

Entrepreneurial Intention Among University Students in Uzbekistan: Determinants, Barriers, and Implications for Management Education

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Abstract: *Entrepreneurial intention — the deliberate cognitive orientation toward establishing a new venture — is considered a proximal predictor of entrepreneurial behaviour and a key intermediate outcome of entrepreneurship education programmes. Despite Uzbekistan's national strategic emphasis on small and medium enterprise development and youth entrepreneurship, the determinants of entrepreneurial intention among Uzbekistani university students remain insufficiently studied. This conceptual article reviews the principal theoretical frameworks applied to entrepreneurial intention research — the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the Entrepreneurial Event Model (Shapero & Sokol, 1982), and the Individual-Opportunity Nexus (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) — and evaluates their applicability to the Uzbekistani higher education context. Four determinant categories are examined: individual factors (self-efficacy, risk tolerance, prior exposure to entrepreneurship), educational factors (entrepreneurship curriculum quality and pedagogy), contextual factors (institutional support, family attitudes, and peer networks), and structural factors (access to finance, regulatory environment). Based on this analysis, a preliminary conceptual model — the IDEA Framework (Intention Determinants in Emerging-Economy Academia) — is proposed. The article concludes with recommendations for curriculum designers, university managers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen entrepreneurial orientation among Uzbekistan graduates.*

Keywords: entrepreneurial intention; university students; Uzbekistan; theory of planned behaviour; management education; IDEA framework; emerging economies.

IJAMR Classification: Management; Entrepreneurship; Education; Economics

1. Introduction:

Entrepreneurship has become a central pillar of economic development policy in transitional and emerging economies. In Uzbekistan, the strategic role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is explicitly codified in the national development framework: by 2023, SMEs contributed approximately 57.4% of gross domestic product and accounted for 78% of total employment (Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan, 2024). The government has established multiple institutional channels to promote youth entrepreneurship, including the «Yosh tadbirkor» (Young Entrepreneur) programme, the Entrepreneurship Development Fund, and a network of business incubators affiliated with higher education institutions (HEIs).

However, policy commitment and institutional infrastructure do not automatically produce entrepreneurial individuals. The translation of enabling conditions into actual new-venture creation depends, in significant part, on the entrepreneurial intentions of potential entrepreneurs — their deliberate orientation toward starting a business (Bird, 1988). Intentions, in turn, are shaped by a complex interaction of individual, educational, and contextual factors that have been extensively studied in North American and European settings but remain poorly documented in Central Asian HEI contexts.

This gap is consequential for two reasons. First, if university-level entrepreneurship education is to contribute meaningfully to Uzbekistan's SME development goals, curriculum designers need to understand which determinants of entrepreneurial intention are most responsive to pedagogical intervention in the specific institutional and cultural environment of Uzbekistani HEIs. Second, the dominant theoretical frameworks in entrepreneurial intention research have been developed and validated predominantly in individualist cultural settings; their applicability to a collectivist, post-Soviet institutional environment where family attitudes and community expectations exert strong normative influence on career decisions requires explicit examination.

This article has three objectives. First, to review the principal theoretical frameworks applied to entrepreneurial intention research and evaluate their contextual applicability. Second, to map the key determinant categories documented in the literature and assess their relevance to Uzbekistani HEI students. Third, to propose the IDEA (Intention Determinants in Emerging-Economy Academia) Framework as a conceptual model for future empirical research and practical curriculum design in this context.

2. Theoretical Background:

2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is the most widely applied framework in entrepreneurial intention research (Liñán & Chen, 2009). TPB posits that behavioural intentions are predicted by three antecedents: attitude toward the behaviour (the individual's positive or negative evaluation of becoming an entrepreneur), subjective norms (perceived social pressure from important others regarding entrepreneurship), and perceived behavioural control (the individual's belief in their capacity to perform entrepreneurial behaviours). Liñán and Chen (2009) adapted and validated a TPB-based Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ) across multiple countries, demonstrating adequate measurement properties in diverse institutional settings.

The TPB's subjective norms component is particularly relevant in collectivist cultural contexts such as Uzbekistan, where family approval and community expectations exert strong normative influence on educational and career decisions. Research in collectivist settings has found that the relationship between personal attitude and intention may be moderated by family attitudes, especially in first-generation university student populations (Moriani et al., 2012). Whether TPB's component structure holds in Uzbekistani HEIs — and whether the relative weights of the three antecedents differ from those documented in Western samples — is an empirical question that current literature does not yet address.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Event Model

Shapero and Sokol's (1982) Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM) emphasises two constructs: perceived desirability (the degree to which the individual finds entrepreneurship personally and socially attractive) and perceived feasibility (the individual's belief that they are personally capable of starting a business). The EEM has been criticised for its limited predictive specificity relative to TPB (Krueger et al., 2000), but its emphasis on the social embeddedness of entrepreneurial perception offers useful complementarity, particularly for understanding how family and community context shapes the perceived attractiveness of entrepreneurship as a career option.

