

**THE INTENTION–ACTION GAP IN STUDENT
ENTREPRENEURSHIP:
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ALGERIAN
UNIVERSITY ECOSYSTEMS**

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Abstract: This article offers a conceptual contribution to the study of student entrepreneurship by addressing the persistence of the intention–action gap in Algerian universities. Rather than presenting empirical findings, it develops an activation-centered paradigm that integrates psychological determinants (attitudes, self-efficacy, achievement motivation), university-based mediation mechanisms (entrepreneurship education, mentorship, incubation, relational capital), and socio-economic factors (entrepreneurial climate, market opportunities, public policies). The originality of the model lies in its emphasis on the mediating role of universities as volitional bridges, moving beyond linear predictions of the Theory of Planned Behavior. By formalizing theoretical propositions and illustrating them through Algerian institutional reforms—such as Ministerial Decree No. 1275 (“Graduation–Startup”), the expansion of incubators and Entrepreneurship Development Centers (CDEs), and the introduction of the Label “Project Innovant” linked to Algeria Venture and the Algerian Startup Fund (ASF)—the study highlights how institutional activation mechanisms can transform entrepreneurial intention into action. This framework provides a theoretical basis for future empirical research and policy design in transitional university ecosystems.

Keywords : Student entrepreneurship; Intention–action gap; Entrepreneurial self-efficacy; University incubation; Institutional mediation.

JEL Classification Codes: L26, I23, M13

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1- Introduction:

Over the past decades, student entrepreneurship has progressively emerged as a strategic lever within public policies aimed at fostering economic development and enhancing graduate employability. Universities, once primarily devoted to the transmission of knowledge, are now increasingly expected to assume an active role in promoting entrepreneurial culture and supporting venture creation. This transformation aligns with the paradigm of the entrepreneurial university, notably conceptualized by Henry Etzkowitz, in which higher education institutions become key actors in innovation systems and regional development. Within this framework, universities are no longer confined to teaching and research but are integrated into a “triple helix” model that connects academia, industry, and government, thereby contributing directly to knowledge commercialization and economic dynamism (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

In this evolving landscape, Algeria has experienced a significant institutional momentum marked by the establishment of dedicated entrepreneurial support mechanisms within universities, including entrepreneurship development centers, university incubators, and innovation support units. These initiatives reflect a political commitment to transforming students into project leaders and to encouraging a shift from the status of job seekers to that of value creators. Such reforms resonate with broader international trends that position entrepreneurship education as a means to stimulate opportunity recognition, innovation capacity, and proactive career orientation (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). However, the effectiveness of these institutional arrangements depends not only on structural provisions but also on students’ psychological readiness and perceived feasibility of entrepreneurial action (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000).

Despite the substantial body of international research devoted to identifying the determinants of entrepreneurial intention, a persistent paradox remains: while a considerable proportion of students express the intention to create a business, only a minority eventually translate this intention into concrete entrepreneurial behavior. This discrepancy, commonly referred to as the *intention–action gap*, raises critical questions regarding the capacity of university-based support systems to convert psychological dispositions into effective entrepreneurial

engagement. The theoretical foundations of entrepreneurial intention research, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Icek Ajzen (1991), posit that intention is the most proximal predictor of behavior. Yet empirical findings suggest that intention alone is insufficient to guarantee action, as situational constraints, resource accessibility, perceived behavioral control, and contextual uncertainty may moderate or inhibit behavioral enactment (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Understanding the mechanisms underlying the transition or rupture between entrepreneurial intention and action therefore constitutes a major scientific challenge, particularly in emerging contexts where entrepreneurial ecosystems are still in the process of consolidation. In environments characterized by institutional transformation, regulatory complexity, and evolving support infrastructures, the intention–action dynamic may be influenced by psychosocial variables (e.g., self-efficacy, risk perception, social norms) as well as by structural and organizational determinants (e.g., access to funding, mentorship, incubation quality). Drawing on the experience of Algerian universities, this article proposes a theoretical reflection aimed at analyzing the psychosocial and institutional factors that may account for this gap, thereby contributing to a more integrated understanding of student entrepreneurial trajectories in transitional ecosystems.

