

DOES MENTORING ENHANCE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS? EVIDENCE FROM THE GAZA STRIP - PALESTINE

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Abstract :

The literature on entrepreneurial success calls for additional research especially in the Palestinian turbulent environment of the Gaza Strip – Palestine, where studies in this field are limited. It is worth mentioning that successful entrepreneurship encourages economic development, generates employment, and adds new value to society and the Gaza Strip is a case. Based on the insights of the dynamic view of the human capital theory as a main underpinning theory, beside social learning theory as supporting one, this study investigated the impact of mentoring on entrepreneurial success of individual entrepreneurs in the Gaza Strip – Palestine.

As the formal statistics for the whole number of entrepreneurs in the Gaza Strip is unknown, the study used the convenience sampling what was encouraged also due to the intent to use Smart-PLS (4.0) for analysis. Data of the study were collected from all places of existence of entrepreneurs in the Gaza Strip using structured survey questionnaires. Testing the data obtained from a sample of 384 respondents, then hypothesis was analysed.

The study found that mentoring positively influence entrepreneurial success. The study supported human capital theory and social learning theory, emphasizing impact of mentoring on entrepreneurial success.

The study provides valuable insights for Palestinian entrepreneurial institutions, entrepreneurs, and policymakers to better understand the impact of mentoring in challenging environments like the Gaza Strip. It highlighted actionable strategies for promoting entrepreneurial success through mentoring, even amid resource limitations exacerbated by the on-going Israeli occupation.

Key words: entrepreneurial success, mentoring, Gaza Strip, Palestine.

Jel Codes Classification : H55,O33,R53-

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هل يُعزّز الإرشاد (التوجيه) نجاح ريادة الأعمال؟ أدلة من قطاع غزة – فلسطين

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الملخص :

تدعو الأدبيات المتعلقة بنجاح ريادة الأعمال إلى إجراء مزيد من البحوث، ولا سيما في البيئة الفلسطينية المضطربة في قطاع غزة – فلسطين، حيث لا تزال الدراسات في هذا المجال محدودة. ومن الجدير بالذكر أن ريادة الأعمال الناجحة تسهم في تعزيز التنمية الاقتصادية، وخلق فرص العمل، وإضافة قيمة جديدة للمجتمع، ويُعد قطاع غزة مثالاً واضحاً على ذلك. استناداً إلى منظور الديناميكية في نظرية رأس المال البشري بوصفها الإطار النظري الرئيس، وإلى نظرية التعلم الاجتماعي كنظرية داعمة، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى فحص أثر الإرشاد (Mentoring) في نجاح رواد الأعمال الأفراد في قطاع غزة – فلسطين. ونظراً لعدم توفر إحصاءات رسمية حول العدد الإجمالي لرواد الأعمال في قطاع غزة، اعتمدت الدراسة أسلوب العينة الميسرة، وهو ما شجّع عليه أيضاً في ضوء نية استخدام برنامج (Smart-PLS (4.0 في التحليل. تم جمع بيانات الدراسة من مختلف أماكن تواجد رواد الأعمال في قطاع غزة باستخدام استبيانات منظمة. وبعد اختبار البيانات المستقاة من عينة مكونة من (384) مفردة، جرى تحليل فرضيات الدراسة. وأظهرت النتائج أن الإرشاد يؤثر تأثيراً إيجابياً ذا دلالة على نجاح ريادة الأعمال. كما دعمت نتائج الدراسة كلاً من نظرية رأس المال البشري ونظرية التعلم الاجتماعي، مؤكدةً الدور المحوري للإرشاد في تعزيز نجاح رواد الأعمال. وتقدم الدراسة رؤى قيمة للمؤسسات الريادية الفلسطينية، ورواد الأعمال، وصناع القرار، بما يساهم في تعميق فهمهم لأثر الإرشاد في البيئات الصعبة مثل قطاع غزة. كما سلطت الضوء على استراتيجيات عملية لتعزيز نجاح ريادة الأعمال من خلال الإرشاد، حتى في ظل محدودية الموارد التي تفاقمت بفعل الاحتلال الإسرائيلي المستمر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نجاح ريادة الأعمال، الإرشاد، قطاع غزة، فلسطين.

