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Investigating the impact of entrepreneurial school dimensions on students' entrepreneurial competencies with an emphasis on the mediating role of interaction with industry

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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:

Entrepreneur,
Entrepreneurial
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Extended abstract

Introduction

The dimensions of an entrepreneurial school, including entrepreneurial leadership, flexible curriculum, innovative organizational culture, interactive learning environment, communication network with stakeholders, and provision of support resources, play a role as a system in promoting entrepreneurial competencies. However, most indicators and policies of traditional schools focus solely on increasing theoretical knowledge and improving GPA, and less emphasis is placed on entrepreneurial skills and attitudes; this has created a serious gap between the general education system and the real needs of society and the labor market (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Beyond the internal and structural dimensions of the school, the role of active engagement with industry as a bridge between education and practice is crucial. Engagement with industry includes visitation schemes, internships, the presence of industrial mentors, joint projects, and even real project-based learning that can make students' learning meaningful and effective. From this perspective, engagement with industry is not only a complementary tool but also an important mediating factor that can facilitate or strengthen the impact of entrepreneurial school dimensions on students' entrepreneurial competencies (Luo et al., 2022). Internal research has mainly focused on skill training or entrepreneurial tendencies, and has rarely linked the structure and function of the school ecosystem with real and systematic engagement with industry. While global research has empirically proven the importance of linking the school with the industrial and economic environment in promoting the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education (Chahal et al., 2024).

The dimensions of the entrepreneurial school, including entrepreneurial leadership, flexible curriculum, innovative organizational culture, interactive learning environment, communication network with stakeholders, and provision of support resources, play a role as a system in promoting entrepreneurial competencies. However, most indicators and policies of traditional schools focus solely on increasing theoretical knowledge and improving GPA, and less emphasis is placed on entrepreneurial skills and attitudes; this has created a serious gap between the general education system and the real needs of society and the labor market (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Therefore, the main question of this research is: What effect do the dimensions of the entrepreneurial school have on students' entrepreneurial competencies, emphasizing the role of mediator in interaction with industry?

Theoretical Framework

The Impact of Entrepreneurial Culture and Perspective on Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies

A school with an entrepreneurial culture and perspective not only creates an environment for entrepreneurial growth, but also plays a key role in internalizing entrepreneurial beliefs and promoting students' multidimensional competencies; so that graduates of such schools have a dynamic, flexible, and highly motivated approach to new opportunities, environmental challenges, and individual and collective development paths (Kanaan-Jebna et al., 2022).

The impact of entrepreneurial leadership and management on students' entrepreneurial competencies

A school whose management and leadership are creative and entrepreneurial, while strengthening participation and freethinking in the educational environment, fosters fundamental entrepreneurial competencies such as "innovation, problem solving, risk-taking, effective interaction, and independent decision-making" among students and prepares them



for successful entry into the innovative and economic arenas of society (Kanaan-Jebna et al., 2022).

The Impact of the Entrepreneurship Curriculum and Experiential Learning on Students' Entrepreneurial Competencies

By providing a structured platform for practical experience, failure, and innovation; the entrepreneurship curriculum and experiential learning make a fundamental contribution to the formation and strengthening of competencies such as innovation, flexibility, problem solving and change management, motivation for progress, and leadership skills in students; and prepare them to actively and successfully face real-world challenges and opportunities (Obi et al., 2022).

The impact of entrepreneurial school dimensions on interaction with industry

Joint programs, the presence of industry experts and entrepreneurs in the educational environment, and the implementation of interactive projects increase the opportunity for students to benefit from current experiences and real industry needs. As a result, the more the entrepreneurial school can develop and institutionalize the aforementioned dimensions, the more students' readiness for employment and entry into the labor market will be improved, and a more effective link will be formed between the educational institution and the industry sector, which will provide a suitable arena for the growth of innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic development (Brekke, 2021).

Sadeghi et al. (2025) presented a model for empowering entrepreneurial school administrators with an artificial intelligence approach. Based on the research findings, a paradigmatic model was presented for empowering entrepreneurial school principals using artificial intelligence, the dimensions of which included causal conditions (such as optimizing decision-making, analyzing student learning behavior, strategic planning, creating a dynamic educational environment, utilizing appropriate training, and learning future skills), central phenomenon (such as empowering entrepreneurial school principals with an artificial intelligence approach), contextual conditions (such as three axes including familiarity with network leadership, educational platforms, and innovation fields), intervening conditions (such as weak infrastructure, managers' lack of sufficient mastery of artificial intelligence tools, lack of organizational data, resistance to technological changes, and lack of sufficient resources), strategies (such as the availability of artificial intelligence tools, strengthening skills in using them, institutionalizing a culture of innovative collaboration, teaching planning with smart technology, and familiarity with new feedback methods), and consequences (such as the productivity of entrepreneurial education, excellence in school performance, branding entrepreneurial schools, and improving the effectiveness of educational processes).

Li (2025) investigated the Entrepreneurship Skill-Augmented Neural Network (ESANN): deep learning approach to enhance entrepreneurship competencies in teachers. Comparative experimental results show that the proposed hybrid model significantly outperforms traditional evaluation methods in several criteria and provides a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the effectiveness of innovation and entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions.

Research Methodology

The present study is applicable in terms of purpose and, descriptive-survey in terms of data collection, and correlational in terms of relationships between variables. The statistical population of the present study includes 95 principals and teachers of secondary schools in Districts 8 and 9 of Tehran, selected by purposive sampling method and a questionnaire was distributed among them. The collection tool in the present study is a questionnaire whose validity was confirmed by experts and its reliability by Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Research findings

SmartPLS3 statistical software was used to analyze data and test hypotheses. The findings of this study show that the curriculum and experiential learning of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial culture and outlook, and entrepreneurial leadership and management have a significant effect on students' entrepreneurial competencies. In indirect hypotheses, entrepreneurial leadership and management and entrepreneurial culture and outlook have a significant effect on students' entrepreneurial competencies with an emphasis on interaction with industry. However, the curriculum and experiential learning do not have a mediating role on students' entrepreneurial competencies with an emphasis on the mediating role of interaction with industry.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to investigate the effect of dimensions of the entrepreneurial school on students' entrepreneurial competencies with an emphasis on the mediating role of interaction with industry. These results are consistent with the studies of Chlebiej (2023), Liu et al. (2024), Obi (2022), Sadeghi et al. (2025), Li (2025), Liu et al. (2024), Khalili et al. (2023), Ghafrani et al. (2022), and Luo et al. (2022). Luo et al. (2022) showed that entrepreneurial environment, entrepreneurial competence, and entrepreneurial education play a positive role in university students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Therefore, this paper proposes that entrepreneurship education should be promoted by creating a good innovative and entrepreneurial environment, establishing a talent education model based on the entrepreneurial competence model and establishing a high-quality entrepreneurship education system.

According to the results obtained, it is suggested: Development of leadership competencies and entrepreneurial culture: It is necessary for school administrators and teachers to take courses in the field of entrepreneurial leadership and promotion of innovation culture so that they can blend the educational environment with entrepreneurial values and effective interaction with industry.