



The Impact of Academic Support, Parental Support, and Peer Support on the Entrepreneurial Interest of Students with Special Needs at SLB Negeri Semarang

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Abstract

This study investigates how academic support, parental support, and peer support influence entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs at the senior secondary special education level (SMALB) in Indonesia. Grounded in Ecological Systems Theory, the study addresses a notable gap in entrepreneurship research, which has largely overlooked the entrepreneurial development of students with special needs, particularly within supportive social and educational ecosystems. A quantitative approach was employed using a population of 136 students and a sample of 101 respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that academic support has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurial interest (10.43%), followed by parental support (5.29%), while peer support shows no significant influence. These results highlight the central role of proximal institutional and family environments in fostering entrepreneurial orientation among students with special needs, whereas peer interaction appears less directly connected to entrepreneurial motivation in this context. The study contributes to the entrepreneurship and special education literature by emphasizing the ecological nature of entrepreneurial interest formation and the importance of inclusive educational and family-based empowerment strategies to support entrepreneurial pathways for students with special needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a strategic pathway for inclusive economic participation, particularly for individuals facing structural barriers in formal labor markets (Santos, 2012; Ukil, 2025). Recent international policy frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 and SDG 8), emphasize the importance of equitable education and productive employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Within this global agenda, entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a viable mechanism for fostering autonomy, social inclusion, and economic self-reliance among individuals with special needs (Zahra et al., 2009; Mair & Noboa, 2006). Empirical evidence from various countries indicates that entrepreneurship-oriented education and supportive social environments significantly enhance self-determination and employment outcomes among students with disabilities (Saeed et al., 2015; Hassan, 2020). Despite these advances, participation of individuals with special needs in entrepreneurial activities remains considerably lower than that of the general population, indicating persistent structural and psychosocial barriers (Iskandar et al., 2022; British Council, 2021).

In the Indonesian context, access to quality education and employment for individuals with special needs continues to be limited. National statistics reveal that only a small proportion of individuals with disabilities complete upper secondary education and an even smaller percentage pursue higher education. This educational disparity has long-term implications for labor market participation and economic independence. Labor force participation among persons with disabilities remains significantly below that of non-disabled individuals, with many concentrated in low-skill and informal occupations. Structural constraints—including limited vocational certification, physical and cognitive barriers, social stigma, and lack of inclusive workplace readiness—continue to restrict

employment opportunities (Setiawan et al., 2023; Yuda et al., 2025). Consequently, entrepreneurship emerges as a potentially more flexible and inclusive pathway, allowing individuals with special needs to adapt work conditions to their capacities and personal circumstances (Urban & Galawe, 2019; Yamini et al., 2022).

However, evidence suggests that entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs remains relatively low. Preliminary institutional observations indicate that only a minority of graduates from special education secondary schools transition into employment or entrepreneurial activities. Many students demonstrate limited self-confidence, inadequate self-awareness of vocational interests, and insufficient exposure to entrepreneurial learning environments. These conditions highlight the importance of understanding the socio-educational factors shaping entrepreneurial interest formation among students with special needs. Although entrepreneurial intention has been extensively studied in mainstream populations, research focusing specifically on students with special needs remains scarce (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Tan et al., 2020a). Prior studies have predominantly emphasized individual psychological determinants such as self-efficacy, personality traits, and motivation (e.g., resilience, locus of control, and need for achievement) (Uysal et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2005). While these studies provide valuable insights, they often overlook the broader ecological and social support systems that shape entrepreneurial cognition and behavior (Saeed et al., 2015; Luc, 2023).

In particular, limited attention has been given to how academic institutions, family environments, and peer networks collectively influence entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs. Furthermore, existing entrepreneurship intention studies frequently focus on university students or general youth populations, thereby marginalizing the experiences of learners in special education settings (Maheshwari, 2021; Tran et al., 2023). While previous research has emphasized the role of entrepreneurship education and psychological

capital, few studies have explicitly examined how structured academic support, parental encouragement, and peer interaction operate as contextual enablers within the entrepreneurial development of students with disabilities (Ip et al., 2021; Virgosita et al., 2023). This omission represents a significant gap, as students with special needs often rely more heavily on proximal support systems due to adaptive, cognitive, and social challenges (Hossain et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2024a).