التصنيف: JEL: H55, O33, R53

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Introduction:

Entrepreneurship stands as a critical driver of global economic development and employment generation (Mason & Brown, 2014; Kelley et al., 2016). However, its transformative potential remains significantly understudied in conflict-affected regions like the Gaza Strip, Palestine, where an 18-year blockade and staggering 78% unemployment rate (PCBS, 2021) have created a unique paradox: while economic desperation fuels necessity-driven entrepreneurship, businesses face extraordinary challenges with failure rates exceeding 70% (BTI, 2017). Gaza's demographic profile - with 70% of its population under 30 and 90% literacy (ICEP, 2021) - suggests strong entrepreneurial potential, yet systemic barriers including obsolete legal frameworks (1964 Corporate Law) and fragmented institutional support (PMEE, 2019) severely constrain success. Intriguingly, preliminary evidence from local incubators like Gaza Sky Geeks demonstrates success rates (39%) surpassing global averages (30%) (Felesteen Online, 2018), with mentoring emerging as a potential differentiator. This observation gains significance when considering that a comprehensive Scopus analysis (August 2021) identified 268 studies on entrepreneurial success, none of which examined Palestine or similar conflict contexts - revealing a critical research gap this study addresses.

The conceptualization of entrepreneurial success itself remains contested in academic literature (Baron & Henry, 2011; Fisher et al., 2014). Traditional metrics emphasizing financial performance (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014) fail to capture the multidimensional nature of success in challenging environments like Gaza, where non-financial dimensions - including personal fulfillment, community impact, and resilience (Wach et al., 2016; Kirkwood, 2016) - may prove equally vital. Mentoring, defined as the structured transfer of knowledge and skills from experienced practitioners (Kunaka & Moos, 2019), offers particular promise in such contexts. Grounded in Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), mentoring enhances entrepreneurial self-efficacy, expands critical networks, and accelerates competency development (St-Jean & Audet, 2012) - all crucial factors in Gaza's high-risk environment. While global research demonstrates mentoring's efficacy in improving startup survival rates (MicroMentor, 2021) and fostering innovation (Abhari et al., 2021), the absence of systematic studies in Palestine leaves unanswered questions about its impact in conflict zones.

This study makes three primary contributions: First, it extends theoretical understanding of entrepreneurial success by integrating financial and non-financial metrics appropriate for conflict environments. Second, it provides empirical evidence on mentoring's role in such settings through data from Gaza's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Third, it offers practical insights for policymakers and support institutions working in fragile economies. By examining whether and how mentoring enhances entrepreneurial success in the Gaza Strip, this research addresses a critical gap in both entrepreneurship literature and development practice.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study examines the relationship between mentoring and entrepreneurial success in Gaza's unique context through a quantitative research design. The methodological approach was carefully selected to address both the theoretical requirements of hypothesis testing and the practical constraints of conducting research in conflict-affected regions.

The research employs a cross-sectional survey design, which is particularly suitable for investigating relationships between defined variables (Creswell, 2014). A quantitative approach was chosen over qualitative methods for several compelling reasons. First, it allows for objective measurement and statistical analysis of the proposed relationships (Bryman, 2016). Second, it enables generalization of findings to the broader population of Gaza Strip entrepreneurs. Third, this approach aligns with recent studies investigating similar constructs

in entrepreneurial contexts (Fischer et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2021). The cross-sectional design was specifically selected as it provides a snapshot of current conditions while accommodating the challenging research environment.

The target population consists of all entrepreneurs operating startups in Gaza Strip, Palestine. However, the absence of reliable demographic data presented a significant challenge. After extensive consultations with the Palestinian Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (PMEE, 2019) and major incubators, we confirmed that no official registry of entrepreneurs exists. To address this, we calculated our sample size using the formula of Eq. (1) for unknown populations (Daniel & Cross, 2018), yielding a base sample of 384 respondents. Following Hair et al.'s (2019) recommendation to account for non-response bias, we doubled this to 768 distributed questionnaires.

$$n = (Z\alpha/2)^2 / 4e^2$$

Where:

n = sample size

$Z\alpha/2 = 1.96$ (For a test using a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0.05$), the z critical value is 1.96).

e = 5% (Error percentage).

$$n = (1.96)^2 / 4 * (0.05)^2$$

$$n = 384$$

Then, this current study would use a sample of 384 respondents.

