

University Entrepreneurship Support and Students' Entrepreneurial Capability: The Role of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy in a China-Mongolia

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Abstract: Under the background of ongoing global advances in innovation and entrepreneurship education, support for university students' entrepreneurship has become a crucial force in fostering their entrepreneurial capabilities. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy serves as a key cognitive variable linking external university-based entrepreneurial support with the internal development of entrepreneurial skills. This study takes university students from China and Mongolia as research subjects and employs comparative analysis to explore differences in the entrepreneurial environments of the two countries, specifically variations in national- and institutional-level support for student entrepreneurship, disparities in cultivating entrepreneurial competencies, and the core mechanisms through which entrepreneurial self-efficacy operates. The findings indicate that differing educational systems and market development contexts between China and Mongolia have shaped distinct higher education models for nurturing students' innovative spirit and implementing entrepreneurial support. These differences result in varied approaches to supporting student entrepreneurship, significantly influencing the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy among students in both countries and, consequently, leading to multidimensional gaps in the cultivation of entrepreneurial abilities and related resources. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy effectively transforms and utilizes university entrepreneurial resources, thereby enhancing students' entrepreneurial capabilities, though its impact varies across the educational environments of the two countries. Based on the strengths and weaknesses of each country's educational practices, this study proposes optimization strategies, offering valuable insights for cross-border entrepreneurship education.

Keywords: University entrepreneurship support; Students' entrepreneurial competence; Entrepreneurial self-efficacy; China-Mongolia comparison; Entrepreneurship education

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial and innovative capabilities are essential qualities for youth in the new era, and the university-

based entrepreneurial support environment system serves as a primary pathway to cultivate students' entrepreneurial literacy and practical skills. Individual entrepreneurial ability results from the combined influence of external educational conditions and internal cognitive factors, with entrepreneurial self-efficacy playing a crucial role in activating university entrepreneurial resources and serving as a key internal factor in transforming entrepreneurial education. China and Mongolia are geographically close, engage in frequent economic and trade interactions, and each has distinctive characteristics in higher education entrepreneurship programs, leading to certain national differences in students' entrepreneurial attitudes and overall competencies. Most existing research adopts a single-country perspective, lacks comparative analysis, and overlooks the mediating role of self-cognition. Therefore, this study systematically examines the internal logic among these three elements from a China-Mongolia comparative standpoint and explores the mechanism of self-efficacy, providing insights for enhancing entrepreneurial education initiatives in both countries.

2. Differences in the entrepreneurship support systems between Chinese and Mongolian universities

2.1. Entrepreneurship support in Chinese Universities: Systematic, institutionalized, and scalable

China's higher education institutions have developed a comprehensive and systematic model for entrepreneurship education, guided by institutional frameworks, covering holistic development, and involving multiple stakeholders. Entrepreneurship and innovation education has been integrated into the national higher education talent cultivation and institutional evaluation systems, establishing a standardized, well-structured, and seamlessly connected talent development framework. A tiered and categorized curriculum approach is implemented, integrating innovation throughout the entire process of professional training through interdisciplinary integration and advanced practical training, building upon general education. Campus cultural activities such as innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, seminars, and lectures help foster a vibrant entrepreneurial atmosphere among students ^[1]. In terms of practical resources, universities have established infrastructure including maker spaces and incubation bases, strengthened collaboration with enterprises and local governments, and effectively leveraged social resources from relevant industries and financial institutions to support student entrepreneurship. These efforts provide comprehensive services in project development, entrepreneurial training, and technology transfer, offering standardized and sustainable talent development to meet the diverse needs of students' entrepreneurial growth.

2.2. Entrepreneurship support in Mongolian universities: Small-scale, market-oriented, and specialized

Entrepreneurship education in Mongolian universities has a relatively short history, and a standardized, unified system has yet to be established. Overall, it exhibits characteristics of being lightweight, market-driven, and localized. Entrepreneurship programs at various institutions mainly consist of elective courses, training sessions, and student clubs, with no mandatory requirements, focusing primarily on nurturing students who are interested in starting businesses. Course content integrates local specialties such as animal husbandry, border trade, and tourism. Emphasis is placed on practical technical training, while systematic theoretical learning remains limited. Local entrepreneurs also participate as instructors. The available facilities and equipment for entrepreneurship are scarce, and there is no dedicated policy support or sufficient resources. There are

no large-scale incubation centers; instead, only basic consulting and fundamental services are provided to students. This approach enables lightweight entrepreneurship development tailored to the local market, demonstrating strong adaptability. However, it suffers from limitations including narrow educational coverage, insufficient support, and an incomplete ecosystem ^[2].