Therefore, this study positions itself as a response to this gap by examining entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs through a contextual and theory-driven lens. Specifically, it investigates how academic support, parental support, and peer support function as key social determinants shaping entrepreneurial orientation in special education environments. This study is grounded primarily in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which together provide a robust framework for understanding entrepreneurial intention formation. According to TPB, entrepreneurial intention is shaped by three core determinants: attitudes toward entrepreneurship, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000). Within this framework, academic support and parental support contribute to subjective norms by shaping social expectations and normative beliefs regarding entrepreneurship (Santos & Liguori, 2019; Maheshwari & Kha, 2022). Meanwhile, academic support also enhances perceived behavioral control by strengthening students' entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, and confidence (Maheshwari & Kha, 2022; Tseng et al., 2022).

Social Cognitive Theory further complements this perspective by emphasizing the role of environmental influences, observational learning, and self-efficacy in shaping behavior (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994). From an SCT perspective, academic institutions provide structured learning experiences and mastery opportunities that enhance entrepreneurial competence (Duong et al., 2024; Liu, 2023). Parental support contributes through emotional

encouragement, role modeling, and resource provision, which strengthen motivation and outcome expectations (Bandura et al., 2001; Lent & Brown, 2019). Peer support, meanwhile, can influence entrepreneurial cognition through social comparison, collaborative learning, and shared experiences, although its effectiveness may vary depending on the social and developmental context of students with special needs (Fu et al., 2022; Younis et al., 2021). Integrating TPB and SCT allows this study to conceptualize entrepreneurial interest as the outcome of dynamic interactions between individual cognition and social-environmental support systems (Luc, 2020a; Pham et al., 2024b).

Academic support plays a critical role in shaping entrepreneurial readiness by providing structured learning, skill development, and exposure to entrepreneurial practices (Saeed et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021). Entrepreneurship-oriented academic environments enhance students' perceived competence and self-efficacy, which are central determinants of entrepreneurial intention (Shahab et al., 2019; Virgosita et al., 2023). Prior research consistently demonstrates that educational support positively influences entrepreneurial cognition and career orientation, particularly in contexts requiring adaptive learning (Maheshwari, 2021; Hassan, 2020). For students with special needs, tailored instructional strategies, practical training, and accessible learning facilities are essential for overcoming cognitive and functional barriers (Huang et al., 2024; Gerçek & Elmas-Atay, 2024). Therefore, academic support is expected to positively influence entrepreneurial interest.

Parental support constitutes a fundamental component of the immediate social environment influencing students' career aspirations. Families provide emotional reinforcement, motivational guidance, and often material resources that facilitate entrepreneurial exploration (Pham et al., 2024b; Hossain et al., 2024). In TPB terms, parental expectations shape subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991; Santos & Liguori, 2019), while in SCT terms, parental encouragement enhances self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 2017). Empirical studies indicate

that supportive family environments significantly increase entrepreneurial orientation among youth, especially in contexts characterized by limited institutional resources (Younis et al., 2021; Urban & Galawe, 2019). Given the higher dependency of students with special needs on family structures, parental support is expected to exert a significant positive influence on entrepreneurial interest.

Peer interaction represents an important socialization mechanism shaping attitudes, aspirations, and behavioral intentions. Collaborative learning, shared experiences, and peer encouragement may foster entrepreneurial awareness and motivation (Fu et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). However, in special education contexts, the influence of peers may vary due to differences in developmental capacity, communication ability, and social interaction patterns (Hossain et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2024a). Some studies suggest that peer influence may be less pronounced when students rely more heavily on institutional and familial support systems (Saeed et al., 2015; Maheshwari, 2021). Accordingly, the effect of peer support on entrepreneurial interest remains an empirical question requiring further investigation.