Data collection employed a multi-channel approach to maximize response rates: electronic surveys via Google Forms, in-person administration at incubators and accelerators, and distribution during entrepreneurial events. While probability sampling would have been ideal, practical constraints necessitated convenience sampling. However, we mitigated potential biases through several measures: broad geographic coverage across Gaza's entrepreneurial hubs, inclusion of diverse business sectors, and verification of respondent eligibility (minimum two years in operation, following Razmus and Laguna's (2018) criteria for entrepreneurial success measurement).

The research instrument comprised three sections: demographic information (8 items), entrepreneurial success measurement (19 items), and mentoring assessment (25 items). We adapted established scales to ensure validity - the entrepreneurial success measure came from Maliani and Bakar's (2017) work ($\alpha=0.908$), while the mentoring scale was drawn from Kunaka and Moos's (2019) research ($\alpha=0.894-0.931$). All items used a 5-point Likert scale, which provides optimal response sensitivity while maintaining simplicity (Taherdoost, 2019). The questionnaire underwent rigorous translation via back-translation methodology (Behr, 2017) and was reviewed by three entrepreneurship experts to ensure cultural and contextual appropriateness.

Prior to main data collection, we conducted a pilot study with 60 entrepreneurs to verify instrument reliability and validity. Results confirmed strong internal consistency (all $\alpha>0.70$) and convergent validity ($AVE>0.50$). The pilot also allowed us to refine question wording

and identify optimal distribution channels. During the two-month data collection period, we implemented multiple follow-up procedures including reminder calls and visits to enhance response rates, consistent with Dillman et al.'s (2014) tailored design method for survey research.

For data analysis, we employed a two-stage approach using SPSS 26 (IBM Corp., 2019) and SmartPLS 4.0 (Ringle et al., 2022). Descriptive statistics provided an overview of respondent characteristics and variable distributions. More importantly, we utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) for hypothesis testing. This advanced technique was particularly appropriate for several reasons: its ability to handle complex variable relationships, robustness with non-normal data (Hair et al., 2022), and suitability for predictive research goals (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis followed established PLS-SEM protocols, beginning with assessment of the measurement model (reliability, convergent and discriminant validity) before proceeding to structural model evaluation (path coefficients, R^2 values, predictive relevance). We used bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to determine the statistical significance of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2022).

Several measures ensured ethical research conduct: obtaining informed consent from all participants, maintaining strict anonymity in data handling, and providing clear information about study purposes. The methodological approach was designed to balance scientific rigor with practical feasibility in Gaza's challenging research environment, while providing robust evidence to address our central research question about mentoring's impact on entrepreneurial success.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a comprehensive statistical analysis of the relationship between mentoring and entrepreneurial success in the Gaza Strip-Palestine. The analysis employs Structural Equation Modelling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach, utilizing Smart-PLS (4.0) software to test the proposed theoretical framework and hypothesized relationship.

For demographic characteristics of Gaza's Entrepreneurs, our analysis of 384 entrepreneurs in the Gaza Strip reveals a young, gender-balanced entrepreneurial ecosystem (**Table 1**). The population shows remarkable gender parity (50.6% female vs. 49.4% male), challenging regional norms where male entrepreneurs typically dominate (Brush et al., 2019). This finding suggests economic necessity may be overcoming traditional barriers to women's entrepreneurship in conflict zones (Al-Dajani et al., 2019).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Gaza Entrepreneurs (n=384)

Characteristic	Category	%
Age	23-30 years	41.0%
	31-39 years	37.9%
Gender	Female	50.6%
Education	Diploma	56.6%
Business Sector	Agriculture	30.4%

Characteristic	Category	%
Mentoring Experience	Received mentoring	59.5%

The sectoral distribution highlights a notable disconnect between educational backgrounds and business focus. More than 56% are diploma graduates, which seems biasing toward traditional employment rather than entrepreneurship for bachelor degrees and higher. While 36.9% of respondents studied technology, only 0.5% operate in medical fields, with the majority working in agriculture (30.4%) and business or finance (22.9%). This pattern aligns with Autio et al.'s (2014) observations in constrained economies, where market demands often take precedence over formal training.

