

STIMULATING ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

STIMULAREA INTENȚIILOR ANTREPRENORIALE ÎN CONTEXTUL ȘCOLAR

CZU: 371.2.51+334.7=111

DOI: 10.46728/pspj.2024.v44.i1.p26-37

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Abstract

This article explores the multifaceted concept of entrepreneurial intention within the context of entrepreneurial behavior, grounded in the theory of planned behavior proposed by Ajzen, highlighting the significance of attitude, societal norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping entrepreneurial intentions. We underscore the necessity of a comprehensive understanding of intention, particularly in the entrepreneurial domain, considering its core components, determinants, and practical implications. We emphasize the crucial role of educational systems in fostering entrepreneurial intentions and propose specific strategies for enhancing entrepreneurial intentions in academic settings, integrating goal setting, positive attitudes, self-efficacy, visualization, implementation intentions, and social support. These educational strategies are presented as essential tools for cultivating the entrepreneurial spirit and capabilities among students, preparing them for future entrepreneurial pursuits. This comprehensive exploration provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and aspiring entrepreneurs, highlighting the dynamic interplay between individual intentions, educational frameworks, and the broader economic environment.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, improving intention, entrepreneurial education, theory of planned behaviour.

Rezumat

Acest articol explorează conceptul multifacțat al intenției antreprenoriale în contextul comportamentului antreprenorial, bazat pe teoria comportamentului planificat propusă de Ajzen, evidențiind semnificația atitudinii, a normelor societale și a controlului comportamental perceput în modelarea intențiilor antreprenoriale. Subliniem necesitatea unei înțelegeri cuprinzătoare a intenției, în special în domeniul antreprenorial, luând în considerare componentele sale de bază, determinanții și implicațiile practice.

Subliniem rolul crucial al sistemelor educaționale în stimularea intențiilor antreprenoriale și propunem strategii specifice pentru îmbunătățirea intențiilor antreprenoriale în

mediile academice, integrând stabilirea de obiective, atitudini pozitive, autoeficacitate, vizualizare, intenții de implementare și sprijin social. Aceste strategii educaționale sunt prezentate ca instrumente esențiale pentru cultivarea spiritului antreprenorial și a capacităților în rândul studenților, pregătindu-i pentru viitoarele activități antreprenoriale. Această explorare cuprinzătoare oferă perspective valoroase pentru educatori, factori de decizie și antreprenori aspiranți, evidențiind interacțiunea dinamică dintre intențiile individuale, cadrele educaționale și mediul economic mai larg.

Cuvinte - cheie: antreprenoriat, intenție de îmbunătățire, educație antreprenorială, teoria comportamentului planificat.

Introduction. The market economy has created opportunities for those involved to actively contribute to social progress through innovative and creative initiatives. From this emerged the concept of the entrepreneur. This refers to an individual who has the necessary knowledge to plan and monitor the resources at their disposal in order to create something new [7]. In practice, entrepreneurship is a process through which a value-added contribution is brought to the economy, beneficial both for the entrepreneur and for society. This added value is found through innovative products or services, additional jobs created, but also through the increased well-being of consumers. However, when discussing entrepreneurial intention, it is necessary to identify the type of behavior of the individual who wants to enter this process. According to the theory of planned behavior [4], intention at the general level is dependent on three components, namely attitude, social values and principles, and control over the perception regarding the desired behavior.

It must be emphasized that entrepreneurial intention, guided by careful strategic planning, does not automatically ensure the success of a business. Success is influenced by a variety of factors, both internal and ex-

ternal. Among the internal factors are resource management skills, resilience to stress, or effective communication [12]. External factors that can hinder entrepreneurial success include market conditions, demand and supply, government regulations, or global economic dynamics. Understanding and effectively managing these factors can increase the chances of success for an entrepreneurial initiative.

Defining entrepreneurial intention.

