

Original Article (Mixed)

Identification and Prioritization of Indicators of Unexpected Behaviors among Entrepreneurial Students at the University of Mazandaran

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Abstract

The present study has identified and prioritized indicators of unexpected actions of entrepreneurial students at Mazandaran University by means of a mixed research design (qualitative and quantitative). To collect data, interviews with experts were used in the qualitative step, and a questionnaire derived from the qualitative step of the research was used in the quantitative step. The statistical population of the research in the qualitative phase was university professors and managers of technological and entrepreneurial units at the University of Mazandaran, and in the quantitative phase, 20 entrepreneurial students at the same University. Snowball sampling was used to select research samples; and data were collected based on 15 in-depth interviews with experts related to the research topic. The Brown and Clark (2006) content and pattern analysis method was used to analyze data in the qualitative step; and in the quantitative step, the best-worst BWM method was used. The findings of the thematic analysis on the unexpected actions of entrepreneurial students at the University of Mazandaran are presented in 4 main themes: (1- Dynamics and Adaptability 2- Exploration and Empowerment 3- Learning and Innovation in Problem Solving 4- Development and Customer Relationship) and 53 sub-themes. In the quantitative step, dynamism and adaptability with a weight of 0.416 was the first priority, exploration and empowerment with a weight of 0.227 was the second priority, learning and innovation in problem solving with a weight of 0.17 was the third priority, and development and customer relationship with a weight of 0.136 was the fourth priority according to the experts. The results of the present study showed that entrepreneurs must have the ability to quickly recognize opportunities and threats, and these decisions must be based on a precise analysis of data and the current situation.

Keywords:

Unexpected actions, uncertainty, entrepreneur students, University of Mazandaran.

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Extended abstract

Introduction

Due to the rapid and unpredictable changes in the business world, entrepreneurial students at the University of Mazandaran face numerous challenges in the field of unexpected actions. These challenges include lack of access to adequate resources such as specialized advice and necessary training, lack of experience in dealing with unexpected situations, and lack of financial and moral support from academic institutions. Also, many of these students are unable to make quick and effective decisions due to fear of risk and uncertainty. These issues can hinder their initiatives and creativity in starting and developing new businesses. Therefore, it is necessary to identify and analyze these problems in order to enhance students' capabilities to respond effectively to unexpected situations and also to provide the necessary platforms for growth and progress in entrepreneurship. Research on the unexpected entrepreneurial action of students at the University of Mazandaran is necessary for several reasons. First, given the rapid changes in the market and the emergence of new challenges and opportunities, understanding the needs and obstacles of entrepreneurial students will lead to improving support platforms. Second, identifying and analyzing unexpected behaviors can help educational institutions to design more effective training programs and practical workshops to enhance decision-making and creativity skills. Also, this research can provide students with deeper insights into dealing with uncertainties and improving their entrepreneurial abilities. The ability to respond quickly to situations can be the key to success in creating and developing new businesses in the world of entrepreneurship. Given the important role of entrepreneurship in economic and social development, this research can help policymakers design better policies and programs to support young entrepreneurs. Finally, the results of this research can contribute significantly to improving the quality and level of student participation in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. Therefore, the researcher in this study seeks to answer the question: what are the indicators of unexpected actions of entrepreneurial students at the University of Mazandaran, and how is it prioritized?

Theoretical Framework

Uncertainty in Entrepreneurship

It is usually easy to differentiate the entrepreneurial context from other contexts and leadership styles. At the heart of this difference is the concept of uncertainty. Many entrepreneurial contexts are full of uncertainty; the probabilities of which are not measurable (Conz et al., 2023). Uncertainty in the entrepreneurial context refers to a situation in which there is insufficient or unstable information, and it is difficult to predict the outcomes and consequences of entrepreneurial decisions. This uncertainty can be caused by various factors such as rapid changes in the market, technological innovations, and complex consumer behaviors (Arend et al., 2024). In such circumstances, entrepreneurs face numerous challenges that limit the ability to accurately assess risks and opportunities. Thus, decision-making in the entrepreneurial environment becomes a complex process that requires flexibility and creativity (Raimi et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurial improvisations

