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Getting Ready for AI Entrepreneurs of the Future: Linking AI Literacy, Entrepreneurial Readiness, and Career Optimization

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ABSTRACT

Objective – The aim of this study is to investigate how future entrepreneurs build and mobilize AI literacy, exploring how these capabilities translate into entrepreneurial action readiness and ongoing career development.
Methodology – To examine this, the study employs a structured narrative literature review combined with abductive thematic synthesis.
Findings – The analysis revealed that AI-related capabilities build entrepreneurial action readiness, which subsequently drives the continuous development and optimization of entrepreneurial careers through a blend of human-AI collaboration, critical evaluation, and experimentation.
Novelty – This research introduces notable originality by shifting the theoretical focus away from traditional entrepreneurial intention to position entrepreneurial readiness as a crucial intermediate step before action, while defining career optimization as a continuous, emerging process fueled by AI integration, experiential learning, and adaptive judgment.
Keywords: *artificial intelligence literacy; entrepreneurial readiness; entrepreneurial career optimization; entrepreneurial action; generative AI; entrepreneurship education; career adaptability; human-AI collaboration*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping how entrepreneurs acquire information, recognize opportunities, make decisions, experiment with business ideas, and develop new ventures. For instance, Crnogaj et al. (2026) demonstrate that AI is increasingly embedded across core entrepreneurial processes (ranging from opportunity recognition and market sensing to process optimization and rapid experimentation). Regarding firm scalability, Ng and Cheung (2026) emphasize that AI facilitates opportunity discovery as well as continuous product and service innovation. Collectively, these studies

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indicate that AI is expanding beyond its role as a mere operational tool, becoming fundamentally tied to how entrepreneurs launch and scale ventures within dynamic environments.

In turn, this shifts the demands placed on entrepreneurship education and the cultivation of entrepreneurial capabilities. Access to AI tools does not automatically enable individuals to leverage them for business purposes (Gong et al., 2025). Rather than accepting AI outputs uncritically, Gong et al. argue that the true foundation of AI-augmented entrepreneurship relies on critical judgment, responsible application, and creative adaptation. Their model frames entrepreneurial development as an iterative progression, evolving from initial AI competency toward project-based experimentation and venture creation. Furthermore, Tsankov and Damyanov (2025) note that students frequently encounter difficulties with AI tools and express a need for structured support, reinforcing that AI exposure does not confer competence on its own. Similarly, Abdelmagid et al. (2026) demonstrate that AI yields developmental benefits primarily when paired with structured instruction, guided learning, higher-order thinking, and future-oriented problem-solving.

Consequently, a growing body of research conceptualizes AI literacy and competence as key antecedents of entrepreneurial outcomes. For instance, AI literacy combined with generative AI adoption correlates with perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, and digital entrepreneurial intention (Duong, 2023). Likewise, AI competence can enhance entrepreneurial identity, attitude, and perceived behavioral control, though these effects vary across institutional and cultural contexts. AI competence thus extends beyond mere technical proficiency; it shapes whether individuals view themselves as capable entrepreneurs who can identify technology-enabled opportunities. While foundational entrepreneurship literature has linked digital literacy, mindset, and formal education to entrepreneurial intention, much of this work remains focused primarily on explaining *whether* individuals aspire to become entrepreneurs.

However, entrepreneurial intention does not automatically equate to preparation for entrepreneurial action. An individual may aspire to start a venture yet lack the self-confidence, judgment, adaptability, opportunity recognition, or practical capability required to bridge the gap from aspiration to execution. Recent empirical evidence supports this distinction. For instance, Duong et al. (2026) demonstrates that the entrepreneurial outcomes of AI literacy depend in part on AI self-efficacy; knowledge without confidence can weaken entrepreneurial identity and ultimately diminish entrepreneurial effort. Similarly, Panxhi et al. (2025) highlight that digitally enriched educational environments enhance career readiness through foundational capacities—such as creativity, adaptability, and opportunity recognition (alongside direct technological exposure). Problem-solving abilities, adaptability, experiential learning, mentorship, and digital enablement thus prove essential for preparing young individuals for sustainable entrepreneurship.

This distinction is particularly evident in recent research emphasizing that AI literacy alone does not fully explain career outcomes. Such studies conceptualize AI readiness as a developmental process connecting AI literacy to career adaptability, defining readiness as the operational capacity to deploy AI in applied settings—the critical link between technical knowledge and adaptive career resources. However, much of this literature relies on cross-sectional designs centered on university students in early developmental stages. Scholars explicitly acknowledge that such designs fail to capture how AI literacy, readiness, and adaptability evolve over time or how these resources are deployed once individuals navigate real-world professional contexts.