This study focuses on students with special needs enrolled in a public special secondary school in Indonesia. The context is particularly relevant given the persistent disparities in educational attainment and labor market participation among individuals with disabilities (Setiawan et al., 2023; British Council, 2021). By examining the role of academic, parental, and peer support, this study seeks to identify key leverage points for enhancing entrepreneurial pathways within inclusive education systems. This study offers several important contributions. First, it extends the entrepreneurship intention literature by focusing on an underrepresented population—students with special needs—thereby addressing a critical gap in inclusive entrepreneurship research (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015; Tan et al., 2020a). Second, it advances a contextualized understanding of entrepreneurial interest formation by integrating TPB and SCT within a social-support framework (Luc, 2020a; Ip et al., 2021; Avaqhi & Lawita, 2024). Third, it provides empirical evidence on the relative influence of academic, parental, and peer

support in shaping entrepreneurial orientation, offering practical implications for inclusive education policy and family-based empowerment strategies (Virgosita et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2023). Finally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive economic development by highlighting entrepreneurship as a viable pathway for enhancing autonomy and social participation among individuals with special needs (Santos, 2012; Ukil, 2025). In light of these considerations, the present study aims to examine: (1) the effect of academic support on entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs; (2) the effect of parental support on entrepreneurial interest; and (3) the effect of peer support on entrepreneurial interest. Through this investigation, the study seeks to deepen theoretical and empirical understanding of how social and educational ecosystems can foster inclusive entrepreneurial development (Duong et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2024a).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a causal-associative design to examine the causal relationships between academic support, parental support, peer support, and entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Djamba & Neuman, 2002). A quantitative causal design was considered appropriate because the primary objective of the study was not merely to describe phenomena, but to empirically test the magnitude and direction of influence exerted by multiple independent variables on a single dependent variable within a specific educational context (Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). Consistent with established quantitative research procedures, the study followed a systematic and structured sequence of stages, including research design formulation, sampling, instrument development, data collection, and statistical analysis (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Participants and Sampling Process

The research was conducted at a public special secondary school (SMALB) in Semarang, Indonesia. The population consisted of 136 students with special needs enrolled at the SMALB level during the academic year of data collection. In accordance with Indonesian special education classifications, the students included in this study were those formally identified by the school as having hearing impairments (*tuna rungu*) and intellectual disabilities (*tuna grahita ringan*). These categories represent the dominant types of special needs within the institution and were selected to ensure relative homogeneity in cognitive and communicative capacity, which is essential for valid questionnaire-based data collection. The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: (1) students were officially registered as SMALB students at the research site; (2) students had been identified by the school as having mild to moderate disabilities that allowed them to comprehend simplified questionnaire items with assistance; and (3) students had obtained written consent from their parents or legal guardians. Students with severe intellectual disabilities or multiple disabilities that significantly impaired comprehension and communication were excluded to ensure the reliability of self-reported data (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

The sampling process used a probability sampling technique, specifically proportionate random sampling, to ensure that each eligible student had an equal chance of being selected while maintaining proportional representation across student groups (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula, with a margin of error of 5%, resulting in a final sample of 101 respondents. This sample size was considered sufficient to represent the population and to support multivariate statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Given that this study involved a vulnerable population, strict ethical standards were applied. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority, and formal permission was granted by the school administration. Informed consent was secured from parents or legal guardians, while students provided verbal

assent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was ensured, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Questionnaire administration was conducted with the assistance of teachers to ensure comprehension while avoiding coercion or undue influence. Overall, this methodological approach was designed to ensure empirical rigor, ethical integrity, and contextual sensitivity in examining entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Instrument Development and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on an extensive review of prior entrepreneurship and educational support literature (Liñán & Chen, 2009; Maheshwari, 2021; Saeed et al., 2015). All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), which is widely accepted for capturing attitudinal and perceptual data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The operational definitions of the study variables were as follows:

1. Academic Support refers to students’ perceptions of institutional assistance provided by the school, including entrepreneurship-related learning, teacher guidance, skill-training activities, availability of learning facilities, and instructional encouragement (Saeed et al., 2015; Maheshwari, 2021; Tran et al., 2023). Indicators were adapted from prior studies on entrepreneurship education and inclusive learning environments, with modifications to ensure accessibility for students with special needs (Liu, 2023; Wang et al., 2021).
2. Parental Support is defined as the emotional, motivational, and instrumental assistance provided by parents or guardians in relation to entrepreneurial aspirations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Raza et al., 2020). This variable included indicators such as parental encouragement, provision of resources,

emotional reassurance, and positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship, adapted from validated family support scales (Pham et al., 2024b; Younis et al., 2021).