2- Research Problem

Despite the proliferation of entrepreneurial support mechanisms within Algerian universities such as entrepreneurship development centers, incubation structures, and innovation support units the actual rate of venture creation among students remains relatively modest when compared to the proportion of students expressing entrepreneurial intentions. This discrepancy reveals a structural and psychosocial tension between declared aspirations and observable entrepreneurial behavior. While institutional discourse increasingly promotes entrepreneurship as a pathway to employability and socioeconomic mobility, empirical reality suggests that the transition from intention to action is neither automatic nor linear.

From a theoretical standpoint, entrepreneurial intention has been widely conceptualized as the most proximal predictor of entrepreneurial behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior developed by Icek Ajzen (1991) posits that intention is shaped by attitudes toward the behavior,

subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, and that it directly precedes action. Similarly, the Entrepreneurial Event Model proposed by Jeffrey A. Timmons Shapero and Sokol (1982) emphasizes perceived desirability and feasibility as central antecedents of entrepreneurial action. However, although these models provide robust explanatory frameworks for intention formation, they offer more limited insight into the mechanisms that enable or inhibit the enactment of entrepreneurial behavior in specific institutional contexts.

Consequently, the central research question guiding this article is formulated as follows:

How can the discrepancy between students' entrepreneurial intention and the actual transition to entrepreneurial action be explained within the context of Algerian universities?

To address this central problem, the reflection is structured around three interrelated sub-questions:

- a) What are the psychological determinants of entrepreneurial intention?
- b) Why is intention insufficient to predict action?
- c) What role do university support mechanisms play in mediating between intention and action?

In the Algerian context where entrepreneurial ecosystems are still consolidating the mediating function of university support systems becomes particularly salient. Institutional coherence, regulatory clarity, and the quality of pedagogical guidance may significantly shape students' confidence in transforming entrepreneurial aspirations into tangible projects.

In sum, the research problem addressed in this article lies at the intersection of psychological determinants, behavioral mechanisms, and institutional mediation. By examining these dimensions within the Algerian university context, this study seeks to contribute to a more integrative understanding of the intention–action dynamic in student entrepreneurship.

3- Theoretical Framework

3-1. Entrepreneurial Intention: Psychological Foundations

Understanding entrepreneurial intention primarily draws upon the Theory of Planned Behavior developed by Icek Ajzen (1991). According to this model, intention represents the most proximal determinant of

behavior and is shaped by three core components: (1) *attitude toward the behavior*, (2) *subjective norms*, and (3) *perceived behavioral control*.

Attitude toward the behavior refers to the individual's overall evaluation of entrepreneurship as desirable or undesirable. In the student context, this includes perceptions of autonomy, financial independence, innovation, and social recognition associated with venture creation. Subjective norms relate to perceived social pressures or support from significant others such as family, peers, or faculty regarding entrepreneurial engagement. In collectivist or transitional contexts, these normative influences may exert a particularly strong impact on students' career orientations. Finally, perceived behavioral control reflects the individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform entrepreneurial tasks, which closely approximates the concept of self-efficacy.

Within entrepreneurship research, these dimensions have been adapted to explain why some individuals develop a strong propensity to create a venture while others do not. Empirical studies confirm that attitudes, perceived feasibility, and perceived social support significantly predict entrepreneurial intention among university students (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000; Kautonen, Van Gelderen, & Fink, 2015). In this respect, intention is conceptualized as a cognitively mediated commitment to future entrepreneurial behavior rather than a spontaneous impulse.

