the superiors to let me know the status of my application and what I should improve. But there is still no response. (P20)*

The statement by P20 elucidates the difficulty faced by the entrepreneurs in obtaining assistance from the government. Apart from the difficulty in getting assistance from the government, there were also problems of inconveniences when dealing with the government agencies. This situation can be explained through informant P12's statement where problems of repayment materialised when dealing with the government agencies. This situation can be explained through the excerpt below:

*Previously, I received orders from the government agencies and the payment was made using local orders (LO). But the payment was late (3 to 4 months), and this caused the problem of capital and made it difficult for me to continue with the production operation of the product because of the lack of money. So, I no longer conduct business transactions using LO payment from the government. (P12)*

The statements of informants P20 and P12 explain the situation that occurred to them when dealing with the government agencies. The difficulty in getting assistance and the complicated procedures made the cooperation between the informants and the government agencies challenging. The result is consistent with the ones found in the studies conducted by Ayub et al. (2020) and Daisy et al. (2011) where the majority of the business support programmes provided by the government were not fully taken advantage of because of the complicated application

procedures, the lengthy process, limited resources, and programme content which did not fit the business level. At the same time, the results of this study also revealed that the type of services that did not get much response from the entrepreneurs was the loan assistance from government agencies such as the SME Bank. This is because of the lengthy loan application procedure (2 months to 3 months) when compared to commercial banks (less than a week). For this reason, entrepreneurs are often more interested in dealing with commercial banks (Daisy et al., 2011). Studies have shown that the problem of weak delivery, difficulties in obtaining assistive services, and the problem of bureaucracy in government administration (Curran & Blackburn, 2000; Yusoff, Yaacob, & Abdul Aziz, 2014) have made it difficult for entrepreneurs to continue with their business activities and expand their business. As a result of these difficulties, the informants in this study acted rationally by choosing not to be involved with the government agencies. The rationale is that the difficulty in getting assistance and the problem of bureaucracy made it difficult for the informants to continue with their business activities according to the business planning and strategies that have been planned. This resulted in the informants using other alternatives in obtaining assistance, without expecting help from the government. At the same time, by not dealing with the government, the informants could avoid from having to face unnecessary problems.

Politics could not be separated from a government. Governments are formed from the political parties that won during elections. Thus, all the programmes organised by the government could not be separated from the agenda of the governing political party at the time. The leadership of a political party has different goals and is constantly changing according to the leadership at that time. The results of this study revealed that the effect of the change of leadership of a political party caused difficulties to the point that it brought losses to the entrepreneurs. This can be evidenced through the statement of informant P3 who explained that the business he built suffered losses when change of leadership occurred:

*In the past, the government promised to make the leather hide collection centre in Southeast Asia but because of politics, the matter did not materialise. Initially, I fulfilled the requirements of the government by making investments, buying machines, investing in skilled workers (Malaysia has no skilled workers in leather processing). When the leader changed from Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to Najib Razak, all budgets for agriculture were cut. The government said this project failed and slashed various types of assistance. As a result, I had to downsize my operation and had to bring in leather hides from*

*Indonesia because there was no livestock leather hide collection centre in Malaysia. After the change of leadership, Najib Razak reopened the licenses from abroad for import of goats from overseas. As a result, I couldn't compete with the products from abroad because the imported products were far cheaper, and I couldn't sell with a cheaper price. (P3)*

The statement above clearly indicates that political influence can affect the business of entrepreneurs. Informant P3 suffered losses as a result of his cooperation in the programmes of the previous leadership. All the planning of the earlier programmes could not be continued and as a result, the entrepreneur suffered losses. In addition, the informants in this study also voiced their grievances towards the government that do not seem to listen to the problems they faced. The following is the statement of informant P10:

*The government now still uses the top-down technique. The problems faced by the livestock farmers including myself are still not listened to by the government. The government still couldn't find the best solution for livestock farmers like myself. The government asked the livestock farmers to increase production and operation. But after producing a lot of yield, the problem of product dumping occurred which resulted in livestock farmers having to sell at a cheap price and having to suffer losses because I produce perishable products and these products do not last long. So, I feel that it's better for me to produce products on a moderate scale and still gain maximum profit. (P10)*