2.3 Individual-Opportunity Nexus

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) proposed the Individual-Opportunity Nexus (ION) framework, which centres the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental opportunities in the entrepreneurial process. ION directs attention to prior knowledge, cognitive frameworks, and information asymmetries as determinants of who recognises and acts upon entrepreneurial opportunities. Applied to HEI students, ION suggests that exposure to entrepreneurial information, role models, and practical experience shapes not only attitudes but the cognitive repertoire through which individuals scan their environment for potential ventures. This has direct implications for curriculum design: pedagogical approaches that increase students' exposure to market information and entrepreneurial role models may improve not only attitude but opportunity recognition capacity.

2.4 Synthesis

No single framework exhaustively captures the determinants of entrepreneurial intention in diverse institutional settings. The analytical approach adopted in this article treats the three frameworks as complementary lenses: TPB structures the individual antecedents and social norms; EEM adds the desirability-feasibility dimension and its social embeddedness; ION contributes the opportunity-recognition and prior-knowledge dimensions. Together, they map a multi-level determinant space across individual, educational, and contextual domains.

3. Methodology:

This article employs an integrative conceptual review methodology, synthesising theoretical frameworks and empirical literature to develop a contextualised model of entrepreneurial intention determinants. An integrative review was selected because the objective is to build conceptual understanding in a setting where primary empirical data are limited, rather than to estimate effect sizes through systematic meta-analysis (Torraco, 2005). The review draws on published studies retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar using the search terms ("entrepreneurial intention" OR "entrepreneurship intention") AND ("university" OR "student" OR "higher education") AND ("determinants" OR "antecedents" OR "factors"). Publications from 2000 to 2024 were prioritised, with foundational theoretical papers from earlier decades included through backward citation searching. Studies directly addressing Central Asian, post-Soviet, or Muslim-majority cultural contexts were specifically sought, though available evidence in these categories is limited. The determinant framework presented in Section 4 was developed inductively from the reviewed literature and structured according to the theoretical lenses described in Section 2. The proposed IDEA Framework is explicitly preliminary and requires empirical validation in Uzbekistani HEI settings before its applied utility can be confirmed.

4. Results: Mapping Determinants of Entrepreneurial Intention:

4.1 Individual Factors

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy — the belief in one's ability to successfully perform the tasks associated with starting and managing a business — is among the most consistently documented individual predictors of entrepreneurial intention (Zhao et al., 2005). A meta-analysis by Rauch and Frese (2007) across 45 studies found a mean corrected correlation between self-efficacy and

entrepreneurial intention of $r = .38$, indicating a moderate to substantial relationship. Self-efficacy is particularly significant in the Uzbekistani context because surveys of university students consistently report that low confidence in business skills and financial management knowledge constitutes one of the primary self-reported barriers to entrepreneurship (Mirzaxolov, 2023).

Risk tolerance is a second individual factor documented in the literature, though its relationship with entrepreneurial intention is more context-dependent than self-efficacy (Stewart & Roth, 2001). In settings characterised by economic uncertainty, currency volatility, and limited social safety nets — features present to varying degrees in the Uzbekistani context — risk tolerance may function differently than in economies with established bankruptcy protection, unemployment insurance, and public support systems for business failure.

Prior exposure to entrepreneurship, through family business ownership, part-time self-employment, or mentoring relationships with entrepreneurs, is associated with higher entrepreneurial intention in multiple studies (Krueger et al., 2000; Liñán & Chen, 2009). In Uzbekistan, where a significant proportion of the population has direct or indirect involvement in informal entrepreneurial activity, this exposure factor may operate through channels different from those studied in Western samples — specifically, through the observation of informal rather than formal business models.

4.2 Educational Factors

The relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intention is positive but contextually sensitive. A meta-analysis by Nabi et al. (2017) across 73 studies found that entrepreneurship education has a significant positive average effect on entrepreneurial intention ($d = 0.42$), but with substantial heterogeneity across programme types. Experiential and action-learning approaches — including business plan competitions, startup simulations, and project-based learning — show stronger effects than lecture-based knowledge transmission. This distinction has direct implications for Uzbekistani HEIs, where entrepreneurship education is predominantly delivered in lecture format and practical business simulation is underused.

