



The Impact of Entrepreneurial Climate on the Entrepreneurial Intention of Physical Education Students: The Mediating Role of Creative Thinking

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine the effect of the entrepreneurial climate on the entrepreneurial intentions of students enrolled in physical education colleges in Yazd Province, Iran, with creative thinking as a mediating variable.

Methodology: This study employed path analysis and correlational methods. The statistical population comprised 314 male and female students from Yazd Province, Iran, and physical education schools. Based on Morgan's table, a sample of 172 students was selected, and their completed questionnaires were included in the analysis. Data were collected using three instruments: Kang et al.'s (2019) Entrepreneurial Climate Questionnaire, Liñán et al.'s (2011) Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire, and Moghimian and Amini's (2009) Creative Thinking Questionnaire. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26 and Smart PLS version 3, with the significance level set at $\alpha = .05$.

Findings: The findings of this study indicate that creative thinking serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial intention among students attending physical education colleges in Yazd, with a path coefficient of 2.907. The entrepreneurial climate demonstrated a significant direct effect on students' entrepreneurial intention at the $\alpha = .05$ level, accounting for 16.7% of the variance. Creative thinking also significantly impacted entrepreneurial intention ($\alpha = .05$), contributing 12.0% to the explained variance. Additionally, the entrepreneurial climate significantly and directly influenced students' creative thinking at the $\alpha = .05$ level, with an effect size of 10.7%.

Originality: This study explores whether individuals operating within an entrepreneurial environment can develop creative capacities and choose to pursue entrepreneurship. Specifically, it examines the relationship between the entrepreneurial climate, innovative thinking, and entrepreneurial intention.

Keywords

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1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely renowned as a key driver of economic growth and a central factor in addressing current global financial challenges (Soluk et al., 2021). Contrary to the past, contemporary societies are experiencing rapid and exponential changes in their needs. One of the most pressing concerns among national policymakers is the growing issue of unemployment, compounded by inadequate training and limited opportunities for individuals to acquire relevant skills, which is of significant importance (Bakan et al., 2020). In today's dynamic world, the evolving role of government, organizations, and individuals underscores the need for a workforce equipped with entrepreneurial skills. Such capabilities empower individuals to navigate modern challenges more effectively. Moreover, unemployed individuals with strong skills can benefit from adopting innovative approaches to problem-solving, demonstrating adaptability, fostering self-reliance, and enhancing creativity through entrepreneurship. A society enriched with diverse skills and continuous learning will likely experience broader economic and social benefits (Henry et al., 2003).

With growing recognition of the role and impact of entrepreneurship on economic growth and development, it is increasingly regarded as a critical contributor to national well-being in developed and developing nations (Atmojo et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship is often viewed as a viable means to navigate and address the complexities of global change (Ratten & Jones, 2021). However, it should be noted that becoming an entrepreneur should be seen as a long-term process in life that should begin in childhood. It is believed that entrepreneurship education provides students with an understanding of entrepreneurial concepts, educates them, and motivates them to engage in entrepreneurial activities in the future (Mani, 2015). Therefore, considering the essential role of entrepreneurship in education, developing and implementing a comprehensive and practical model for entrepreneurial learning is imperative.

Entrepreneurship is critical to economic growth and national development, emphasizing the importance of integrating entrepreneurial education into formal education systems (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011). Various environmental factors—including societal influences, family dynamics, and educational institutions—play a significant role in fostering creativity, enabling individuals to realize and apply their innovative potential. However, research suggests that current environmental conditions are unfavorable for entrepreneurial activity. For example, a World Bank report ranks Iran 137th out of 183 countries in terms of ease of business, reflecting an adverse business environment. This low ranking is attributed mainly to the country's bureaucratic structure, characterized by complex laws, rigid regulations, and cumbersome administrative procedures (Karimi et al., 2013).