Complementing this perspective, Albert Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory emphasizes the central role of self-efficacy beliefs in human agency. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy refers to the individual's perceived capacity to successfully perform the roles and tasks associated with venture creation, such as opportunity recognition, resource mobilization, innovation management, and risk handling. Research indicates that higher levels of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are associated not only with stronger entrepreneurial intentions but also with greater persistence in the face of uncertainty and setbacks (Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005).

From this standpoint, entrepreneurial intention emerges from a dynamic interplay between cognitive evaluations (attitudes), social influences (subjective norms), and perceived competence (self-efficacy/perceived control). These models provide a robust explanatory basis for understanding how entrepreneurial aspirations are formed within the university environment, particularly when educational programs seek to

enhance students' confidence, opportunity awareness, and perceived feasibility of entrepreneurship.

However, although these theoretical frameworks effectively account for the formation of entrepreneurial intention, they offer more limited insight into the mechanisms that govern the transition from intention to action. While the Theory of Planned Behavior posits a direct relationship between intention and behavior, empirical evidence suggests that this relationship is often moderated by contextual constraints, emotional regulation, access to resources, and implementation processes (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Thus, the predictive strength of intention may diminish when environmental uncertainty, institutional barriers, or structural limitations intervene.

In the specific context of emerging entrepreneurial ecosystems, such as those found in developing economies, additional factors including regulatory complexity, limited access to financing, and fragile support networks may further weaken the intention–action linkage. Consequently, while psychological models remain essential for understanding the genesis of entrepreneurial aspiration, they must be complemented by institutional and contextual analyses to fully explain why many students with strong entrepreneurial intentions do not ultimately engage in venture creation.

3-2. The Intention–Action Gap: Limitations of Intentional Models

Research in social psychology and entrepreneurship consistently demonstrates that intention, although a necessary antecedent of behavior, is not a sufficient condition for action (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). While intentional models particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior assume a direct and linear relationship between intention and behavior, empirical findings reveal that this relationship is often weaker than theoretically expected. In entrepreneurial contexts, the transition from intention to venture creation appears especially fragile, as it requires the mobilization of cognitive, emotional, and material resources within uncertain environments.

Several factors may hinder the translation of entrepreneurial intention into action. First, fear of failure represents a major psychological barrier. Entrepreneurship inherently involves uncertainty and the possibility of loss financial, social, and symbolic. Individuals who perceive failure as stigmatizing or irreversible may hesitate to act despite expressing strong entrepreneurial aspirations (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015). Closely related

to this is risk aversion, which can moderate the intention–behavior relationship. Although students may positively evaluate entrepreneurship at an attitudinal level, their tolerance for ambiguity and potential loss may remain insufficient to trigger actual engagement.

Second, resource constraints significantly affect behavioral enactment. Entrepreneurial action requires access to financial capital, social networks, mentorship, and institutional support. In contexts where these resources are scarce or unevenly distributed, intention may remain purely aspirational (Kautonen, Van Gelderen, & Fink, 2015). The perceived lack of feasibility despite high desirability can thus interrupt the motivational process described by intentional theories.

Third, institutional uncertainty and regulatory complexity may further weaken the intention–action link. In emerging or transitional economies, unclear administrative procedures, limited legal protection, and fluctuating policy frameworks can create structural barriers that discourage entrepreneurial commitment. Under such conditions, the perceived behavioral control component emphasized in intentional models may not adequately capture the broader systemic constraints that shape entrepreneurial feasibility.

Fourth, socioeconomic constraints including family responsibilities, financial precarity, and limited employment alternatives may either push or inhibit entrepreneurial engagement. For some students, entrepreneurship is perceived as a risky deviation from stable employment paths, particularly in environments where public sector careers remain socially valued. These contextual pressures illustrate that entrepreneurial behavior is embedded within broader social structures and cannot be fully explained by individual-level cognitions alone.