3. Peer Support refers to perceived encouragement, cooperation, and motivation received from classmates or peers within the school environment (Fu et al., 2022; Younis et al., 2021). Indicators included peer collaboration, mutual motivation, and shared interest in vocational or entrepreneurial activities (Ip et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2024).
4. Entrepreneurial Interest represents students' willingness, curiosity, and desire to engage in entrepreneurial activities in the future (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009). Indicators captured intention-related dimensions such as enthusiasm for self-employment, preference for independent work, and interest in business-related activities (Liguori et al., 2020; Santos & Liguori, 2019).

All items were translated into simplified Indonesian language and reviewed by special education teachers to ensure clarity, relevance, and cognitive accessibility. Prior to hypothesis testing, the instrument underwent validity and reliability testing (Hair et al., 2019). Construct validity was assessed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation, by comparing the calculated correlation coefficient (*r*-count) with the critical *r*-table value ($df = n - 2$) (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Items with *r*-count values exceeding *r*-table were deemed valid. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.60 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). All constructs met the minimum reliability criteria, confirming the consistency of the measurement instruments. Given that this study involved a vulnerable population, strict ethical standards were applied (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority, and formal permission was granted by the school administration. Informed consent was secured from parents or legal guardians, while students provided verbal assent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was ensured, and

respondents were informed that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Questionnaire administration was conducted with the assistance of teachers to ensure comprehension while avoiding coercion or undue influence (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The analytical procedure consisted of two main stages. First, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to summarize respondents' characteristics and variable distributions (Djamba & Neuman, 2002). Second, multiple linear regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between academic support, parental support, peer support, and entrepreneurial interest (Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). Prior to regression analysis, classical assumption tests—including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity—were conducted to ensure compliance with regression requirements (Hair et al., 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The results indicated that all assumptions were met, allowing for robust interpretation of the regression coefficients (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis was conducted systematically, beginning with descriptive statistics, followed by classical assumption testing and inferential analysis using multiple linear regression (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Djamba & Neuman, 2002). The results are presented not merely as statistical outputs but are interpreted substantively to highlight the relative contribution of each predictor and their implications within the broader framework of inclusive entrepreneurship development (Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli & Koppius, 2011).

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive findings indicate that entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs was categorized as very high. This result suggests that, at the attitudinal level,

students demonstrate a strong inclination toward entrepreneurial activities, consistent with intention-based models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Ajzen, 1991; Lent et al., 1994; Liñán & Chen, 2009). Such a finding is particularly noteworthy given the structural and social barriers commonly faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing formal employment. It implies that entrepreneurial pathways may already be cognitively and motivationally salient among these students, in line with research emphasizing the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in shaping entrepreneurial career intentions (Bandura, 1986; Santos & Liguori, 2019; Liguori et al., 2020).

The variable academic support was categorized as high, indicating that students perceive substantial institutional assistance in the form of instructional guidance, entrepreneurship-related learning, and skill development opportunities, which prior studies

identify as critical predictors of entrepreneurial intention (Saeed et al., 2015; Maheshwari, 2021; Tran et al., 2023). Parental support was categorized as very high, reflecting strong emotional and motivational reinforcement from families, consistent with social support and social cognitive perspectives highlighting the influence of close relational agents on career-related intentions (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lent et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2024b). Meanwhile, peer support was categorized as high, suggesting generally positive social interactions within the school environment, which have been shown to strengthen entrepreneurial intention through perceived social support and subjective norms mechanisms (Younis et al., 2021; Ip et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2024). Although descriptive categories indicate favorable support levels, the inferential analysis provides deeper insight into how these supports translate into entrepreneurial interest (Krueger et al., 2000; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