Integrating entrepreneurship into the education system, including its various sub-systems, such as physical education and training schools, is increasingly considered essential. Embedding entrepreneurship within educational contexts enables the practical identification and utilization of both internal and external resources and fosters new opportunities for teaching and learning. However, the growth of entrepreneurial initiatives

is significantly impeded by inadequate infrastructure, limited access to appropriate entrepreneurial spaces, and insufficient technological resources (Karimi et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the organizational climate—individuals' perceptions of their work and life environment—plays a crucial role in influencing behavior. Hoy & Hannum (1997) a school's organizational climate comprises internal characteristics that distinguish it from other institutions and directly impact the behavior of its members. One of the most critical elements influencing student creativity is the academic climate. However, fostering creativity in the educational environment is important in our contemporary and rapidly changing society. Educational institutions need help to move beyond traditional approaches and effectively assess creativity (Kalogeratos et al., 2023). Education prepares students for their careers by equipping them with essential creative and problem-solving skills (Ayyildiz & Yilmaz, 2021).

Creative thinking is a cognitive process that addresses complex, unresolved problems or generates innovative solutions to enduring challenges, often serving as a precursor to innovation. In an era marked by rapid advancements in knowledge, technology, and information dissemination, societies need to prioritize the development of skills that align with scientific and technological progress. Diverse perspectives contribute to varied approaches and actions, making creative thinking a critical element in innovation. Scholars emphasize the influential role of families, academic institutions, and educators in nurturing creative thinking from an early onset (Sternberg, 2003).

Intentions are central to the decision-making process, particularly within entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial intention is an individual's conscious commitment to entrepreneurial activities (Aho, 2020). Establishing a new venture typically begins with forming such intentions, which precede identifying specific business opportunities (Krueger, 2007). Entrepreneurial knowledge has been shown to influence students' entrepreneurial intentions significantly. In recent years, intention has emerged as a reliable predictor of pre-planned behaviors, such as launching a business (Aho, 2020). Furthermore, entrepreneurial intention is regarded as one of the most robust indicators of future entrepreneurial behavior (Karimi et al., 2013).

Many scholars contend that when examining entrepreneurial intention, individuals' perceptions of their environment are more influential than the objective environment itself, as these perceptions play a greater role in shaping decision-making processes. The decision to pursue entrepreneurship is often guided by an individual's subjective interpretation of external conditions rather than the conditions alone. Dehghan & Peymanfar (2021) argue that students in sports science who adopt a more strategic perspective toward managing their attitudes and behaviors related to entrepreneurship can significantly contribute to developing the sports industry. Consequently, it is essential to foster entrepreneurial intention among sports science students, particularly through the lens of the theory of planned behavior. By doing so, these students can harness their specialized knowledge to address industry-specific challenges and generate innovative solutions for future applications (Tradif & Sternberg, 1988).

Enhancing individual creativity has the potential to foster entrepreneurial behavioral intentions (Ward, 2004). In a study conducted by Pourhaji et al. (2022), six key behavioral factors were identified as influencing the entrepreneurial tendencies of physical education

students in conservatories across Iran. Ranked by priority, these factors include: (1) the existence of a constructive cultural environment within the conservatory, (2) students' personality traits and their antecedents, (3) gender, (4) parental adoption of leadership roles as opposed to managerial roles, (5) the presence of an effective communication system between parents and students, and (6) sustained and practical interaction among parents. Additionally, [Gazi et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasized that entrepreneurship education enhances students' employability and motivation to pursue self-employment and equips them with the critical skills and knowledge necessary for successful business creation. As such, entrepreneurial intention is pivotal in shaping individual employability outcomes.

Within the field of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial intention—along with key influencing factors such as organizational climate and creativity—a substantial body of research has been developed (e.g., [Gazi et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Pourhaji et al. \(2022\)](#)). However, given the accelerating pace of change in the modern world, characterized by the rapid expansion of diverse industries and the cognitive advancement of younger generations, there remains a pressing need for continued empirical investigation. This need is particularly pronounced in educational contexts, where schools and students serve as foundational environments for fostering entrepreneurial awareness and intention. In this regard, physical education students merit specific attention, as the sports sector represents a significant and growing global industry. These students are poised to become future leaders and decision-makers within national sports institutions, making understanding and cultivating their entrepreneurial intentions through focused research and strategic educational interventions imperative.

This raises a critical research question: Can factors such as a school's entrepreneurial climate and students' creative thinking facilitate the entrepreneurial development of physical education students, thereby contributing to the growth of the broader sports industry and supporting the success of their ventures across multiple levels? To explore this inquiry, the present study examines the impact of the entrepreneurial climate on the entrepreneurial intentions of physical education students in Yazd Province, Iran. In this analysis, creative thinking is investigated as a mediating variable.