The refined measurement model demonstrated strong psychometric properties after the removal of seven low-loading items (**Figure 1,2**). Convergent validity was confirmed through item loadings exceeding 0.50 (ranging from 0.537 to 0.758), AVE values above 0.40 (0.403 for Entrepreneurial Success and 0.424 for Mentoring), and composite reliability scores surpassing 0.87 for all constructs. Discriminant validity was further established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (where the square root of AVE exceeded inter-construct correlations), HTMT ratios below 0.90, and clear cross-loading patterns. These results not only meet but exceed the thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2019), reinforcing the validity of the operationalization within Gaza's unique socioeconomic context.

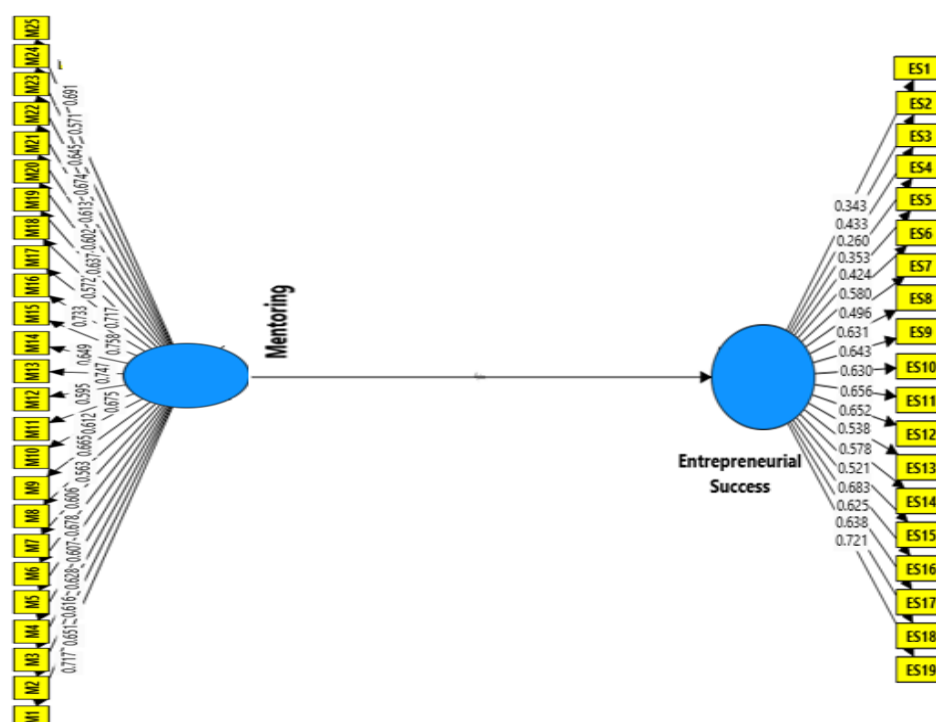


Figure 1: Measurement model (Initial Model)