This limitation directly underlines the central research problem of the present study. While existing literature documents statistical relationships among AI literacy, AI competence, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial identity, intention, and readiness, little is known about how these AI-related capabilities actually translate into action. Traditional quantitative approaches establish that these constructs are

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correlated, but they offer limited insight into how entrepreneurs critically evaluate AI, integrate it into opportunity exploration, deploy it confidently, combine AI-generated insights with human judgment, iterate business models, and execute entrepreneurial action. Examining this process is vital, as recent findings show that the effects of AI capability are contextual and multi-pathway rather than linear. For example, Duong (2023) demonstrates how AI competence functions in Vietnam and Poland, illustrating how entrepreneurial outcomes emerge from distinct configurations of competence, identity, attitude, and perceived control.

A secondary challenge concerns what unfolds following entrepreneurial readiness and initial action. While literature indicates that AI-related capabilities foster adaptability, agility, experimentation, and venture development, these streams remain fragmented. For instance, Iram et al. (2025) demonstrate that entrepreneurial agility and AI assimilation drive performance, emphasizing that adoption alone is insufficient without high AI proficiency. Similarly, Gong et al. (2025) view entrepreneurial development as an iterative learning process encompassing competency formation, experimentation, customer discovery, venture creation, feedback, and refinement—rather than a single transition from intention to launch. However, existing frameworks rarely trace how AI-related competencies continuously evolve across these iterative venture cycles.

Consequently, little is known about how entrepreneurs deploy AI capabilities once they are ready to act, or how these capabilities sustain long-term career growth. This study provisionally terms this post-action phase entrepreneurial career optimization. Here, optimization extends beyond financial performance; it represents an ongoing process in which entrepreneurs combine AI tools, experiential learning, entrepreneurial judgment, and adaptive skills to uncover opportunities, refine decision-making, reallocate resources, and sustain their entrepreneurial trajectories. Importantly, this construct is treated as emergent rather than established, allowing its underlying mechanisms and boundaries to be grounded in empirical data.

Addressing these gaps requires shifting the analytical focus from whether AI literacy simply predicts a given outcome to how AI-related capabilities are cultivated, applied, and transformed along the entrepreneurial journey. A qualitative process perspective is particularly well-suited to capturing these iterative developmental dynamics, answering calls to investigate AI-augmented pathways and competence formation across repeated learning cycles (Gong et al., 2025; Testa et al., 2026).

In doing so, this study seeks to map how entrepreneurs translate AI literacy into entrepreneurial readiness and action, as well as how this readiness supports long-term career growth and optimization. It examines entrepreneurs at various developmental stages who integrate generative AI into their venture activities—not as a substitute for entrepreneurial judgment, but as a mechanism for critical evaluation, experimentation, opportunity recognition, adaptability, and human agency.

Specifically, the study addresses three primary research questions:

RQ1: How do entrepreneurs develop and apply AI literacy within their entrepreneurial activities?

RQ2: How do AI-related capabilities translate into entrepreneurial readiness and subsequent entrepreneurial action?

RQ3: How does entrepreneurial readiness support the continuous development of AI-enabled entrepreneurial careers?

To answer these questions, this study makes three key contributions. First, it moves AI literacy research beyond basic technical proficiency toward a comprehensive understanding of how AI capabilities translate into actionable entrepreneurial readiness. Second, it conceptualizes entrepreneurial readiness as a vital developmental link between AI literacy and entrepreneurial action—bridging the gap between aspiring to

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be an entrepreneur and actively operating as one. Third, it frames entrepreneurial career optimization as an AI-enabled, capability-driven process that integrates entrepreneurial action, adaptability, experiential learning, and continuous venture development. In doing so, this study offers a process-oriented framework for preparing and supporting entrepreneurs within a rapidly evolving landscape of AI capabilities and business demands.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

AI Literacy in Entrepreneurship

Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in core entrepreneurial activities, including opportunity recognition, market analysis, decision-making, experimentation, and venture development. However, AI tools alone cannot replace the intentional, entrepreneurial application of AI. AI literacy entails understanding and applying AI technologies while critically evaluating their outputs and limitations. For instance, Ngo et al. (2025) show that integrating generative AI can augment perceived entrepreneurial desirability and feasibility, thereby strengthening entrepreneurial intention. Similarly, Duong et al. (2026) define AI competence as the capacity to understand AI technologies and apply them to discover, assess, and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities.