To address these limitations, research on volition offers a complementary perspective. Peter Gollwitzer (1999) distinguishes between the motivational phase, during which intentions are formed, and the volitional phase, in which these intentions are translated into concrete actions. Central to this framework is the concept of *implementation intentions*, defined as specific “if–then” plans that link anticipated situations to goal-directed responses. By specifying when, where, and how an intended action will be performed, implementation intentions strengthen goal commitment and increase the likelihood of behavioral enactment (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006).

Applied to student entrepreneurship, this perspective suggests that the intention–action gap may reflect a deficit in transition mechanisms between motivational commitment and volitional execution. Students may express a general intention to create a business but fail to develop structured action plans, timelines, resource mobilization strategies, or coping mechanisms for anticipated obstacles. Without such volitional scaffolding, entrepreneurial intention remains at the level of aspiration rather than operationalization.

Therefore, the intention–action gap can be interpreted not as a failure of motivation per se, but as a breakdown in the processes that convert intention into sustained, goal-directed behavior. This interpretation calls for integrative models that combine intentional theories with volitional and contextual perspectives, particularly in university environments seeking to foster effective entrepreneurial engagement.

3-3. The Mediating Role of the University

In the contemporary Algerian context, university-based entrepreneurship support mechanisms can be analyzed as genuine psychosocial mediation structures operating between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial action. The progressive transformation of universities into actors of economic development aligns with the paradigm of the entrepreneurial university theorized by Henry Etzkowitz (2003). Within this perspective, higher education institutions transcend their traditional missions of teaching and research to become engines of innovation, knowledge commercialization, and value creation.

This institutional reconfiguration reflects a broader shift in which universities are increasingly embedded in innovation ecosystems and contribute to regional competitiveness through knowledge transfer and venture incubation (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). In Algeria, this evolution is visible through the establishment of structured entrepreneurial support mechanisms aimed at facilitating students' transition from academic engagement to economic initiative.

In this framework, the Algerian university can be conceptualized as:

- A producer of social capital, by fostering networks among students, faculty, industry actors, and policymakers;
- A facilitator of access to technical and informational resources, enabling students to navigate legal, financial, and technological challenges;

- An incubator of entrepreneurial identity, contributing to the construction of self-perceptions aligned with entrepreneurial roles.

This institutional mutation materializes through three key structural entities:

a) Entrepreneurship Development Centers (CDE)

Entrepreneurship Development Centers function as spaces for awareness-raising, training, and entrepreneurial socialization. Their role extends beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; they actively participate in shaping entrepreneurial representations, disseminating a project-oriented culture, and enhancing the perceived social desirability of entrepreneurial engagement.

From a psychosocial perspective, CDEs contribute to:

- Strengthening entrepreneurial self-efficacy,
- Developing perceived project management competencies,
- Legitimizing entrepreneurship as a viable and socially recognized career trajectory.

The enhancement of self-efficacy is particularly significant. According to Albert Bandura (1997), self-efficacy beliefs influence individuals' choices, effort levels, resilience, and persistence in the face of obstacles. In entrepreneurship education contexts, experiential learning, simulations, and project-based activities have been shown to positively impact both entrepreneurial self-efficacy and intention (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Thus, CDEs may serve as catalysts in strengthening the motivational phase of the entrepreneurial process.

b) Technology and Innovation Support Centers (CATI)

Technology and Innovation Support Centers (CATI) play a strategic role in accompanying innovation-driven projects, particularly in areas such as intellectual property protection, research valorization, and technology transfer. These centers function as bridges between academic knowledge production and the economic sector, facilitating the transformation of research outputs into structured economic opportunities.