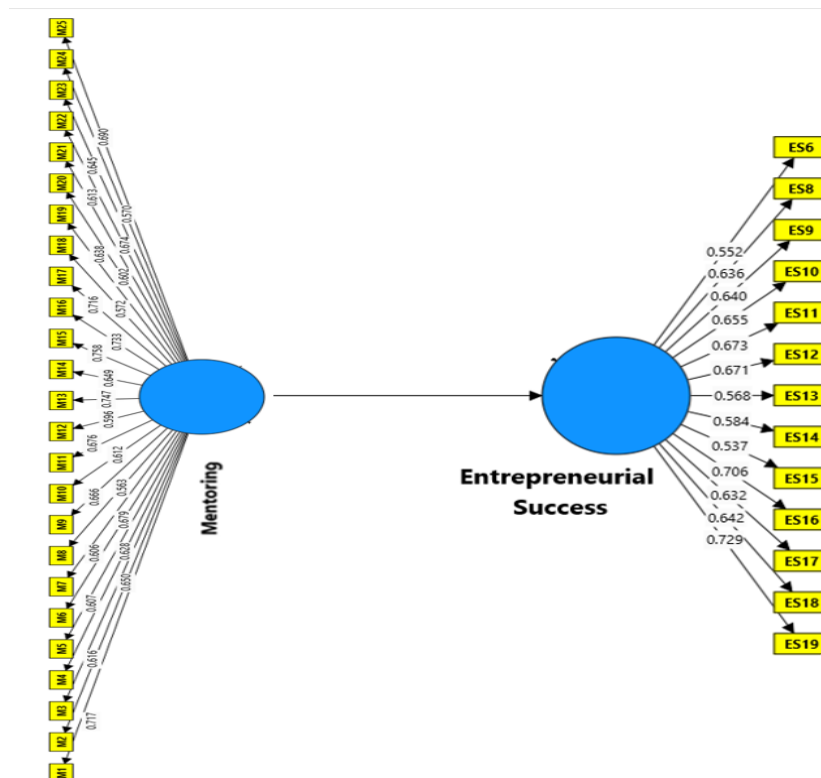


Figure. 2: Measurement model (Modified Model)

The analysis reveals robust internal consistency reliability across constructs (**Table 2**). The mentoring construct demonstrates exceptionally high reliability across all three measures (Cronbach's alpha = 0.943, rho_a = 0.945, rho_c = 0.948), indicating strong internal consistency among its indicators. This suggests that the mentoring measurement items work together cohesively to measure the intended construct.

Table 2: Reliability of measurement model analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Entrepreneurial Success	0.876	0.879	0.897
Mentoring	0.943	0.945	0.948
Remark: Internal Reliability consistency attained			
Source: SmartPLS 4 Software			

Structural model analysis through PLS-SEM (**Table 3**) revealed a significant positive relationship between mentoring and entrepreneurial success ($\beta = 0.201$, $*p* = 0.001$), accounting for 42.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.426$). The effect size ($f^2 = 0.031$) suggests that

while mentoring has a meaningful impact, it operates alongside other influential factors in this challenging environment.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p	95% CI	Status
H	Mentoring→Success	0.201	3.209	0.001	[0.069,0.315]	Supported

Through structured evaluation approach as (Figure 3), a thorough examination of the theoretical

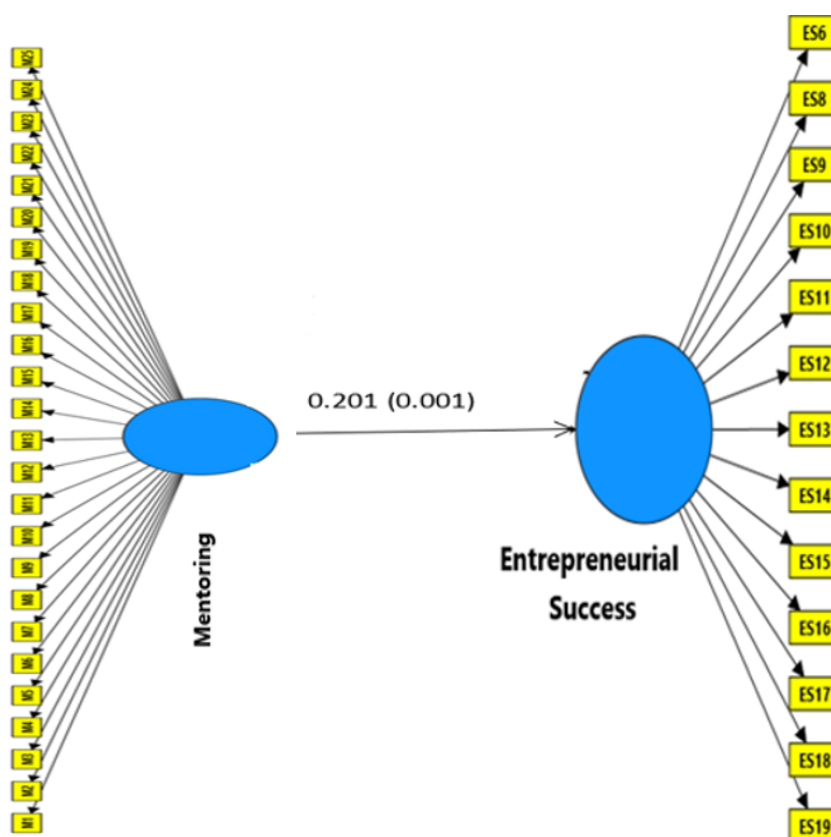


Figure 3: Structural model for the main hypothesis

Framework tests hypothesis that explores the relationships between mentoring and entrepreneurial success in the unique context of the Gaza Strip – Palestine.