The statements of informants P3 and P10 described the situation that occurred when liaising with government agencies. Their participation in the entrepreneurship programmes organised by the government brought problems and losses to their business. The problems emerged because the policies and strategies formulated by the government did not involve the participation of the entrepreneurs in contributing ideas and in voicing the problems faced by the entrepreneurs. According to Curran and Blackburn (2000), governments which are represented by political parties simply formulate or change economic policies such as taxes and interest rates which ultimately has a detrimental effect on entrepreneurs. This can be evidenced through the statements of informants P3 and P10 where the

government's initiatives and recommendations in assisting the entrepreneurs were seen not to benefit the entrepreneurs and even created various problems that had to be faced by the entrepreneurs on their own. The government did not involve the entrepreneurs in designing a programme. The informants had to follow all the planning set by the government if they want to deal with the government. The informants felt that all the suggestions and problems faced by the informants were not attended to by the government. If a problem emerged, the informants had to solve the problems on their own and there was no assistance from the government. Consequently, the informants no longer place their trust and confidence in the government and acted rationally by no longer following the programmes organised by the government. The rationale is that the informants felt that there is no guarantee of success and profit in each of the programmes organised by the government. Therefore, the informants acted by planning the business on their own without involving the government. This situation taught the entrepreneurs a lesson which is to no longer cooperate with the government through programmes planned in the future especially those involving certain political parties.

*I do not depend on the government and politicians because I want to avoid my business from failing. Most businesses that depend on politicians will eventually fail. But politics is important as well. Let the politicians look for us and not us looking for the politicians. For example, Tan Sri Syed Mokhtar, the government looked for him because he has potential and influence. So, the politicians depend on him, and the politicians need his support. (P12)*

Informant P12 agreed that business should not involve politics. Dependence on politics brings with it more problems than profit. This shows that informant P12 acted rationally by separating business from politics. The rationale is that involving business with politics would not help the business endure and would eventually bring with it the risk of losses in the future.

## **5. Conclusion**

Previous researchers have discussed the factors of rejection of assistance from the government. However, the findings from previous research have not been able to explain in depth the factors of rejection of government



business support services from the worldview of the Malay entrepreneurs themselves. To explain the social phenomenon at the micro level (Malay entrepreneurs) and its relationship with the macro level (government institution) according to the worldview of the Malay entrepreneurs, in-depth interviews were conducted with Malay entrepreneurs in this study. Based on the findings, two conclusions can be drawn from this study. The first conclusion is that the reluctance of the Malay entrepreneurs to deal with the government is due to two main factors, namely the attitude of the Malay entrepreneurs themselves who did not dare take risks and wanted to run their business on a small scale, and the nature of the entrepreneurship programmes and training organised by the government which were unappealing and required huge expenses for the entrepreneurs to participate in. The second conclusion is the lack of understanding between the Malay entrepreneurs and the government agencies at the implementation stage. This situation occurred because of the lack of expertise and knowledge among the government staff, the lack of response and feedback from the government, the problem of bureaucracy, the issue of political influence, and government policies that do not favour the Malay entrepreneurs. As the field of entrepreneurship is a key area in economic development and societal wellbeing (job offerings), the government needs to provide effective business support services so as to produce even more entrepreneurs who are successful, viable and resilient in line with the goals of the 2030 national entrepreneurship policy. The implication of this study is the government should facilitate the entrepreneurs in getting assistance and re-evaluate the content of the entrepreneurship programmes so that they meet the entrepreneurs' business needs. In formulating and designing the entrepreneurship programmes, the government should identify the problems faced by the entrepreneurs and take into consideration the views of the entrepreneurs so that every programme that is formulated fulfils the needs and requirements of the entrepreneurs. The government should also review the entrepreneurship policies by paying attention to entrepreneur-friendly elements and basing the policies on mutual integration so that the policies and strategies introduced are able to bring benefit to the entrepreneurs and subsequently engender entrepreneurs who are capable of competing in the market.

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