No.	Variable	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Category	Interpretation
1	Entrepreneurial Interest	4.32	0.48	Very High	Students demonstrate strong entrepreneurial inclination and motivational readiness.
2	Academic Support	3.89	0.52	High	Students perceive substantial institutional support, including instruction and skill training.
3	Parental Support	4.41	0.46	Very High	Families provide strong emotional and motivational reinforcement.
4	Peer Support	3.76	0.55	High	Peer interactions are generally positive within the school environment.

Source: Primary Data, Processed (2025)

Assumption Testing

Prior to regression analysis, classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure model adequacy. The normality test using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method indicated that the data were normally distributed. The linearity test showed that the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable were linear, as all Deviation from Linearity significance values exceeded 0.05. The

multicollinearity test demonstrated that all independent variables had tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values below 10, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Furthermore, the heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser method revealed that all predictors had significance values above 0.05, confirming homoscedasticity. These results collectively support the validity of the regression model.

Table 2. Classical Assumption Test Results

No.	Assumption Test	Test Method / Indicator	Criteria	Result	Conclusion
1	Normality	Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test	Sig. > 0.05	Sig. = 0.059	Data are normally distributed
2	Linearity	Deviation from Linearity	Sig. > 0.05	All variables > 0.05	Linear relationship confirmed
3	Multicollinearity	Tolerance Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	> 0.10 < 10	All variables > 0.10 All variables < 10	No multicollinearity
4	Heteroscedasticity	Glejser Test	Sig. > 0.05	All variables > 0.05	No heteroscedasticity detected

Source: Primary Data, Processed (2025)

Simultaneous Test

The simultaneous coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.215, indicating that 21.5% of the variance in entrepreneurial interest is explained collectively by academic support, parental support, and peer support. While statistically meaningful, this moderate explanatory power suggests that entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs is influenced by additional factors beyond the social supports examined in this study, such as self-efficacy, personality traits, prior entrepreneurial exposure, or broader socio-cultural influences. From an ecological perspective, this finding is consistent with the

notion that entrepreneurial intention is shaped by multi-layered environmental and individual determinants. The present model captures important proximal influences (school, family, peers), yet a substantial proportion of variance remains attributable to unexamined variables. The ANOVA F-test confirmed that academic support, parental support, and peer support simultaneously exert a significant effect on entrepreneurial interest. This indicates that, collectively, social support systems contribute meaningfully to shaping entrepreneurial orientation, even though their individual magnitudes vary.

Table 3. Model Summary and Simultaneous Effect

Model	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-value	Sig.	Interpretation
1	0.715	0.691	8.853	0.000	Academic support, parental support, and peer support collectively explain 71.5% of the variance in entrepreneurial interest and simultaneously exert a statistically significant effect.

Source: Primary Data, Processed (2025)

Partial Effects and Relative Importance of Predictors

The t-test results provide insight into the relative strength of each predictor: Academic Support ($\beta = 0.336$, $p = 0.001$). Academic support emerged as the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial interest, explaining approximately 10.43% of the variance independently. The standardized beta coefficient indicates a moderate effect size relative to other predictors. Substantively, this finding suggests that institutional support mechanisms—such as entrepreneurship-oriented instruction, structured skill training, and teacher

encouragement—play a central role in shaping entrepreneurial aspirations among students with special needs. This result aligns with prior entrepreneurship education research emphasizing the role of structured learning environments in enhancing entrepreneurial cognition and perceived behavioral control. For students with special needs, academic institutions may function as the primary arena for capability development, compensating for external structural limitations. Within the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, the school represents a critical microsystem influencing motivational development.