By reducing legal and technical uncertainty related to innovation processes, CATIs contribute to what may be termed cognitive securitization of entrepreneurial projects. In contexts characterized by regulatory ambiguity or limited familiarity with intellectual property frameworks, institutional guidance reduces perceived risk and enhances perceived behavioral control an essential component of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

In this sense, CATIs operate at the interface between psychological confidence and structural feasibility. They help transform academic ideas into economically viable opportunities by providing legal clarity, technological validation, and strategic orientation.

c) University Incubators and Their Articulation with SMEs

The recent expansion of university incubators within Algerian higher education marks a decisive step in the operationalization of the entrepreneurial university model. These structures offer:

- Personalized mentoring and coaching,
- Access to professional networks,
- Logistical and administrative support,
- Structured business development pathways.

Incubators act as action-enabling devices, structuring the volitional phase of entrepreneurial engagement. Drawing on Peter Gollwitzer's (1999) distinction between motivational and volitional phases, incubators can be understood as mechanisms that facilitate the transition from intention to implementation. Through mentoring and structured planning processes, they foster implementation intentions and reinforce commitment to concrete entrepreneurial steps (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006).

Moreover, incubators facilitate students' progressive integration into the ecosystem of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are central to Algeria's economic diversification strategy. In a national context characterized by policy efforts to strengthen the SME sector, university incubators represent a strategic linkage between academic institutions and the productive fabric of the economy. They provide a relatively secure environment for experimentation, learning, and gradual market entry.

Since 2021, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) has implemented a national strategy to promote student entrepreneurship through the establishment of dedicated structures. By 2025, the Algerian university landscape included 44 incubators and 58 Entrepreneurship Development Centers (**CDEs**) nationwide, supporting nearly 1,200 student projects, of which 18% resulted in official business registration with the national trade registry (MESRS, 2025). Despite this institutional dynamism, the rate of concretization remains modest, confirming the persistence of the intention–action gap and highlighting the need for stronger coordination

between institutional mechanisms and students' practical needs. A pivotal milestone reinforcing this strategy is Ministerial Decree No. 1275, commonly referred to as the "*Graduation–Startup*" (*Un diplôme, une startup*) mechanism. This policy represents a concrete shift toward the activation-centered paradigm by allowing students to substitute a traditional academic thesis with a business plan or a prototype for a startup, thereby creating a formal bridge between the motivational phase and volitional execution. Decree 1275 provides regulatory clarity and cognitive securitization by giving students a legitimate academic path to entrepreneurship. As of 2024–2025, the Algerian ecosystem had expanded to include over 90 university incubators and several Technology and Innovation Support Centers (**CATI**), which facilitate the *Triple Helix* model by connecting student researchers with the Algerian National Institute of Industrial Property (INAPI). Moreover, CDEs now serve as the primary filter for the *Label "Project Innovant"*, a certification granting students access to Algeria Venture (the national startup accelerator) and targeted funding through the Algerian Startup Fund (**ASF**) (MESRS, 2024).

A Multidimensional Institutional Mediation

Taken together, CDEs, CATIs, and university incubators operate across several interconnected psychosocial levers:

- a. Strengthening entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).
- b. Reducing perceived uncertainty associated with entrepreneurial risk.
- c. Normalizing entrepreneurship as a legitimate and socially valued professional trajectory.
- d. Structuring the cognitive and strategic dimensions of entrepreneurial projects.
- e. Fostering the progressive construction of entrepreneurial identity.

Entrepreneurial identity formation is particularly crucial. Becoming an entrepreneur involves not only acquiring skills but also internalizing a role identity consistent with opportunity recognition, autonomy, and responsibility. Institutional support structures contribute to this identity work by legitimizing entrepreneurial aspirations within the academic environment and embedding them in collective narratives of innovation and development.

Consequently, entrepreneurial action cannot be reduced to an individual disposition alone; it emerges from the dynamic interaction between cognitive–motivational factors and institutional devices. In the Algerian

case, the scientific challenge lies not merely in measuring entrepreneurial intention levels among students, but in assessing the extent to which CDEs, CATIs, and university incubators function as effective catalysts of entrepreneurial action. Understanding their mediating capacity is essential for bridging the gap between aspiration and venture realization within emerging university ecosystems. To strengthen the scientific contribution of this study, the following section introduces an activation-centered paradigm that integrates psychological, institutional, and contextual dimensions into structured theoretical propositions.