3. Differences in entrepreneurial competence and self-efficacy development between Chinese and Mongolian students

3.1. Basic differences in students' entrepreneurial competence

Due to differences in entrepreneurial development models, educational philosophies, and market environments between universities in China and Mongolia, there are notable disparities in the entrepreneurial capabilities of students from both countries. Chinese university students, nurtured under a systematic entrepreneurial education framework, have developed a solid theoretical foundation, strong innovative thinking, and effective resource integration skills. Long-term, structured entrepreneurship education enables them to master comprehensive knowledge of entrepreneurial theory, market analysis, and project management. They can leverage their academic expertise to develop innovative ventures, demonstrating strong innovation capacity, breakthrough potential, and scalability. Moreover, extensive campus-based entrepreneurial competitions and practical training enhance their teamwork, coordination, and ability to quickly connect with diverse resources ^[3].

Under localized and hands-on entrepreneurial training, Mongolian students exhibit strong adaptability, practical skills, and resilience. Their entrepreneurial education is market-oriented, enabling local students to promptly identify business opportunities rooted in regional economic characteristics and international trade. They excel at launching small-scale and locally focused ventures, displaying high execution efficiency. Additionally, Mongolian student entrepreneurs tend to be more open-minded and flexible, capable of swiftly adapting to dynamic market conditions and responding effectively to unexpected challenges. However, due to the lack of systematic education, most students possess limited theoretical knowledge in entrepreneurship, struggle with innovation and research and development, and lack sufficient resource integration skills. As a result, their ventures often suffer from homogenization and face significant limitations in long-term growth and large-scale expansion ^[4].

3.2. Trait differences in students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy

The differences in entrepreneurial support systems directly shape distinct structures of entrepreneurial self-efficacy among students in different countries. In China, university students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy exhibits structural differentiation. Systematic university-based entrepreneurship support enables students to have high self-efficacy regarding standardized entrepreneurial behaviors, such as formalized learning of entrepreneurial knowledge, innovation projects, and resource integration, and fosters confidence in structured, systematic entrepreneurial management. However, routine campus entrepreneurship practices are simulated scenarios, detached from real market risks; when facing actual market failures, setbacks, and unknown situations, their self-efficacy significantly declines, resulting in a pattern characterized by theoretical confidence but insufficient practical resilience. In contrast, Mongolia's long-term, reality-oriented entrepreneurship education equips students with the ability to adapt to uncertain market environments and setbacks, enabling them to maintain stable self-efficacy in implementing, operating small-scale entrepreneurial ventures, and managing various risks.

4. Core of the comparative study on entrepreneurial self-efficacy between China and Mongolia

4.1. Mediating function: Transformation from exogenous support to endogenous entrepreneurial capability

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy acts as a mediator through which university entrepreneurial support influences students' entrepreneurial capabilities. The promotion of college students' entrepreneurial development by institutional support is fully mediated by entrepreneurial self-efficacy, with significant cross-country differences observed. Under China's higher education system, well-established and systematic entrepreneurial support mechanisms continuously deepen students' theoretical knowledge in entrepreneurship, strengthen their entrepreneurial awareness, broaden their entrepreneurial perspectives, and consistently enhance their self-efficacy within standardized entrepreneurial environments. Empowered by increased self-efficacy, students actively participate in various innovation and entrepreneurship training programs, competitions, and project development activities, thereby continuously improving their innovative thinking, resource integration, and project planning abilities ^[5].

Under the current university-based entrepreneurship development system in Mongolia, light-weighted and market-oriented support fails to provide students with comprehensive theoretical foundations or sufficient guarantees. Instead, it focuses on precisely shaping entrepreneurial self-efficacy based on students' real-life contexts. This market-driven self-awareness encourages students to actively engage in local entrepreneurial practices, enabling them to quickly develop capabilities in analysis, decision-making, execution, implementation, and risk management, effectively transforming limited entrepreneurial resources into practical competencies. However, constrained by insufficient self-efficacy, universities are unable to effectively foster innovation, scaling, and operational expansion among students.

4.2. Explanatory role: Explaining differences in entrepreneurial development between the two countries

Differences in the structure of entrepreneurial self-efficacy are the most important internal factor explaining the distinct characteristics and developmental gaps in entrepreneurial competence between Chinese and Mongolian students. External differences in university-level entrepreneurial support between the two countries manifest as internal disparities in self-efficacy, thereby shaping divergent patterns in entrepreneurial development.

The entrepreneurial traits of Chinese students, strong theoretical foundation, high innovation potential, but weak practical execution, are actually reflections of an imbalanced self-efficacy structure. Robust external support fosters high self-efficacy among Chinese students in theoretical and innovative contexts, accelerating the development of corresponding entrepreneurial competencies. However, low self-efficacy in real-world market scenarios results in weak practical implementation skills, creating structural shortcomings in overall ability development.

Similarly, the entrepreneurial traits of Mongolian students, strong practical capabilities but limited innovation capacity, also stem from limitations in self-efficacy. High self-efficacy driven by hands-on market experience strengthens their operational skills, yet low self-efficacy in advanced innovation and large-scale operations hinders further innovation and long-term sustainability of their ventures.