2. Methodology

This study employed a path analysis and correlational research design. The statistical population consisted of male and female students from 11 physical education schools in the Province of Yazd, totaling 314 individuals. Questionnaires were distributed to all 314 students, of which 172 completed the questionnaire, free of missing data or errors, and were included in the final analysis. Data were collected using three standardized instruments: [Kang et al. \(2016\)](#) Entrepreneurial Climate Questionnaire (3 items), [Liñán et al. \(2011\)](#) Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (6 items), and [Moghimian & Amini \(2012\)](#) Creative Thinking Questionnaire (12 items). An expert panel from sports management and sports entrepreneurship reviewed the research objectives and questionnaires to establish content and face validity. The specialist panel feedback was used to refine the instruments further. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was conducted to assess data normality. Path analysis and Pearson correlation tests were employed to

examine the significance of the research hypotheses. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 26 and Smart PLS version 3, with a significance level set at $\alpha = .05$.

3. Results

Examining demographic characteristics can make research results more understandable. In this study, an attempt was made to comprehensively analyze the demographic characteristics (Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the statistical sample of students.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Type of school	Frequency	Percentage	
men	74	43	Governmental	141	82	
women	98	57	Non-government	31	18	
sum	172	100	Sum	172	100	
Sports team membership	Frequency	Percentage	Skill certificate	Frequency	Percentage	
YES	Individual	47	27.3	YES	34	19.8
	Team sport	40	23.3			
NO		85	49.4	NO	138	80.2
	Sum	172	100	Sum	172	100
Mother's job	Frequency	Percentage	Father's job	Frequency	Percentage	
Employed		19	11	Salaried	91	52.9
Housewife		153	89	Business	81	47.1
	Sum	172	100	Sum	172	100

Table 1 presents the sample frequency distribution based on school type, gender, sports team membership, possession of a skill certificate, and parental occupation (mother and father).

Table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check the normality of research data.

Variables	Z test Kolmogorov Smirnov	P-value (two domains)
Entrepreneurial climate	0.137	0.126
Creative thinking	0.089	0.200
Entrepreneurial intention	0.171	0.056

According to the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test results presented in Table 2, the significance levels for all variables exceeded 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data are typically distributed, justifying parametric statistical tests.

Table 3. Matrix of correlation coefficients.

Variables	Entrepreneurial climate	Creative Thinking	Entrepreneurial intention
Entrepreneurial climate	-	0.335	0.414
Creative Thinking	0.335	-	0.354
Entrepreneurial intention	0.414	0.354	-

As shown in Table 3, the correlations between the entrepreneurial climate and creative thinking, the entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial intention, and creative thinking and entrepreneurial intention were all strong and statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

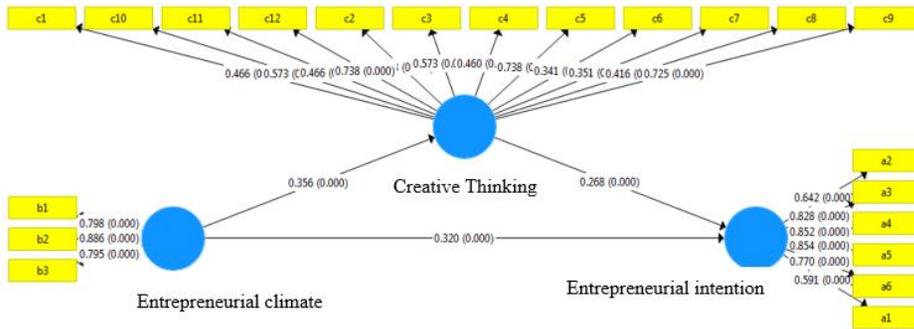


Figure 1. Path coefficients and significant values of the empirical model of factors affecting entrepreneurial intention.