4- Proposal of conceptual framework: An activation-centered paradigm

Building upon the preceding theoretical analysis, an integrative model can be proposed to explain the persistence of the intention–action gap in student entrepreneurship within Algerian universities. This model is structured around three interdependent levels: (1) *individual factors*, (2) *university-based mediation mechanisms*, and (3) *the broader socio-economic environment*.

The central assumption is that entrepreneurial action results from a dynamic interaction between psychological dispositions, institutional activation mechanisms, and contextual opportunity structures. The “gap” emerges when institutional mediation mechanisms fail to effectively mobilize or channel individual resources into concrete entrepreneurial behavior.

Level 1: Individual Factors

At the first level, entrepreneurial engagement is rooted in individual cognitive and motivational determinants. Three key components can be identified:

- 1) Entrepreneurial attitudes
- 2) Entrepreneurial self-efficacy
- 3) Need for achievement (achievement motivation)

Entrepreneurial attitudes refer to the degree to which an individual holds favorable evaluations toward entrepreneurial activity. Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes constitute a central predictor of entrepreneurial intention. Positive

evaluations of autonomy, innovation, and opportunity exploitation strengthen the motivational foundation of entrepreneurial engagement. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, conceptualized by Albert Bandura (1997), refers to the belief in one's capacity to successfully perform entrepreneurial tasks. High self-efficacy enhances perseverance, resilience in the face of setbacks, and proactive opportunity seeking elements crucial for transitioning from intention to action.

Finally, achievement motivation, initially theorized by David McClelland (1961), represents a dispositional drive toward excellence, goal attainment, and personal accomplishment. Individuals with a strong need for achievement are more likely to assume calculated risks and pursue challenging entrepreneurial goals.

However, although these psychological variables are necessary for entrepreneurial intention formation, they do not automatically produce behavior. Their activation depends largely on mediating institutional structures.

Level 2: University-Based Mediations

The second level concerns the mediating function of the university as an activating environment. In the Algerian context, this mediation is operationalized through four principal mechanisms:

- 1) Entrepreneurship education and training
- 2) Mentorship programs
- 3) Incubation structures
- 4) Relational capital development

Entrepreneurship education programs already exist in many Algerian universities. Nevertheless, their effectiveness may be limited by rigid scheduling and insufficient adaptation to students' availability. Research indicates that experiential and flexible entrepreneurship education positively influences both self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Therefore, revising program duration and scheduling according to students' academic constraints could enhance their mediating impact.

Mentorship is also present but requires reinforcement and personalization. Mentoring relationships provide modeling, feedback, and social persuasion three mechanisms identified by Bandura (1997) as crucial sources of self-efficacy development. Personalized mentorship

may facilitate clearer goal-setting and implementation planning, strengthening the volitional phase described by Peter Gollwitzer (1999). University incubators function as structured environments for venture development, offering logistical support, professional networks, and strategic guidance. They operate as transitional spaces between academic life and market entry, enabling students to transform abstract intentions into operational projects.

Relational capital, developed through networking events, partnerships with SMEs, and industry collaboration, further reduces uncertainty and enhances perceived feasibility. Social capital theory emphasizes that access to networks provides informational, emotional, and instrumental resources that increase entrepreneurial success probabilities (Burt, 1992).

Collectively, these university-based mediations activate, channel, and stabilize individual psychological resources. When these mediations are weakly coordinated, insufficiently personalized, or poorly integrated, the transition from intention to action remains fragile.

Level 3: Socio-Economic Environment

The third level encompasses macro-structural determinants:

- 1) Entrepreneurial climate
- 2) Market opportunities
- 3) Public policies

The entrepreneurial climate reflects societal norms, cultural representations of entrepreneurship, and tolerance for failure. Social legitimacy plays a decisive role in shaping entrepreneurial behavior. In contexts where entrepreneurship is perceived as risky or unstable, intentions may remain symbolic rather than operational.