Nevertheless, technological capability alone does not guarantee entrepreneurial effectiveness (Gong et al., 2025). Foundational capabilities for AI-enabled entrepreneurship instead depend on critical judgment, responsible application, and creative adaptation. Their framework conceptualizes AI as more than a mere productivity tool; rather, it serves as an infrastructure for iterative learning, experimentation, innovation, and venture creation. Likewise, research on AI-supported learning suggests that meaningful outcomes require structured educational frameworks that combine AI tools with higher-order human reasoning, rather than a passive reliance on automated outputs. Accordingly, this study defines entrepreneurial AI literacy as the capacity to understand, apply, critically evaluate, and responsibly adapt AI to address business challenges while exercising human judgment.

Entrepreneurial Readiness

Entrepreneurship research has traditionally focused on entrepreneurial intention—specifically, whether individuals intend to start a business. Digital literacy, entrepreneurship education, mindset, and self-efficacy have been shown to bolster such intentions among university students (Ganefri et al., 2024). More recently, AI-focused research has extended this perspective to demonstrate relationships among AI literacy, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial identity, perceived feasibility, and entrepreneurial behavior (Duong, 2023; Ngo et al., 2025).

However, intention is conceptually distinct from readiness. Whereas intention represents the willingness or aspiration to become an entrepreneur, readiness denotes the practical capacity to act with confidence, skill, judgment, adaptability, and resources. Testa et al. (2026) provide the foundation for this distinction by demonstrating that AI readiness mediates the relationship between AI literacy and career adaptability. Their findings indicate that AI-related knowledge delivers value only when individuals are prepared to apply it in practice.

Furthermore, core entrepreneurial competencies enhance this state of readiness. For instance, Pasi et al. (2025) identify creativity, adaptability, and opportunity recognition as key outcomes of technology-enabled learning, underscoring their direct relevance to career preparedness. Ultimately, entrepreneurial readiness

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is strengthened by a broader set of capabilities, including problem-solving, experiential learning, and digital proficiency.

Accordingly, this study conceptualizes entrepreneurial readiness as the preparedness to recognize and evaluate opportunities, make sound entrepreneurial judgments, experiment under conditions of uncertainty, mobilize relevant capabilities, and successfully transition from aspiration to action.

Entrepreneurial Career Development and Optimization

Preparing to take entrepreneurial action does not mark the end of entrepreneurial development. Entrepreneurs must continually adapt to technological shifts, market dynamics, resource constraints, and emerging opportunities. Research increasingly demonstrates that AI supports this ongoing development by enhancing decision-making, experimentation, agility, and resource utilization.

For instance, Iram et al. (2025) show that AI assimilation enhances entrepreneurial performance through organizational agility; however, successful outcomes remain contingent on an entrepreneur's proficiency with AI. While AI can facilitate opportunity recognition, market sensing, process automation, optimization, and rapid experimentation, individual and contextual perceptions of its benefits vary.

Consequently, entrepreneurial development is iterative rather than linear (Gong et al., 2025), evolving from AI competency into project-based experimentation, customer discovery, venture creation, scaling, and continuous feedback loops. This perspective aligns with the growing demand for adaptability in navigating changing career environments. In this context, Testa et al. (2026) define career adaptability as "a set of psychosocial resources that help people cope with uncertain career transitions."

Building on these literature streams, this study conceptualizes entrepreneurial career optimization as an emergent process rather than a static construct. It represents the mechanism through which entrepreneurs combine AI capabilities, experiential learning, judgment, and adaptive resources to pursue opportunities, make decisions, refine ventures, maximize resource utilization, and sustain long-term career growth.

Literature Integration

Together, the literature points to a developmental pathway (see Figure 1). Existing studies document strong associations between AI literacy and key factors such as intention, self-efficacy, identity, readiness, and adaptability. However, less is known about how these capabilities translate across distinct phases of the entrepreneurial journey. Indeed, it is crucial to understand how AI literacy and readiness develop across professions rather than relying solely on cross-sectional observations (Testa et al., 2026). In a similar vein, Gong et al. (2025) called for empirical research on how AI-related competencies develop and evolve over repeated cycles of learning and venture creation. Accordingly, this study aims to examine how AI literacy transforms into entrepreneurial readiness and action, and how these capabilities are mobilized to sustain an ongoing entrepreneurial career.

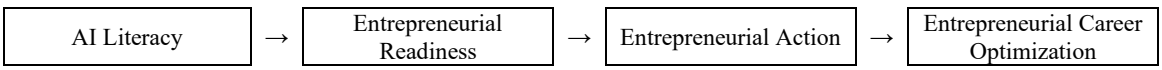

Figure 1. Developmental Pathway

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III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a structured narrative literature review combined with abductive thematic synthesis to examine the relationships among AI literacy, entrepreneurial readiness, entrepreneurial action, and entrepreneurial career development. Relevant literature was identified through Google Scholar using search terms such as AI literacy, AI competence, entrepreneurial readiness, entrepreneurial intention, career adaptability, and generative AI in entrepreneurship. The review targeted open-access publications published between 2022 and August 2026 that addressed AI-related capabilities within entrepreneurial contexts, readiness, action, or career development. Articles that were duplicate, unavailable in full text, or not directly related to the intersection of AI and entrepreneurship were excluded.