The concept of „intention” has multiple facets, extending into various disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience. To understand intention in a comprehensive manner, it is essential to explore definitions, key components, determinants, psychological aspects, and practical applications, especially in entrepreneurial professional development. Evoking an implicit, unobservable state, the notion of intention is used in psychology with two different meanings: „The first is specific to common language: intention consists in setting a goal, corresponding to a will or desire that precedes an action. This first definition fits within a mechanical or biological model, where intention consists of the prior representation (conscious or unconscious) of the act. In this case, the action has two parts:

a mental fact called will or intention, and then the effect of this mental fact (which is another fact), succeeding it. The action has the particularity of always being directed towards an object. The second definition corresponds to a direction that considers any action to be intentional in itself, that is, the intention, desire, will are integral parts of the action; in this case, intention corresponds to a dispositional component of the action; no action, whatever it may be, can be formulated or realized without the intention being implicit. Therefore, intention is not only a moment before the action, it continues in the action” [2, p. 413-414]. Thus, intention can be broadly defined as

a mental state that represents a commitment to perform an action or a series of actions in the future, involving mental activities such as planning and anticipation. At its core, intention represents the way in which individuals initiate any type of action. It arises from several factors such as personal values, beliefs, principles, education received, or even the emotional states that a person goes through [9]. There is also the possibility that two people may be guided by the same influencing factors, but the intention may be different, or the outcome of this may be opposite from one individual to another because the action itself will never be identical [14].

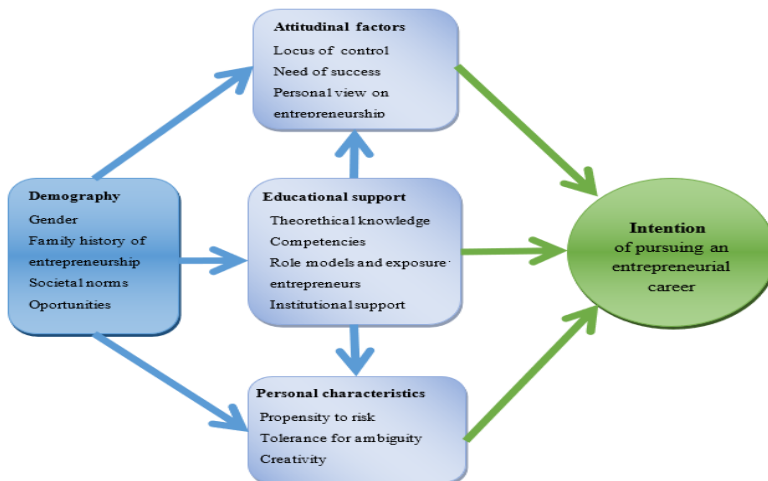


Figure 1. The influencing factors that determine entrepreneurial intention

The most relevant psychological theory regarding intention, from the entrepreneurial environment perspective, is the theory of planned behavior, published by Icek Ajzen in 1991 [4]. He established that in order to observe a behavior, three predictor variables are needed: personal attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control [4]. According to the

theory considered, intention involves the interlinking of key factors that directly influence behavior. In this case, a distinction is made between the effort to be made in the desired action to achieve success. Similarly, according to the determinants of entrepreneurial intention, the motivation to succeed in the desired business is essential to be able to start an enterprise [4].

Attitude towards behavior is the foundation of the theory of planned behavior as it provides insight into an individual's desire to undertake an activity. This variable predicts action through the beliefs and principles held by the person in question, both about the process itself and about the possible final outcome that can be achieved [5]. Applying this aspect to the theme of the present work, one can discuss individuals' opinions regarding entrepreneurship, as a process, and the acquisition of wealth in a capitalist economy. Social norms can originate from two different areas, so the impact on the entrepreneurial initiative will undoubtedly be affected by this determining factor. The first area of influence refers to close groups or individuals such as families, friends, or even work colleagues. Their opinion regarding entrepreneurial intention will bring either a business opportunity or a market entry barrier. The second area, the descriptive one, actually shows the beliefs and perceptions about external models that an individual has in the desired behavior. Specifically, the social or subjective norm is an element composed of two types of beliefs, internal and external. These ideas were reported in the research of several authors such as Ajzen [4] (1991); Anjum (2021) et. al. [6]; Lv et al. al. (2021)[13]; Neves and Brito (2020) [14] (see fig. 1).