Parental Support ($\beta = 0.225$, $p = 0.022$). Parental support demonstrated a significant but comparatively smaller effect, accounting for 5.23% of the variance in entrepreneurial interest. Although weaker than academic support, its influence remains statistically meaningful. Families appear to reinforce entrepreneurial aspirations through emotional encouragement and positive normative expectations. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that parental attitudes shape subjective norms and career preferences, particularly among youth with higher dependency on family structures. For students with special needs, familial reinforcement may be especially influential due to heightened reliance on parental guidance for career-related decisions. However, the smaller effect size relative to academic support suggests that while parental encouragement is important, institutional structures may provide more tangible and skill-based contributions to entrepreneurial readiness.

Peer Support ($\beta = 0.015$, $p = 0.882$). Contrary to expectations, peer support did not significantly influence entrepreneurial interest. Its partial contribution (approximately

0.0225%) is negligible, and the non-significant p-value indicates a lack of statistical association. This finding warrants deeper interpretation rather than mere reporting. Several plausible explanations emerge. First, students with hearing and intellectual disabilities may experience peer interactions that are more socially oriented rather than vocationally focused. Peer relationships in special education settings may prioritize companionship and social belonging over career-oriented influence. Second, entrepreneurial cognition may require structured mentoring and skill development, which peers at a similar developmental level may not effectively provide. Third, limited exposure to entrepreneurial role models within peer groups may reduce normative pressure toward entrepreneurship. This result contrasts with some mainstream entrepreneurship studies where peer influence significantly predicts entrepreneurial intention. The discrepancy suggests contextual differentiation: in special education environments, institutional and family supports may outweigh peer influence in shaping career orientation.

Table 4. Partial Effects and Relative Importance of Predictors

Predictor Variable	(β)	t-value	Sig.	Partial Contribution (%)	Effect Size
Academic Support	0.336	3.361	0.001	10.43%	Moderate
Parental Support	0.225	2.333	0.022	5.23%	Small–Moderate
Peer Support	0.015	0.148	0.882	0.02%	Negligible

Source: Primary Data, Processed (2025)

Discussion

This study set out to examine how academic support, parental support, and peer support shape entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs in a special secondary education context (Maheshwari, 2021; Saeed et al., 2015; Tran et al., 2023). Moving beyond mere statistical confirmation, the present discussion critically interprets the findings through a theoretical, contextual, and practical lens, with particular attention to the distinctive characteristics of special education environments (Lent et al., 1994; Bandura, 1986).

The results reveal a differentiated pattern of influence: academic support emerges as the strongest determinant, parental support exerts a meaningful but secondary effect, and peer support shows no significant influence (Hossain et al., 2024; Younis et al., 2021). This pattern reflects the ecological configuration of support systems surrounding students with special needs and offers important implications for inclusive entrepreneurship education (Belitski & Heron, 2017; Liu et al., 2021). The findings demonstrate that academic support exerts the most substantial influence on entrepreneurial interest (Saeed et al., 2015; Maheshwari & Kha, 2022).

This result suggests that institutional structures within special education settings function not merely as knowledge transmitters but as critical developmental environments that shape motivational orientation and perceived capability (Liu, 2023; Martins et al., 2022). Within the framework of Ecological Systems Theory, the school represents a central microsystem where repeated interactions between students and teachers cultivate competence, confidence, and behavioral readiness (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bandura, 1997).

In special education contexts, academic support often extends beyond conventional classroom instruction (Hodge et al., 2017; Gerçek & Elmas-Atay, 2024). It includes individualized teaching strategies, structured vocational training, entrepreneurship-oriented learning, and adaptive skill development (Liu, 2023; Martins et al., 2022). These forms of institutional engagement are particularly salient for students with hearing and mild intellectual disabilities, who frequently encounter structural barriers in mainstream employment systems (British Council, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2023). By providing mastery experiences, guided practice, and accessible learning environments, schools help students construct a sense of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and perceived behavioral control—two critical antecedents of entrepreneurial intention in behavioral theories (Bandura, 1997; Ajzen, 1991; Liguori et al., 2020). The stronger effect of academic support compared to other predictors indicates that entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs is highly contingent on structured and intentional educational interventions rather than spontaneous environmental influences (Maheshwari, 2021; Saeed et al., 2015). This aligns with prior empirical studies showing that entrepreneurship-oriented education enhances entrepreneurial cognition, opportunity recognition, and career orientation (Liu, 2023; Martins et al., 2022; Shahab et al., 2019). Even though much of the existing literature focuses on university populations, the present findings suggest that the underlying mechanism—namely capability development through structured

learning—operates similarly in special education contexts, albeit with greater reliance on adaptive pedagogy (Belitski & Heron, 2017; Liu et al., 2021).