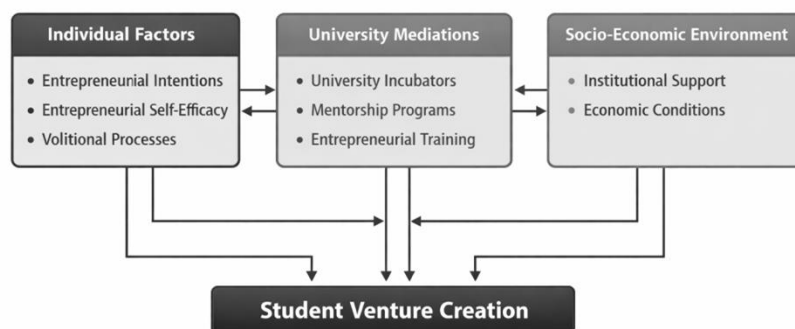
Market opportunities determine the objective feasibility of venture creation. Opportunity recognition is influenced not only by individual alertness but also by structural economic conditions (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Public policies including financial incentives, regulatory simplification, and startup support measures directly affect perceived behavioral control. Supportive institutional frameworks can reduce structural barriers and enhance the likelihood that entrepreneurial intentions translate into action.

Supportive institutional frameworks can reduce structural barriers and enhance the likelihood that entrepreneurial intentions translate into action.

The preceding analysis has outlined the three interdependent levels individual factors, university-based mediations, and the socio-economic environment that shape the dynamics of student entrepreneurship in Algerian universities. While this integrative model provides a descriptive understanding of the intention–action gap, its scientific contribution requires further formalization. To move beyond a purely intention-centered perspective, the following section introduces an activation-centered paradigm, which synthesizes these levels into structured theoretical propositions. This framework emphasizes that entrepreneurial action emerges not from isolated traits or institutional devices, but from their coordinated interaction, thereby offering a basis for future empirical research and policy design.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the intention–action gap in student entrepreneurship



Source: Author's elaboration based on Ajzen (1991), Bandura (1997), McClelland (1961), Fayolle & Gailly (2015), Shane & Venkataraman (2000), and institutional reforms (MESRS, Decree 1275, Algeria Venture, ASF)

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model developed in this article to explain the persistence of the intention–action gap in student entrepreneurship within Algerian universities. The model is structured around three interrelated levels:

a) Individual Factors include entrepreneurial attitudes, self-efficacy, and volitional processes. These psychological dispositions form the motivational foundation of entrepreneurial engagement but require activation to translate into behavior.

b) University-Based Mediations encompass institutional mechanisms such as incubators, mentorship programs, and entrepreneurship training. These structures operate as psychosocial catalysts that facilitate the transition from intention to action by reinforcing self-efficacy, structuring implementation intentions, and legitimizing entrepreneurial identity.

c) Socio-Economic Environment refers to macro-level determinants including institutional support and economic conditions. These contextual variables shape the perceived feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurship, influencing both intention formation and behavioral enactment.

The arrows in the diagram illustrate the dynamic interplay between these levels. Entrepreneurial action emerges not from isolated factors but from their coordinated interaction. The model emphasizes that the gap arises when institutional mediation fails to effectively mobilize individual resources or when contextual constraints inhibit volitional execution.

This framework offers a theoretical basis for assessing the activation capacity of university ecosystems in transitional contexts.

Building upon this integrative model, the next section formalizes the activation-centered paradigm through structured theoretical propositions designed to guide future empirical research.