The quality of the entrepreneurial learning environment — including instructor entrepreneurial experience, curriculum relevance to local market conditions, and peer entrepreneurial norms — moderates the education-intention relationship (Fayolle & Liñán, 2014). In Uzbekistani universities, the entrepreneurship curriculum has been expanded in recent years as part of the national reform agenda, but the gap between curriculum content and local market realities, combined with limited instructor practical experience, may constrain its impact on student intention.

4.3 Contextual Factors

Family attitude toward entrepreneurship is documented as a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention in collectivist cultural contexts (Moriani et al., 2012). In Uzbekistan, where family opinion plays a central role in career decision-making and where the cultural expectation of stable public-sector or corporate employment remains strong in many communities, negative family attitudes toward the uncertainty of entrepreneurship may represent a significant barrier that curriculum-based interventions alone cannot address.

Peer and role model effects operate through TPB's subjective norms component: when students perceive that respected peers and community figures view entrepreneurship positively and engage in it successfully, their own entrepreneurial intentions increase (Liñán & Chen, 2009). The visibility of successful young entrepreneurs in Uzbekistani public discourse — increasingly present through government-promoted media coverage of youth entrepreneurship award recipients — may constitute a growing positive role-model effect, though its impact has not yet been empirically measured.

4.4 Structural Factors

Access to start-up financing is a documented structural barrier to entrepreneurial intention in lower-income settings. When individuals believe that financial barriers to new-venture creation are insurmountable regardless of their personal motivation, perceived feasibility — and therefore intention — may remain low even in the presence of high desirability and self-efficacy (Krueger et al., 2000). In Uzbekistan, while government-backed financing channels exist (including the Entrepreneurship Development Fund and «Yoshlar — kelajagimiz» programme), awareness and accessibility of these instruments among HEI students appears uneven, with rural and regional students facing greater information barriers than urban counterparts.

The regulatory environment shapes perceived entrepreneurship cost and complexity. Uzbekistan has reduced business registration time substantially — from over 30 days in 2017 to a single working day for online registration by 2023 (Ministry of Justice, 2023) — but tax compliance complexity, inspection burden, and legal protection for small businesses continue to be cited as barriers in enterprise surveys. Regulatory factors operate primarily through perceived feasibility rather than desirability, and improvements in regulatory simplicity may have stronger effects on intention among students with already-positive attitudes.

Table 1

Summary of Entrepreneurial Intention Determinants and Uzbekistani Contextual Relevance

Category	Determinant	Evidence Base	Uzbekistani Contextual Note
Individual	Entrepreneurial self-efficacy	Zhao et al. (2005); Rauch & Frese (2007)	Low business-skill confidence documented as primary barrier (Mirzaxolov, 2023)
Individual	Risk tolerance	Stewart & Roth (2001)	Economic uncertainty may depress risk tolerance relative to stable-economy norms
Individual	Prior entrepreneurial exposure	Krueger et al. (2000)	High informal entrepreneurship exposure; formal exposure limited
Educational	Programme type (experiential vs. lecture)	Nabi et al. (2017)	Predominantly lecture-format delivery; simulation underused
Educational	Instructor experience and curriculum relevance	Fayolle & Liñán (2014)	Limited instructor practical experience; curriculum-market gap reported
Contextual	Family attitude	Moriano et al. (2012)	Strong family influence on career choice; stable employment preference
Contextual	Peer norms and role models	Liñán & Chen (2009)	Growing government-promoted youth entrepreneur visibility
Structural	Access to start-up finance	Krueger et al. (2000)	Government programmes exist; awareness and access uneven
Structural	Regulatory environment	Shane & Venkataraman (2000)	Registration simplified; compliance burden remains significant

Note. Evidence base references selected primary source(s) per determinant. Uzbekistani contextual notes are based on available policy and survey sources cited in the References section.

5. Discussion: The IDEA Framework

5.1 Framework Structure

Drawing on the theoretical synthesis and determinant mapping presented above, this article proposes the IDEA Framework — Intention Determinants in Emerging-Economy Academia — as a preliminary conceptual model for understanding and supporting entrepreneurial intention development in Uzbekistani HEIs. The framework is organised around four interactive domains, whose initial letters form the acronym: Individual capacity, Didactic environment, Ecosystem conditions, and Attitude formation.

Individual capacity encompasses entrepreneurial self-efficacy, risk tolerance, and prior entrepreneurial exposure. These determinants are principally amenable to educational intervention: competency-based curriculum, experiential learning, and structured mentorship relationships can be designed to systematically build the personal resources that support entrepreneurial intention.