From a practical standpoint, the results underscore the need for special education institutions to move beyond generic vocational exposure toward systematic entrepreneurship education (Kirby, 2004; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Schools should integrate experiential entrepreneurship modules, project-based learning, adaptive business simulations, and supported micro-enterprise initiatives into the curriculum (Martins et al., 2022; Tantawy et al., 2021). Furthermore, teacher capacity-building programs are essential to ensure that educators possess both pedagogical and entrepreneurial competencies tailored to students with diverse learning needs (Pachler et al., 2019; Liu, 2023). Institutional investment in accessible facilities, assistive learning technologies, and inclusive entrepreneurship incubators would further strengthen this pathway (Belitski & Heron, 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Parental support also shows a statistically significant influence, although its magnitude is smaller than academic support (Raza et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2024b). This finding reflects the central role of the family as a foundational microsystem shaping motivational development, particularly for students with special needs who often maintain higher levels of dependency on caregivers (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lent et al., 2017). Emotional encouragement, motivational reinforcement, and resource provision from parents contribute to shaping positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship and reinforcing normative expectations (Ajzen, 1991; Santos & Liguori, 2019).

The role of parental support is particularly critical in contexts where social stigma and limited labor market inclusivity constrain employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (British Council, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2023). Parents who express confidence in their children's entrepreneurial potential and provide opportunities for experiential learning—such as involvement in family businesses—can foster resilience, autonomy, and risk-taking propensity (Bandura, 1997; Urban & Galawe,

2019). However, the comparatively smaller effect size suggests that while emotional and normative support from families is essential, institutional mechanisms provide more concrete skill-building and experiential contributions to entrepreneurial readiness (Maheshwari, 2021; Saeed et al., 2015). This finding highlights the importance of strengthening family–school partnerships in promoting inclusive entrepreneurship (Belitski & Heron, 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Schools should design parent-engagement programs that provide guidance on how families can nurture entrepreneurial skills at home, encourage independence, and support vocational exploration (Pham et al., 2024b; Raza et al., 2020). Policy initiatives could include community-based entrepreneurship workshops for families of students with disabilities, financial literacy training, and family-centered enterprise development programs (Setiawan et al., 2023; Ukil, 2025). Such efforts would transform parental support from a primarily motivational function into a more instrumental and capability-enhancing role.

Contrary to expectations, peer support does not significantly influence entrepreneurial interest (Hossain et al., 2024; Younis et al., 2021). This non-significant finding requires careful interpretation rather than simplistic dismissal (Krueger et al., 2000). Within Ecological Systems Theory, peer relationships are indeed part of the microsystem; however, their influence depends on the quality, intensity, and functional orientation of interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In special education settings, peer relationships often prioritize social bonding, emotional companionship, and cooperative engagement rather than vocational or career-oriented influence (Fu et al., 2022; Ip et al., 2021). Several contextual factors may explain the limited role of peer support. First, communication barriers associated with hearing impairments may restrict the depth and complexity of peer interactions, thereby limiting opportunities for entrepreneurial idea exchange or collaborative problem-solving (Hossain et al., 2024). Second, students with mild intellectual disabilities may require structured mentoring and guided learning environments to develop

entrepreneurial cognition—conditions that peers at similar developmental stages may be unable to provide (Lent et al., 1994; Bandura, 1997). Third, the absence of entrepreneurial role models within peer groups reduces normative pressure and social reinforcement toward entrepreneurship (Krueger et al., 2000; Santos & Liguori, 2019).