4-1. Formalized Theoretical Propositions

- **Proposition 1 “Motivational Foundation”:** Entrepreneurial intentions, attitudes, and self-efficacy form the necessary psychological substrate, but they remain latent unless activated by volitional processes.
- **Proposition 2 “Mediation Effect”:** University-based mediations (CDE, incubators, mentorship) act as psychosocial catalysts that reduce the intention–action gap by facilitating implementation intentions and providing cognitive securitization.
- **Proposition 3 “Regulatory Lever”:** In the Algerian context, the institutionalization of entrepreneurship through regulatory frameworks (e.g., Ministerial Decree 1275, “Graduation–Startup”) increases perceived behavioral control by legitimizing venture creation as a formal academic outcome.
- **Proposition 4 “Systemic Misalignment”:** The gap persists when there is a lack of coordination between individual readiness, university

support structures, and macro-economic opportunities, leading to symbolic rather than operational intentions.

4-2. Dynamic Interaction and the Emergence of the Gap

The integrative model assumes that entrepreneurial action emerges from the interaction among these three levels. Individual motivation provides the psychological foundation; university mediation structures activate and organize this potential; and the socio-economic environment determines opportunity realization conditions.

The intention–action gap appears when institutional mediation is insufficient to activate individual resources within a supportive environmental framework. In other words, even strong entrepreneurial attitudes and high self-efficacy may remain latent if:

- Training is poorly adapted,
- Mentorship is generic rather than personalized,
- Incubation is inaccessible or weakly structured,
- Or the external environment generates excessive uncertainty.

Thus, the gap is not solely a psychological deficit but a systemic misalignment between motivational readiness, institutional support, and contextual opportunity structures.

This integrative model provides a multidimensional framework for empirical investigation in Algerian universities. Rather than limiting analysis to intention measurement, future research should assess the quality, coherence, and activation capacity of university mediation mechanisms within their socio-economic environment.

5- Conclusion

The analysis of the intention–action gap in student entrepreneurship demonstrates that entrepreneurial intention, although theoretically central, does not guarantee venture creation. In the Algerian university context, the gap results from a dynamic misalignment between individual psychological readiness, institutional mediation, and socio-economic opportunities. Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), intention remains a necessary precursor of behavior, but as highlighted by Sheeran & Webb (2016), volitional processes, implementation planning, and supportive contextual conditions are required to translate intention into action.

This study identifies three interacting dimensions that determine whether intention evolves into entrepreneurial action: individual dispositions

(attitudes, self-efficacy, achievement motivation), university-based mediations (education, mentorship, incubation, relational capital), and the socio-economic environment (entrepreneurial climate, opportunities, public policies). The gap should therefore be interpreted not as a motivational deficiency but as a systemic misalignment in which psychological resources are insufficiently activated, coordinated, or supported.

In the Algerian case, the challenge lies in designing coherent, flexible, and integrated ecosystems capable of converting declared intentions into sustained entrepreneurial engagement. This requires aligning entrepreneurship education with students' academic constraints, strengthening personalized mentorship, enhancing coordination between CDEs, CATIs, incubators, and external actors, and ensuring that public policies reduce uncertainty.

Ultimately, bridging the intention–action gap requires a shift from an intention-centered paradigm to an activation-centered paradigm. The originality of this article lies in reframing universities as institutional catalysts structuring the volitional phase of entrepreneurship. Unlike existing multi-level models, the proposed framework emphasizes the decisive role of university mediation in transitional ecosystems. The Algerian case illustrated by Ministerial Decree No. 1275 “Graduation–Startup”, the expansion of incubators and CDEs, and the *Label “Project Innovant”* linked to Algeria Venture and the ASF demonstrates how institutional activation can provide regulatory clarity, cognitive securitization, and access to resources.

By formalizing theoretical propositions, this article positions itself as a conceptual foundation for future empirical research, inviting scholars to assess not only the level of entrepreneurial intention but also the quality, coherence, and activation capacity of university ecosystems. Bridging the gap requires coordinated institutional mediation embedded in supportive socio-economic environments, thereby transforming symbolic aspirations into operational entrepreneurial trajectories.

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