Selected articles were analyzed thematically using an abductive approach. Findings were coded into key themes, including AI literacy, self-efficacy, opportunity recognition, adaptability, entrepreneurial readiness, entrepreneurial action, and career development. The thematic analysis was structured around the following conceptual framework: AI Literacy → Entrepreneurial Readiness → Entrepreneurial Action → Entrepreneurial Career Optimization

Specifically, the review addressed three primary research questions: How do entrepreneurs develop and apply AI literacy within their entrepreneurial activities? How do AI-related capabilities translate into entrepreneurial readiness and subsequent entrepreneurial action? How does entrepreneurial readiness support the continuous development of AI-enabled entrepreneurial careers?

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed four key themes: AI literacy, entrepreneurial readiness, entrepreneurial action, and entrepreneurial career optimization. AI literacy encompasses more than technical proficiency with AI tools; in entrepreneurial contexts, it requires understanding AI systems, critically evaluating their outputs, applying them responsibly, and leveraging them to address complex business problems. Indeed, studies demonstrate that AI literacy and competence enhance opportunity recognition, perceived feasibility, entrepreneurial identity, and decision-making.

Second, entrepreneurial readiness serves as an important intermediate link between AI literacy and entrepreneurial action. While existing research has largely focused on entrepreneurial intention, intention alone does not guarantee a preparedness to act. Readiness instead reflects an individual's ability to mobilize knowledge, confidence, adaptability, opportunity recognition, and judgment in real-world entrepreneurial situations. As Testa et al. (2026) demonstrate, readiness connects AI literacy with career adaptability, underscoring its pivotal role in developmental progression.

Third, readiness transitions into entrepreneurial action through experimentation, opportunity evaluation, self-efficacy, and adaptive decision-making. AI delivers value when entrepreneurs actively test ideas, analyze opportunities, gather feedback, and refine decisions rather than passively accepting AI-generated outputs. Gong et al. define this process as a continuous cycle encompassing competency development, experimentation, customer discovery, venture creation, and iterative feedback.

The literature also suggests that entrepreneurial development extends beyond venture creation. While AI can support agility, opportunity sensing, resource allocation, decision-making, and venture refinement, these outcomes ultimately depend on entrepreneurial proficiency, judgment, and contextual conditions. Accordingly, this work conceptualizes entrepreneurial career optimization as an emerging process in which

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entrepreneurs integrate AI capabilities, experience, judgment, and adaptability to build their ventures and sustain their careers. Overall, these findings point to the following developmental progression: AI Literacy → Entrepreneurial Readiness → Entrepreneurial Action → Entrepreneurial Career Optimization

The central contribution of this model is that AI literacy alone is insufficient; it yields true entrepreneurial value only when transformed into a readiness to act and continuously augmented through human judgment, experimentation, learning, and adaptation.

Taken together, the reviewed literature suggests a developmental rather than merely associative relationship among these constructs. AI literacy provides the cognitive and evaluative capabilities necessary to engage with AI; entrepreneurial readiness represents the preparedness to mobilize these capabilities within uncertain entrepreneurial contexts; entrepreneurial action reflects their behavioral enactment; and entrepreneurial career optimization represents the ongoing refinement of entrepreneurial activities through continuous learning, adaptation, and human-machine collaboration.

V. CONCLUSION

The role of artificial intelligence in entrepreneurship extends beyond the tools themselves. As the literature demonstrates, AI literacy is most valuable when entrepreneurs can critically evaluate, apply, and adapt AI solutions to real-world business challenges. However, AI literacy alone is insufficient. To generate true entrepreneurial value, it must translate into entrepreneurial readiness (encompassing confidence, opportunity recognition, adaptability, judgment, and the willingness to act). Consequently, entrepreneurial readiness serves as a vital developmental bridge connecting AI literacy to actionable entrepreneurial outcomes.

They add that entrepreneurial development is a continuous process rather than a linear transition from ideation to venture creation. Based on the literature review, the proposed developmental path is AI Literacy → Entrepreneurial Readiness → Entrepreneurial Action → Entrepreneurial Career Optimization, which relies on ongoing learning, experimentation, feedback, and human judgment. Entrepreneurial career optimization is thus conceptualized as an emerging process where entrepreneurs integrate AI, experiential learning, and adaptive capabilities to discover new opportunities and foster venture growth. Overall, the findings clearly indicate that the AI era demands more than just technical savviness (it requires AI knowledge translated into tangible business action and sustained career development).

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