Immediate and unusual entrepreneurial actions taken in the face of immediate challenges and opportunities under conditions of uncertainty refer to behaviors in which entrepreneurs use their initiative and creativity to react quickly and make non-traditional decisions to increase their ability to adapt to environmental changes and exploit new opportunities (Yadollahi Farsi et al., 2025). These actions can include rapid product changes, innovative marketing, or attracting investors and stakeholders in unexpected ways; thereby enhancing entrepreneurs'



ability to manage risk and exploit opportunities in unstable conditions (Behrouzazar et al., 2024).

Research Methodology

The present research is of mixed or combined type (qualitative and quantitative) in terms of methodology. The strategy of the present research is thematic analysis (Brown and Clark model) in the qualitative part; and survey-mathematical in the quantitative part (best-worst method). The statistical population of the present research, in the qualitative phase consists of university professors and managers of technological and entrepreneurial units of the University of Mazandaran, selected by snowball sampling method of 15 people. In the quantitative phase, it includes 20 entrepreneurial students of the University of Mazandaran, who, according to the report of the Entrepreneurship Center and the Growth Center of the University of Mazandaran, have undertaken entrepreneurial action in the past two years, and selected purposefully. In order to collect data and information, the interview method has been used for analysis in the quantitative part, and a multi-criteria decision-making questionnaire was used in the quantitative part. Data analysis in the qualitative part of this research was carried out using thematic analysis method with the approach of Brown and Clark (2006) and with MAXQDA 2021 software, and in the quantitative part; the best-worst method (BWM) was carried out using EXCEL 2016 and LINGO software.

Research findings

Based on the results of the quantitative part, dynamism and adaptability as the first priority indicate the importance of the ability of entrepreneurs to respond to environmental changes and fluctuations. In today's world, markets and economic conditions change rapidly, and entrepreneurs must be able to react quickly and effectively to these changes. This finding clearly emphasizes that entrepreneurs must have the ability to quickly recognize opportunities and threats, and these decisions must be based on careful analysis of data and the current situation. This priority can indicate an agile approach that facilitates the ability to manage changes and maintain organizational health. The second priority, exploration and empowerment, shows that entrepreneurs should not only adapt to existing conditions, but also pay attention to exploring new opportunities and empowering their work teams. Exploration means identifying and creating new entrepreneurial opportunities, and empowerment means increasing the confidence and skills of team members to take effective action. This substitution of dynamics shows that entrepreneurs should actively seek innovations and improve employee performance to exploit existing situations. Learning and innovation in problem solving, as the third priority, highlights the importance of continuous learning and creativity in the decision-making process. Entrepreneurs should be able to learn from their experiences and mistakes and use this information to innovate and improve their functions. This priority may indicate the need to create a learning culture in the organization that allows entrepreneurs to react quickly to new conditions and find creative solutions to challenges. Customer development and communication as the fourth priority also indicates that entrepreneurs pay attention to the importance of continuous and effective relationships with customers and the need to develop products and services tailored to their needs. This priority means that while interaction with customers is important, given the speed of changes in the external environment, entrepreneurs should focus more on internal dynamics and capabilities to best meet customer needs. This result can also point to the necessity of using customer feedback for continuous improvement and optimization of processes.



Conclusion

For entrepreneurial students at the University of Mazandaran who may encounter unexpected actions, the following suggestions can help them be more effective and successful: Hold workshops in the fields of crisis management, creative thinking, and entrepreneurial strategies. These workshops can help students act with confidence and sufficient knowledge in the face of unexpected challenges. Encourage students of different majors to collaborate and exchange ideas to generate innovative ideas in response to challenges. Organize entrepreneurial competitions and challenges focused on solving real problems that force students to come up with immediate and creative solutions. Create a network of mentors and successful entrepreneurs to guide and advise students on unexpected challenges.