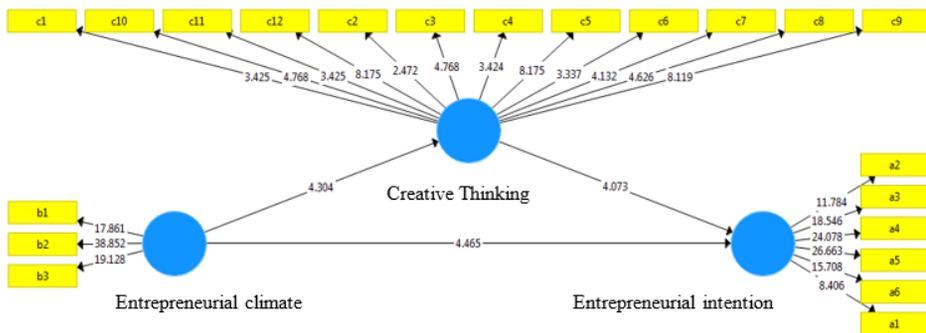


Figure 2. T-statistic values in the empirical model of factors affecting entrepreneurial intention.

Table 4. The structural pattern of paths in the final pattern.

Path beginning variable	Path end variable	Path regression coefficients	T-Test	P-value
Entrepreneurial climate	Entrepreneurial climate	0.356	4.304	0.000
Creative thinking	Creative thinking	0.268	4.073	0.000
Entrepreneurial intention	Entrepreneurial intention	0.320	4.465	0.000

As indicated in Table 4, the p-values for all path coefficients in the final model are below 0.05, indicating statistical significance. Specifically, the entrepreneurial climate has a direct effect of 0.356 on creative thinking, creative thinking has an effect of 0.268 on entrepreneurial intention, and the entrepreneurial climate exerts a direct effect of 0.320 on entrepreneurial intention. Additionally, the t-values for all paths exceed 1.96, confirming the significance of these relationships. The factor loadings for all components of the research variables are within acceptable ranges, indicating a well-fitting model and eliminating the need to remove any elements.

Table 5. The results of the research hypothesis test.

Path of main hypothesis variables	Path coefficient	Standard error	Z-value	Result
Entrepreneurial climate - creative thinking	0.083	0.356	2.907	Accept
Creative thinking - entrepreneurial intention	0.066	0.268		

As shown in Table 5, the Sobel test yielded a Z-value of 2.907, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96, indicating statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This finding supports the conclusion that creative thinking is a mediating variable in the relationship between entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial intention among physical education students in Yazd Province. The significant path coefficient of 2.907 further confirms the mediating role of creative thinking in this relationship.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Entrepreneurial intention is fundamental in initiating an economic enterprise (Peymanfar & Akbarian, 2023). Accordingly, the present study aimed to examine the effect of the entrepreneurial climate on the entrepreneurial intentions of physical education students, with creative thinking as a mediating variable. The findings revealed that creative thinking significantly mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial intention, with a path coefficient 2.907.

Consistent with these results, Choubdari et al. (2023) examined the interactive role of cultural factors and entrepreneurship education in shaping students' entrepreneurial intentions. Their study found a significant and positive relationship between cultural beliefs—such as self-efficacy and responsibility—and entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, an important relationship was also observed between cultural beliefs and the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education.

In another supporting study, Lihua (2022) conducted an experimental investigation into entrepreneurial intention and behavior among students. The results indicated that factors such as anticipated material rewards, social reputation, self-evaluation, sense of mission, responsibility, and career development significantly predicted entrepreneurial attitudes. Additionally, family and peer support and the influence of university teachers and role models were found to predict subjective norms associated with entrepreneurship.

Anjum et al. (2020) also reported that individuals' attitudes toward creativity significantly and positively impact entrepreneurial intention. Finally, Gazi et al. (2024) concluded that fostering an entrepreneurial environment—through exposure to entrepreneurial curricula, practical knowledge, and skill development—can significantly enhance students' intentions to start their businesses, ultimately contributing to improved employment outcomes.

One of the practical factors contributing to a strong entrepreneurial climate is the education and preparation of students for entrepreneurship. Instruction in entrepreneurial skills—such as creative thinking, business planning, resource management, and business communication—equips students with the tools to develop and transform their ideas into viable ventures. Creating supportive spaces and providing the necessary facilities for nurturing entrepreneurial talents are also essential to an effective entrepreneurial climate (Rezaeisharif et al., 2022). Beyond infrastructure, the leadership and support offered by

school administrators and teachers play a pivotal role in fostering such an environment. Consistent encouragement of students' entrepreneurial ideas and initiatives enhances their self-confidence and motivation to pursue entrepreneurial activities. A strong entrepreneurial climate, therefore, is characterized by an environment that inspires students to generate ideas, think creatively, and apply entrepreneurial skills through practical experiences.