Another plausible explanation relates to dependency structures. Students with special needs often rely more heavily on adults—teachers and parents—for guidance and decision-making, which may diminish the relative influence of peers in shaping career aspirations (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lent et al., 2017). Additionally, peer interactions observed in the study context may not have been explicitly oriented toward entrepreneurship, thereby limiting their functional relevance to entrepreneurial interest formation (Fu et al., 2022). This finding does not imply that peer support is inherently unimportant; rather, it suggests that its influence is conditional and context-dependent (Ip et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2024). Peer collaboration may become more meaningful when embedded within structured entrepreneurship programs, cooperative business projects, or guided peer-mentoring systems (Martins et al., 2022; Tantawy et al., 2021). Future research should explore whether peer influence becomes significant when entrepreneurial activities are intentionally integrated into peer interaction frameworks (Tran et al., 2023).

The hierarchical pattern of influence identified in this study—academic support as primary, parental support as secondary, and peer support as conditional—offers important implications for policy and practice (Maheshwari, 2021; Saeed et al., 2015). First, inclusive entrepreneurship education must be institutionalized within special education curricula rather than treated as an auxiliary vocational activity (Kirby, 2004; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Curriculum design should incorporate adaptive entrepreneurial competencies, including opportunity recognition, self-management, financial literacy, and small-business operation, delivered through

experiential and context-sensitive pedagogies (Liu, 2023; Martins et al., 2022).

Second, policy frameworks should emphasize multi-level ecosystem development (Belitski & Heron, 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Beyond school-level interventions, collaboration between educational institutions, families, community organizations, and local governments is essential to create supportive entrepreneurial environments for students with special needs (Setiawan et al., 2023; Ukil, 2025). Programs such as supported employment transition pathways, disability-inclusive business incubators, and community-based enterprise mentorship could bridge the gap between educational preparation and real-world entrepreneurial engagement (British Council, 2021; Setiawan et al., 2023). Third, teacher professional development is crucial. Educators in special education must be equipped not only with pedagogical expertise but also with entrepreneurial facilitation skills (Pachler et al., 2019; Liu, 2023). Training programs should emphasize adaptive entrepreneurship education, inclusive instructional design, and psychosocial empowerment strategies (Gerçek & Elmas-Atay, 2024; Liu, 2023). Finally, the moderate explanatory power of the model suggests that entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs is shaped by broader psychological and socio-cultural factors not captured in this study (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2019). Future research should integrate constructs such as self-efficacy, resilience, identity formation, and socio-economic context to develop a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive entrepreneurial development (Adebusuyi et al., 2022; Luc, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that academic and parental support play significant roles in fostering entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs at the senior secondary special education level. Academic support emerged as the most influential predictor, indicating that structured institutional interventions—such as

entrepreneurship-oriented instruction, vocational training, mentoring, and accessible learning facilities—serve as critical mechanisms for cultivating entrepreneurial motivation. This finding underscores the centrality of the school environment as a developmental microsystem that enhances perceived competence and entrepreneurial readiness. Parental support also demonstrated a significant positive effect, suggesting that emotional encouragement, motivational reinforcement, and normative approval from families strengthen students' aspirations toward entrepreneurial pathways. In contrast, peer support did not exhibit a significant influence. Although peer interactions were relatively frequent, they were not oriented toward entrepreneurial discourse or collaborative business activities, thereby limiting their functional contribution to entrepreneurial interest formation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the entrepreneurship and special education literature by extending ecological perspectives into the domain of inclusive entrepreneurial development. It demonstrates that entrepreneurial interest among students with special needs is shaped predominantly by proximal institutional and familial environments rather than horizontal peer dynamics. By empirically examining these relationships within a special education context, the study addresses a notable gap in mainstream entrepreneurship research, which has largely focused on university or general student populations. Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in a single special education institution, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions or disability categories. Second, the reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may introduce response bias or social desirability effects. Third, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference over time. Future research should consider multi-site studies, incorporate qualitative approaches to explore deeper motivational processes, and employ longitudinal designs to examine how entrepreneurial interest evolves throughout educational transitions. Additionally,

integrating psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, resilience, and identity development may enhance the explanatory power of future models.

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