In the case of internal ones, perceptions extrapolated to reference models outside of current behaviors are envisioned, while external ones are represented by the social pressures and opinions of close external partners regarding the desired initiatives. In the case of the last determinant factor of the theory of planned behavior, namely perceived behavioral control, it refers to the ideology held regarding the

probability of success, reducing risks and circumventing obstacles within an individual's physical internal capabilities [3]. In this context, perceived control is represented by a series of attributes, skills, abilities, and possibilities that can always alter a situation in favor of the holder. In other words, when it comes to this factor, it should be considered that the perception of control can always be overestimated, hence a critical and honest evaluation is necessary [5].

Currently, it is considered [6, 10, 18] that entrepreneurial intention implies, in addition to the previously mentioned influencing factors, a certain level of creativity to be able to cultivate the business and utilize emerging opportunities. The call to the entrepreneurial lifestyle can be described as a natural instinct that brings a positive contribution to society by solving consumer needs. Initially, it appears as a desire to solve one's own problem which envisages identifying stability. The second phase is the construction of added value, both personally through material wealth, and for society by creating new jobs and contributing to the national economy and, where applicable, to the international economy through imports and exports.

According to relevant literature [10, 12], entrepreneurs can be both born and created in academic environments through the necessary education, as exemplified in figure 1. However, it is noteworthy that these situations are co-dependent. A future business owner will never be prepared for the economic environment and will not know how to identify the necessary opportunities for growth without formal training. At the same time, the natural instinct that can only be innate was mentioned

earlier, and this is vital for starting a successful business. Both factors mentioned have a significant impact when it comes to entrepreneurial intention, and a combination of these can favor the conception and implementation of a sustainable, profit-based enterprise that brings value to the society in which it operates [13].

Moreover, factors such as intrinsic motivation to succeed and the possibility of obtaining viable sources of financing, as well as risk-taking inclinations, significantly determine entrepreneurial initiatives, especially among the youth. Currently, organizations that support entrepreneurship, both banking and governmental, provide young potential entrepreneurs with easy access to financing mechanisms. It is worth mentioning, however, that when talking about intergovernmental institutions such as the European Union, the allocated funds can be non-repayable, which represents an effective incentive in starting entrepreneurial processes. Entrepreneurship is an uncertain process, therefore it carries a series of risks that the participant must be willing to accept. For this reason, intention will be influenced by the assumption of those uncertain situations in order to achieve significant gains [1].

Improving entrepreneurial intentions Continuous exposure to relevant stimuli, guided by educational strategies that incorporate both cognitive and affective components, is essential for promoting deep and lasting learning and development. These experiences must be diverse but periodically return to the theme of entrepreneurship, creating an environment where students can continuously develop and refine their entrepreneurial intentions and skills. A mere exposure to entre-

preneurship through an isolated meeting, even with local entrepreneurs or a project presentation, is not enough. Instead, an integrated approach is required, allowing students to deeply explore and interact with entrepreneurial principles in a structured and supported setting. The program should include both theory and practice, guided by the previously proposed strategies, providing students the opportunity to understand the key concepts of entrepreneurship and apply them in real projects. Through repeating the theme of entrepreneurship and constant exposure to success examples and case studies, students will be able to form a strong entrepreneurial mindset and develop the skills needed to navigate the business world [10, 13]. It's also crucial to create an environment where students can experiment, make mistakes, and learn from these mistakes without fear of failure. This approach encourages innovation, creativity, and risk-taking, all essential elements in developing an authentic entrepreneurial attitude.