In this context, creative thinking holds particular significance for physical education students. The present study's findings confirmed the first sub-hypothesis: the entrepreneurial climate significantly and directly affects students' entrepreneurial intentions at the 0.05 significance level. Through various physical activities and exercises, physical education courses contribute to students' physical health and stimulate creative thinking. Such thinking enables students to devise innovative and diverse exercise routines to enhance fitness, coordination, strength, and balance. Moreover, creative thinking empowers students to develop solutions to complex challenges encountered in physical education settings by designing unique and effective strategies (Rezaeisharif et al., 2022).

Furthermore, creative thinking supports the development of movement creativity among students, allowing them to introduce originality and variety into their exercises and sports activities. It also facilitates cooperative learning, as students use creative approaches to participate in group activities and problem-solving scenarios, benefiting from diverse perspectives and experiences.

The study's second sub-hypothesis—asserting that creative thinking significantly and directly affects students' entrepreneurial intentions—was also confirmed at the 0.05 level. Physical education schools that foster a high entrepreneurial climate often promote teamwork and collaborative learning, enabling students to exchange ideas and experiences that enhance their cognitive flexibility and entrepreneurial potential. In contrast, schools with a limited focus on entrepreneurship and an emphasis solely on theoretical or practical physical training may hinder the development of students' creative thinking. In such environments, students may experience reduced motivation for creativity and innovation. Thus, cultivating innovative thinking is a critical educational objective that directly and meaningfully shapes students' future entrepreneurial engagement.

Educational institutions can play a robust role in fostering entrepreneurial thinking by organizing exhibitions and competitions to stimulate creativity and promote entrepreneurship as a viable pathway for self-employment and job creation. Such initiatives encourage the development of innovative ideas amongst youth and generate enthusiasm for independent ventures. To further support this objective, policymakers should motivate physical education students to pursue entrepreneurship by promoting independence and recognizing success as a product of individual effort and ability (Svotwa et al., 2022). This recognition reinforces self-efficacy and strengthens students' belief in their entrepreneurial potential.

Additionally, developing small business initiatives within academic departments, under the guidance of experienced entrepreneurs, can significantly influence students' entrepreneurial intentions. These practical learning environments allow students to observe firsthand how individual performance, abilities, and effort contribute to business

success. They also highlight the importance of self-confidence and calculated risk-taking in entrepreneurship. Through such experiential learning, students gain a more realistic understanding of the entrepreneurial process, including the responsibilities and decision-making required to run a successful business (Svotwa et al., 2022).

In this context, an in-depth understanding of entrepreneurial ability and its influence on entrepreneurial intention becomes essential. This knowledge can empower young entrepreneurs, educational institutions, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations to nurture the next generation of business leaders. Academic institutions, in particular, are encouraged to integrate entrepreneurship education into their curricula to cultivate students' entrepreneurial aspirations and enhance their employability. By establishing a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem—through dedicated courses, mentoring programs, and hands-on learning opportunities—schools and universities can help students actively engage in entrepreneurial activities and increase their likelihood of launching successful ventures.

Furthermore, these initiatives can develop critical thinking, innovation, and problem-solving skills that are transferable across multiple career paths. Practical components such as internships, entrepreneurial projects, and networking opportunities provide students with real-world insights and industry exposure, fostering a sustainable entrepreneurial mindset (Gazi et al., 2024). Embedding entrepreneurship education within the academic structure equips students with the tools, confidence, and support necessary to thrive in today's dynamic and competitive labor market.

The third sub-hypothesis confirmed that the entrepreneurial climate significantly and directly affects students' creative thinking at a 0.05 significance level. This finding validates the research hypothesis and aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the relationship between the learning environment and creativity (e.g., (Anjum et al., 2020; Buschow & Laugemann, 2020; Choubdari et al., 2023; Lihua, 2022; Wu & Rudnák, 2021; Yin et al., 2020)). The results of the current study indicate that a supportive entrepreneurial climate in physical education schools promotes creative thinking by fostering a dynamic and encouraging environment. Such an atmosphere not only values students' creative potential but also motivates them to engage in entrepreneurial activities actively.