Didactic environment refers to the pedagogical design of entrepreneurship education — curriculum content, instructional methods, instructor competencies, and assessment approaches. The reviewed evidence strongly favours experiential and action-learning approaches over knowledge-transmission formats. For Uzbekistani HEIs, this implies that investment in pedagogical reform — specifically the introduction of startup simulation, real venture projects, and industry-linked entrepreneurship programmes — is likely to produce stronger returns on intention than curriculum content expansion alone.

Ecosystem conditions encompass the family and peer social environment, institutional support infrastructure, access to financing, and regulatory conditions. These factors lie largely outside the direct control of HEI curriculum designers, but can be partially addressed through institutional bridging strategies: inviting successful local entrepreneurs as guest speakers and role models, facilitating student access to government financing programmes, and partnering with business incubators to provide co-curricular entrepreneurial experience.

Attitude formation refers to the dynamic process through which students' desirability evaluations and feasibility beliefs are shaped by the interaction of individual, educational, and ecosystem factors over the course of their studies. Attitude formation is not a static input but a continuous process; the same curriculum may produce different effects on entrepreneurial attitude depending on the prior beliefs, cultural background, and social context of students.

5.2 Framework Interactions

The IDEA Framework is explicitly non-linear. Individual capacity and didactic environment interact such that pedagogical interventions have stronger effects on students who enter with moderate self-efficacy and openness to risk, while students with very low initial self-efficacy may require targeted confidence-building support before entrepreneurship coursework can effectively shift intention. Ecosystem conditions moderate the attitude formation process: positive family attitudes and visible role models amplify the effects of educational interventions, while negative normative environments may attenuate them, suggesting that family orientation programmes could increase the effectiveness of curriculum-based approaches.

5.3 Comparison with Existing Models

The IDEA Framework shares features with Liñán and Chen's (2009) adaptation of TPB and with Nabi et al.'s (2017) review of entrepreneurship education effects, but differs in three respects relevant to the Uzbekistani context. First, it treats family attitude as a distinct ecosystem variable rather than subsuming it within TPB's generic subjective norms construct, which better reflects the specific normative weight of family opinion in collectivist settings. Second, it explicitly includes the regulatory environment as a structural determinant operating through perceived feasibility, which general TPB applications do not address. Third, it positions didactic environment as a modifiable institutional variable rather than treating educational exposure as a simple binary control, reflecting the evidence that programme type and pedagogy matter as much as programme presence.

5.4 Limitations

The IDEA Framework has significant limitations that should be acknowledged. It is conceptually derived from literature that is geographically concentrated in non-Central-Asian settings; its component weights and interaction patterns in Uzbekistani HEIs are hypotheses rather than documented findings. The framework has not been subjected to expert review, stakeholder validation, or empirical testing, and should be treated as a structured research agenda rather than validated applied guidance. Cultural specificity is also a concern: the framework is developed for Uzbekistan as a primary context and should not be applied uncritically to other Central Asian systems, which differ in institutional traditions, language environments, and regulatory frameworks.

6. Conclusion:

This article has reviewed the principal theoretical frameworks and empirical literature on entrepreneurial intention determinants and proposed the IDEA Framework as a contextualised conceptual model for Uzbekistani higher education settings. The review reveals that entrepreneurial intention in HEI students is shaped by the interaction of individual capacity factors (particularly self-efficacy and prior exposure), didactic environment quality (particularly pedagogical approach), ecosystem conditions (family attitudes, peer norms, financing access, and regulatory environment), and attitude formation processes. For Uzbekistani HEIs, the evidence suggests that investment in experiential entrepreneurship pedagogy, instructor professional development, and institutional bridging to ecosystem support may produce stronger returns on student entrepreneurial intention than curriculum content expansion alone.

Three recommendations are offered for HEI leaders and policymakers. First, entrepreneurship curricula in Uzbekistani HEIs should be redesigned to incorporate experiential learning components — startup competitions, real-venture projects, and mentorship programmes — which show stronger evidence of intention effects than lecture-based delivery. Second, university-enterprise partnerships that give students visible access to local entrepreneurial role models and practical financing information can address ecosystem barriers that curriculum alone cannot overcome. Third, the IDEA Framework should be empirically tested through survey research among Uzbekistani management and economics students, using validated instruments adapted from the EIQ (Liñán & Chen, 2009) and the SEE scale (Zhao et al., 2005), to establish which determinants show the strongest context-specific relationships with intention in this setting.

Future research should also examine whether the determinant weights identified in international samples hold in the Uzbekistani cultural context, particularly the relationship between family attitude and entrepreneurial intention in a setting where family opinion is a more powerful normative force than in most previously studied populations. Longitudinal designs tracking students from first-year exposure to entrepreneurship education through post-graduation venture behaviour are ultimately necessary to establish whether educational interventions produce durable effects on intention and, ultimately, on new-venture creation.

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