In order to better guide educators, we delve deeper into strategies for improving intentions by examining specific methods and techniques that will stimulate the formation and development of entrepreneurial intentions in high school education. These approaches are supported by theories and academic research and will be explained with concise examples. Thus, we propose the following strategies for improving entrepreneurial intention:

- 1. Setting entrepreneurial goals** through the introduction of exercises in which students set specific, measurable, and achievable entrepreneurial goals. For example, creating a simulated business plan or developing a product prototype.

Establishing clear entrepreneurial goals helps students to materialize abstract business concepts and to understand the practical steps necessary to achieve them. A concrete example could be a workshop where students are guided to create a business plan for a mobile coffee shop serving artisan drinks in their neighborhoods. This exercise will help them learn how to set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives, as well as understand the importance of market research and financial planning. This aligns with Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory [11], highlighting the motivation derived from specific goals.

2. Promoting a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship by incorporating success stories of entrepreneurs and discussions about the challenges and rewards of entrepreneurship [15]. This could involve guest lectures or case studies. Sessions can be organized with local entrepreneurs who share their success stories, as well as the obstacles they faced. For example, inviting the founder of a local company that has succeeded in developing a product popular among young people. Organize events where school alumni who have become successful entrepreneurs share their experiences, thus providing accessible and relevant role models for students. These personal stories can have a powerful impact in motivating and inspiring the young. Organize competitions where students present business ideas, giving them the opportunity to receive constructive feedback from experienced entrepreneurs. This encourages creative thinking and provides a realistic perspective on what it means to turn an idea into a viable business. By exposing students to successful

entrepreneurial narratives, a positive mindset is stimulated and fear of failure, which is crucial in an entrepreneurial journey, is combated [15].

3. Stimulating entrepreneurial self-efficacy by involving students in practical entrepreneurial projects, allowing them to experience success in small enterprises, thus building their confidence. The concept of self-efficacy, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the crucial role of personal success experiences in developing an individual's belief in their own capacity to complete tasks and achieve goals [10]. This theory suggests that people who experience success in the tasks they undertake are more inclined to believe in their abilities, which motivates them to take on new and more challenging tasks. By successfully completing small-scale entrepreneurial projects, students' belief in their entrepreneurial capabilities is reinforced [10, 11]. A practical project could be creating and selling handmade products, such as jewelry or home decor items, at a school fair or online. Active participation in this process, from idea to sale, will increase students' belief in their abilities to achieve entrepreneurial success.

4. Visualization and role-play can be effectively combined through exercises that encourage students to imagine themselves as successful entrepreneurs or to participate in various entrepreneurial scenarios. This approach allows them to explore and experience from an entrepreneur's perspective, stimulating and developing critical thinking skills, creativity, and decision-making competencies in diverse and challenging business world contexts. Visualization techniques, often used in sports psychology, and role-playing,

used in legal practice by lawyers, can be just as effective in entrepreneurial education, helping students mentally rehearse and prepare for real-world business challenges [16]. An example activity is organizing a workshop where students can take on different roles within a fictitious company, from CEO to marketing manager, helping them understand various aspects of running a business. This experience can help them visualize success and learn about the importance of teamwork as well as the tensions that can arise in coordination with others. Practical experiences offer a taste of the entrepreneurial process, highlighting challenges but also sparking enthusiasm for success.

5. Stimulating implementation intentions for entrepreneurial actions by educating students to plan specific actions related to entrepreneurial activities, such as market research, product design, or networking strategies. Peter Gollwitzer's concept of implementation intentions emphasizes the importance of transitioning from setting an intention to taking actual action [8]. It describes how specific planning of when, where, and how to act can facilitate goal achievement. Implementation intentions help overcome obstacles and improve the likelihood of success, providing a detailed framework that prepares the individual for the actual action. Students can be guided to develop a detailed plan for launching a crowdfunding campaign for an innovative product they designed. This exercise would allow them to practice setting concrete and achievable steps, from market research to project promotion. By planning detailed entrepreneurial actions, students are more likely to actualize their entrepreneurial intentions

[3]. A long-term development plan for cultivating entrepreneurial intentions is akin to a roadmap for an aspiring entrepreneur. It outlines the path from the initial spark of interest to the eventual establishment and growth of a successful entrepreneurial enterprise. Such a plan is crucial as it provides continuity, ensuring that the momentum generated by the educational program is not lost. At the same time, it addresses the evolving needs of aspiring entrepreneurs as they transition from students to business initiators, providing a framework for integrating various support mechanisms, making the journey less daunting.