4.3. Regulatory and optimization role: Guiding the pathways for optimizing entrepreneurship education in both countries

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy serves not only as a mediating and explanatory variable for differences, but also as a key moderating factor in optimizing the entrepreneurial education systems of universities in China and Mongolia, precisely targeting the weaknesses in both countries' entrepreneurial support frameworks. For China, students' weak practical self-efficacy indicates that the current entrepreneurial support system overemphasizes theory while neglecting practice, prioritizes high-level concepts at the expense of implementation. Future educational improvements should focus on real-world market contexts, strengthen practice-oriented entrepreneurial training, address students' shortcomings in practical capability development, and promote integrated growth in both theoretical knowledge and hands-on skills. In Mongolia, the lack of self-efficacy among students in advanced entrepreneurship highlights a fragmented support system, insufficient theoretical foundations, and a scarcity of high-end entrepreneurial resources.

5. Improving entrepreneurship education measures in Chinese and Mongolian higher education institutions based on comparative analysis

5.1. Chinese universities: Enhancing practical empowerment and balancing self-efficacy structure

Leveraging existing entrepreneurial support systems, we aim to address the shortcomings in practical education and rebuild students' self-efficacy structures in entrepreneurship, thereby achieving a more balanced development of their entrepreneurial capabilities. First, promote the transformation of entrepreneurial education scenarios by reducing simulation-based and theoretical training, and instead encouraging school-enterprise collaborations for real-world project practices. Introduce market-driven entrepreneurial projects into campuses, guiding students to engage in actual project operations, market expansion, risk management, and other hands-on activities, thus strengthening their self-efficacy in real-market environments. Second, strengthen entrepreneurial competitions and practical training by shifting focus away from overly utilitarian contests toward projects that emphasize implementation and long-term sustainability. Guide students to enhance their resilience and confidence through overcoming setbacks in entrepreneurship. Provide targeted psychological counseling to transform students' theoretical perceptions of entrepreneurship, cultivate pragmatic entrepreneurial mindsets, and achieve a harmonious integration between theoretical innovation self-efficacy and operational entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

5.2. Higher education institutions in Mongolia: Strengthening system development and expanding the boundaries of entrepreneurial capacity

Mongolian universities should fully leverage their strengths in practical, locally grounded teaching to address shortcomings in systematic and foundational entrepreneurship education, broaden students' sense of self-efficacy, and overcome constraints limiting student development. First, building upon a fundamental innovation and entrepreneurship curriculum framework, institutions should integrate localized entrepreneurial practices with universal entrepreneurial knowledge, refine tiered course content, strengthen foundational theoretical education in entrepreneurship, and cultivate students' confidence and understanding of innovative research, development, and large-scale resource integration. Second, universities should enhance the development of entrepreneurial resources and establish standardized incubation environments for

entrepreneurial practice, while effectively utilizing high-quality entrepreneurial resources from outside regions to support student-led innovative projects, thereby broadening students' entrepreneurial horizons. Finally, while preserving existing models of entrepreneurship education, institutions should improve pedagogical approaches by expanding training in innovative entrepreneurial capabilities, encouraging students to move beyond imitative thinking patterns, promoting project upgrades, and enhancing the integration of innovation and practical execution skills among university students.

5.3. China-Mongolia universities: Deepening cross-border cooperation to establish a complementary talent development mechanism

Leveraging their geographical and economic advantages, universities in China and Mongolia are further deepening cross-border collaboration in innovation and entrepreneurship education, enabling mutual sharing of strengths and enhancing students' entrepreneurial self-efficacy and capabilities. Chinese universities provide Mongolian institutions with support in established curricula, practical training bases, and innovative talent development models, helping to promote and improve the entrepreneurial support system for Mongolian students and addressing the issue of insufficient self-efficacy in student innovation and entrepreneurship. In return, Mongolian universities can offer localized cross-border entrepreneurial environments, facilitating Chinese students' research and practical activities in Sino-Mongolian cross-border trade and specialized industries, thereby strengthening their capacity and confidence in international entrepreneurship. Through coordinated efforts, both sides will establish an integrated entrepreneurial talent development system that emphasizes both theory and practice, as well as local and cross-border integration, comprehensively enhancing the overall entrepreneurial competence of students from both countries.

6. Conclusion

The university student entrepreneurship support system is a crucial external condition for cultivating entrepreneurial capabilities among students, while entrepreneurial self-efficacy is the internal key that activates, transforms, and elevates the educational value of these abilities. Differing educational market environments in China and Mongolia have shaped distinct models of student entrepreneurship support, which in turn influence the structural dimensions of entrepreneurial self-efficacy among students, ultimately resulting in unique characteristics and shortcomings in their entrepreneurial competencies. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy functions as a mediating conduit, explaining differences and guiding direction between these factors, thus playing an irreplaceable bridging role. Chinese and Mongolian universities should leverage their respective strengths and address weaknesses by focusing on the core aspect of structural entrepreneurial self-efficacy, thereby improving their entrepreneurship support systems in targeted ways to enhance students' entrepreneurial abilities and compensate for existing deficiencies. At the same time, through cross-border collaboration, they can learn from each other, complement strengths, and jointly advance innovation and entrepreneurship education, continuously nurturing outstanding young entrepreneurs who meet the demands of new-era development—capable of engaging in cross-border economic activities and responding to local industrial needs.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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