Students in high-entrepreneurial-climate schools often perceive physical education as a platform for developing skills and creativity. In this context, they tend to demonstrate greater creative abilities than their peers. These students are encouraged to generate novel and innovative ideas within their physical exercises and activities, viewing challenges through a creative lens and formulating unique solutions. The entrepreneurial climate supports this process by facilitating collaborative opportunities, such as team-based projects and idea-sharing sessions, that stimulate innovative thinking. As a result, students' creative abilities are enhanced, positioning creative thinking as a mediating factor in the relationship between entrepreneurial climate and entrepreneurial intention.

Based on these findings, efforts to strengthen students' entrepreneurial intention in physical education programs are recommended to focus on fostering creativity. Schools should consider implementing workshops and training courses to enhance creative thinking and entrepreneurship. These initiatives could include participation in entrepreneurship competitions, startup events, company visits, and practical

entrepreneurship workshops. Additionally, organizing motivational sessions featuring successful young entrepreneurs can help students gain inspiration and valuable insight into the entrepreneurial journey. Further strategies may include hosting creativity and idea-generation competitions, problem-analysis events, and entrepreneurial challenge presentations. These activities can cultivate a vibrant entrepreneurial mindset and equip students with the tools necessary to innovate and succeed in their future careers.

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تأثیر جو کار آفرینی بر قصد کار آفرینی دانشجویان تربیت بدنی: نقش میانجی تفکر خلاق

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کلیدواژه

تربیت بدنی
تفکر خلاق دانش آموزان
جو کار آفرینانه
قصد کار آفرینی

نوع مقاله

پژوهشی اصیل

چکیده

هدف: هدف از این پژوهش، بررسی تأثیر جو کار آفرینانه بر قصد کار آفرینی دانش آموزان هنرستان های تربیت بدنی استان یزد با نقش میانجی تفکر خلاق بود.

روش: پژوهش حاضر، به روش های تحلیل مسیر و همبستگی انجام شد، جامعه آماری دانش آموزان پسر و دختر هنرستان های تربیت بدنی استان یزد (۳۱۴ نفر) بود که نمونه آماری بر اساس جدول مورگان ۱۷۲ نفر مورد تحلیل قرار گرفت. داده ها با استفاده از پرسشنامه های جو کار آفرینانه کانگ و همکاران (۲۰۱۶)، قصد کار آفرینی لینان و همکاران (۲۰۱۱) و تفکر خلاق مقیمیان و امینی (۲۰۰۹) جمع آوری گردید. داده ها با استفاده از نرم افزارهای SPSS26 و PLS3 در سطح معنی داری ۰/۰۵ مورد تحلیل قرار گرفت.

یافته ها: یافته های پژوهش نشان داد که تفکر خلاق در تأثیر جو کار آفرینانه بر قصد کار آفرینی در دانش آموزان هنرستان های تربیت بدنی استان یزد با ضریب مسیر ۲/۹۰۷ نقش میانجی دارد. جو کار آفرینانه بر قصد کار آفرینی دانش آموزان، در سطح معنی داری ۰/۰۵ به میزان ۱۶/۷ درصد تأثیر معنی دار و مستقیم دارد. تفکر خلاق بر قصد کار آفرینی دانش آموزان، در سطح معنی داری ۰/۰۵ به میزان ۱۲/۰ درصد تأثیر معنی دار و مستقیم دارد. جو کار آفرینانه بر تفکر خلاق دانش آموزان، در سطح معنی داری ۰/۰۵ به میزان ۱۰/۷ درصد تأثیر معنی دار و مستقیم دارد.

اصالت و ابتکار مقاله: کارآفرین ترکیبی از ریسک و تمایل به موفقیت است، اما به دلیل نفوذ محیط کسب و کار داخلی و خارجی، دستیابی به آن آسان نیست. بنابراین، این مطالعه با هدف شناسایی عوامل اصلی که ممکن است بر تمایل افراد تأثیر بگذارد، انجام شد.

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