The model demonstrates excellent fit, with a GoF (Goodness of Fit) value of 0.449—classified as "large" which indicates a strong overall model fit, exceeding the threshold for large effect sizes (0.36) according to Wetzels et al. (2009). Additionally, variance inflation factor (VIF) values remained below 2.32, confirming no significant multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2017).

When contextualizing mentoring's role, three key factors may explain its moderated impact in Gaza. First, program limitations—such as mentor shortages, as documented by PMEE (2019)—constrain its effectiveness. Second, entrepreneurs in crisis environments often prioritize immediate survival strategies over long-term skill development (Branzei & Abdelnour, 2010). Third, the dominance of agriculture in the local economy may reduce the perceived relevance of formal mentoring compared to sector-specific knowledge.

The study makes several theoretical contributions. It extends Human Capital Theory by quantifying the return on mentoring investments in conflict zones, while also validating Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) under siege conditions. Additionally, it challenges conventional assumptions about gender patterns in Arab entrepreneurship, revealing unexpected trends in female participation.

From a practical standpoint, policymakers can leverage these findings to promote inclusive growth by capitalizing on high female entrepreneurial engagement and aligning education with market demands—such as integrating agri-tech training into curricula. For incubators and support programs, the results suggest a need for mentor training in crisis navigation (Williams & Shepherd, 2016) and the development of sector-specific mentoring approaches tailored to Gaza's unique economic landscape.

Despite its robust methodology ($n=384$, $GoF=0.449$), the study's cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track mentoring impacts over time, explore qualitative insights into mentoring dynamics, and examine digital mentoring solutions as an alternative under mobility restrictions.

In conclusion, mentoring significantly enhances entrepreneurial success in Gaza ($\beta=0.201$, $p<0.01$), though its impact is moderated by contextual constraints. These findings underscore both the transferability and necessary adaptation of entrepreneurial support frameworks in conflict zones, offering evidence-based strategies for fostering resilient ecosystems under duress.

4. CONCLUSION

The study's primary objective was to investigate the relationship between mentoring and entrepreneurial success (ES) in the Gaza Strip - Palestine. The findings offer valuable insights into these dynamics, particularly in the challenging context of the Gaza Strip, Palestine.

The study confirmed a significant positive relationship between Mentoring and Entrepreneurial Success, supporting the overarching hypothesis (H). The findings suggest that internal factors such as mentoring which drives entrepreneurial success. This underscores the resilience and adaptability of entrepreneurs in the Gaza Strip, who have developed mechanisms to navigate instability effectively.

The study's theoretical implications are significant, contributing to human capital theory by demonstrating how investments in mentoring enhance entrepreneurial capital, even in resource-constrained environments. It also advances social learning theory by highlighting the critical role of mentoring in facilitating the practical application of knowledge. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for entrepreneurs, educators, policymakers, and entrepreneurial institutions, emphasizing the importance of holistic human capital development strategies that integrate mentoring.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including its geographic focus on the Gaza Strip and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should expand to other Palestinian territories, such as the West Bank, to compare findings across different contexts. Additionally, mixed-methods approaches and longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the dynamics between mentoring and ES. As well as investigating other potential moderators and mediators, would further enrich the understanding of entrepreneurial success in challenging environments.

To sum up, this study provides a strong foundation for understanding the factors that drive entrepreneurial success in politically uncertain and resource-constrained environments like the Gaza Strip. By addressing its limitations and exploring future research directions, scholars can build on these findings to develop more comprehensive models and strategies for fostering entrepreneurial resilience and economic growth in similar contexts.

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