6. Social support should be integrated by establishing mentoring programs and networking events with local entrepreneurs, business leaders, and alumni. Social support, according to social learning theory, is vital in forming intentions [15]. Networking with real-world entrepreneurs provides inspiration, guidance, and the necessary social validation to stimulate entrepreneurial intentions. In this regard, we recommend implementing a mentoring program or free discussion sessions where local entrepreneurs or school alumni who have become successful entrepreneurs are invited. They can offer students practical advice, guidance, and support, encouraging them to develop their entrepreneurial networks [15]. Mentoring and networking are essential for young individuals starting out. This early exposure is crucial for demystifying entrepreneurship and making it a tangible and achievable goal for students. A mentor provides guidance, advice, and support, acting as a source of ideas and encouragement during difficult periods. Building a network of mentors and industry professionals ensures that studen-

ts have access to the knowledge and experience that will guide their entrepreneurial journey. Establish partnerships with local entrepreneurs to give students the chance to work on real projects, developing a deep understanding of the daily challenges of running a business and how theory applies in practice. Organize workshops focusing on failure as part of the learning and development process in entrepreneurship. Invite entrepreneurs to share their „failure” moments and how these helped them grow and develop. This helps demystify failure and encourages resilience.

7. Development of a curriculum will be achieved not only through covering theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship, but also by integrating entrepreneurial concepts into various subjects, thus demonstrating how entrepreneurial skills are relevant in different contexts. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that students see entrepreneurship not just as a standalone concept but as a set of skills applicable in various fields, enhancing its perceived value and applicability [10]. For a successful assimilation and integration of the entrepreneurial journey into the subjects already studied in school, it is necessary for students to identify themselves ways to use the knowledge acquired in different subjects. For example, based on the specific subjects of natural sciences (biology, physics, chemistry), students can work on projects involving sustainable innovations, such as developing ecological solutions for everyday problems (e.g., biodegradable water filters or energy-saving devices). This project can teach them not only scientific principles but also how to apply innovative thinking in entrepreneurship. For those with artistic inclinations,

students can be encouraged to create design products that meet the real needs of the community, such as smart urban furniture or functional and sustainable fashion accessories. The design process, from concept to prototype, helps them understand the importance of creativity and innovation in product development. Integrating entrepreneurship into physical education could involve developing a business plan for a fitness center for teenagers or creating a mobile app that promotes physical activity and mental health. Students learn how to combine their passion for sports with entrepreneurial opportunities. History and social studies should not be overlooked either, through which students learn about corporate social responsibility and the importance of innovative solutions in addressing social issues. A project could be proposed that explores the impact of entrepreneurs from the past on today’s society or developing a business plan for a company that offers solutions to social problems (such as poverty, education, or health). Through these interdisciplinary approaches, students learn to see entrepreneurship as an integral component of many fields of study, thus enriching their perspective on how the knowledge acquired in school can be applied in real entrepreneurial initiatives.

Incorporating these strategies into school programs can significantly stimulate entrepreneurial intentions among students. These methods are not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant, offering a holistic approach to entrepreneurial education. By focusing on setting goals, positive attitudes, self-efficacy, visualization, specific action planning, social support, and curriculum integration,

schools can effectively cultivate the entrepreneurial spirit and skills of students, preparing them for future entrepreneurial endeavors. Integrating intention-improvement strategies into a school program aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial intentions involves a personalized approach that resonates with the unique dynamics of entrepreneurship. This integration can be highly effective in educating future entrepreneurs but requires long-term support to be truly integrated into the aspirations of the young. Cultivating entrepreneurial intentions among high school students through specialized educational programs represents a significant step towards promoting a generation of innovative, resilient, and motivated entrepreneurs [10]. These programs, characterized by a combination of educational courses, mentorship from successful entrepreneurs, and practical experiences through real-life projects, create a foundation to spark entrepreneurial interests. However, the initial ignition of these intentions is just the beginning of a long and complex journey.

In the context of developing the entrepreneurial spirit among students, it's crucial to recognize that a simple initial act of stimulating entrepreneurial intentions is not enough. In the field of educational psychology, it's acknowledged that long-term development of complex cognitive and affective domains requires continuous and consistent exposure to relevant stimuli and experiences [17]. To maximize the potential of these initial intentions and to ensure they develop in a sustainable manner, it's essential to direct energy and resources towards long-term development strategies. This involves not only reiterating the fundamental principles of entrepreneur-

ship but also providing diverse, real-world experiences that illustrate the challenges and rewards of entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, improving entrepreneurial intentions among the pupils requires more than a one-time intervention; it demands a sustained commitment from educators and educational institutions to provide a framework in which students can grow and evolve. Only through constant exposure and the development of a well-structured educational program can we ensure that the entrepreneurial spirit of students is not only awakened but also cultivated in the long term, thereby increasing their chances of becoming successful entrepreneurs in the future.

Conclusions

The market economy and the concept of entrepreneurship play a crucial role in shaping modern society by stimulating innovation and creativity. Entrepreneurs, equipped with knowledge, resources, and well-planned intentions, are the engine that adds value to the economy and society. Despite challenges such as limited access to funding or competitive markets, the essence of entrepreneurship remains in the ability to transform an idea into a profitable and valuable reality for the community.

To improve entrepreneurial intentions, it is crucial to promote clear and specific objectives, a positive attitude, self-efficacy, visualization, detailed planning, and social support. Introducing these elements into educational programs can make a significant difference in preparing young people for their future entrepreneurial careers. We believe that education plays a key role in shaping and reinforcing students' entrepreneurial aspirations. Integrating an entrepreneurial approach into

the school curriculum not only encourages the development of business competencies and innovation but also cultivates a set of values and positive attitudes necessary for success in the business world. By setting concrete entrepreneurial goals, promoting positive attitudes, developing self-efficacy, visualizing success, planning specific actions, and fostering strong social support, educational programs can play a decisive role in shaping future entrepreneurs [10]. These strategies not only validate psychological and behavioral theories but also prove to be effective in practice, contributing to a holistic approach to entrepreneurial education. By focusing on these aspects, schools can prepare students not just to understand the basics of business but also to develop the skills necessary to navigate a dynamic and ever-changing economic landscape. Thus, entrepreneurial education becomes a vital tool in equipping young people with the skills, knowledge, and mindset needed to turn innovative ideas into successful initiatives, thereby contributing to economic growth and societal development.

At the same time, stimulating and sustaining entrepreneurial intentions among high school students requires a concerted effort that extends beyond initial education-

nal programs. By implementing strategies that provide ongoing education, mentorship, access to resources, and community support, we can ensure that the spark of entrepreneurship ignited in these young people is fueled and will continue to contribute to innovation and economic growth. The commitment to supporting entrepreneurial intentions is not just an investment in individual futures but in the future of our global economy. As educators, mentors, and community members, it is our collective responsibility to support these aspiring entrepreneurs on their journey, ensuring their potential is realized and their dreams of making a difference through entrepreneurship are fulfilled.

In conclusion, entrepreneurship represents a unique blend of vision, determination, and the ability to navigate a constantly changing economic environment. It is a journey full of challenges but also rewards, where success is not guaranteed, but the possibility of making a positive change in the world is unlimited. By understanding and applying the principles discussed, the entrepreneurs of tomorrow are well-equipped to embrace challenges and turn dreams into tangible realities, thus contributing to the progress and well-being of society.

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Primit la redacție: 23.12.2023

Acceptat spre publicare: 15.05.2024

Publicat 06.06.2024