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Breaking Unemployment Via Entrepreneurial Skills Among Rural Graduates In Tirunelveli District.

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Abstract:
Individual income plays a significant role in the growth of a nation. Graduate unemployment is a considerable barrier for developing countries like India. As part of various efforts to address this, encouraging rural graduates in entrepreneurship has been identified, and efforts are underway. However, the lack of successful outcomes from such initiatives among rural graduates is a drawback to the country's economic growth. To rectify this, this research has attempted to facilitate rural entrepreneurship success by examining the factors required for and contributing to entrepreneurship success among rural graduates with entrepreneurial interest in the Tirunelveli district of South Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, through various literature surveys and understanding, a model for entrepreneurship success and an explanation of its necessity have been provided.
Key words: Unemployment, Entrepreneurship, Technical Skills, Soft Skills, Academic Skills, Entrepreneurial Skills.

1.INTRODUCTION

One of the most essential investments in the career development of a person is education. It enables individuals to understand who they are and the world around them, growing their skills and aspirations in specific paths (Ajayi & Anyidoho, 2017). Although education is normally accessible, the way in which individuals absorb and make use of it greatly changes, shaping their career paths and opportunities. Historically, education has played a crucial role in national economic development and personal economic enhancement (Lewis, 1962; J. Li et al., 2024).

India, with its huge population, continues to significantly depends on higher education to economic growth. The rapid expansion of government and private institutions has resulted in an increased output of graduates. According to the AISHE report, nearly 4.14 crore students enrolled in higher education during 2020–2021 (Government of India Press Information Bureau, n.d.). However, the increasing number of graduates has not matched with an equivalent increase in opportunities for employment (Nilsson, 2016). As a result, a large section of educated youth remains unemployed or underemployed, with 29.1% of them unable to find suitable employment and over half working in low-skill jobs ("Young Indians More Likely to Be Jobless if They Are Educated: ILO Data," 2025; Banerjee, 2024).

To address this critical problem, both prominent and state administrations have executed various long-term methods aimed at capacity building the younger generation and growing Vocational fitness. As part of the most highlighted answers is entrepreneurship, particularly graduate entrepreneurship, which shows a substitute route to career and economic involvement ("Promoting Entrepreneurship to Reduce Graduate Unemployment," 2022; Li et al., 2013; Yatich, 2022). By encouraging entrepreneurial attitudes, administrations can diminish profession burdens while motivating more comprehensive economic development. However, Business creation is not without its obstacles, especially in developing nations like India, where financial, infrastructural, and skill-related barriers continue (Kundanika, 2025). These challenges prevent many potential entrepreneurs despite institutional efforts. However, continued research and policy interventions are paving the way to make entrepreneurship a feasible solution for educated youth unemployment (Wright et al., 2021).

Rural Graduate Entrepreneurship: Key Enablers for Success

Success in entrepreneurship for rural graduates necessitates a blend of soft skills, technical skills, business acumen, and intrinsic motivation (Kundanika, 2025). Essential soft skills—such as communication, adaptability, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving—are fundamental to both labour market readiness and entrepreneurial success (Abdullah et al., 2021; Listyaningsih et al., 2023). It is crucial to cultivate these soft skills within educational institutions must be nurtured.

Technical competencies are equally important, including digital literacy, adaptability to new technologies, and practical platform management, specifically in the Industry 4.0 environment (Ataei et al., 2020; Importance of Soft Skills Over Technical Skills for the Management Graduates in Industry 4.0, 2023).

Proficiency in technology has become essential for successful entrepreneurship in the digital economy (Guitert et al., 2020), (Ataei et al., 2020; Importance of Soft Skills Over Technical Skills for the Management Graduates in Industry 4.0, 2023). Technological proficiency has become a requirement for successful entrepreneurship in the digital economy (Guitert et al., 2020).

There stands a well-supported positive connection between education and entrepreneurship worldwide (Dickson et al., 2008). In particular, practical education helps connect academic knowledge to real-world applications (Fajaryati et al., 2020). Graduates who have relevant employability skills, a passion for creation, and expertise in their domain are more possible to achieve success in entrepreneurship.

Nigerian Case and Lessons for Tamil Nadu

Nigeria performs as a suitable case study showing how entrepreneurship can effectively address graduate unemployment. Through strong associations among the government, academic institutions, and the private sector, the Nigerian model concentrates on mentorship, policy support, access to financing, and skill development. Additionally, enhancing infrastructure in rural areas—such as roads, electricity, markets, and internet access—also encourages entrepreneurial growth (Chukwu & Igwe, 2012).

Also, in Tamil Nadu—a state with dreams to become a trillion-dollar economy by 2030—being unemployed among rural graduates continues a constant issue (Government of Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission, 2025). Despite economic growth and educational advancements, rural areas lag behind in employment generation. This imbalance leads to the migration of educated youth to urban centres, hindering rural economic sustainability (Keiko, 2011; Jeyarajan, 2022).

The Tamil Nadu government recognizes the capability for entrepreneurship to transform its rural economy. Regardless, living self-employment enterprises have been discovered to be insufficient in ensuring constant gain or protection. Therefore, well-arranged skill growth, mentoring, and infrastructure development are needed to transform rural entrepreneurship into a sustainable solution (Information Technology and Digital Service Department Government of Tamil Nadu, 2025).

Skills for Sustainable Rural Entrepreneurship

According to Balraj & Velmurugan (2017), Effective rural entrepreneurs in Tamil Nadu need an expansive range of skills, including entrepreneurial, communication, technical, and collaborative competencies. These skills allow them to adjust to altering business environments and motivate their teams. However, many rural entrepreneurs still lack awareness of available training opportunities. Targeted government-supported training programs can address this gap and enhance entrepreneurial outcomes.

Likewise, Chukwu & Igwe (2012) highlight the essential for incorporating entrepreneurial education into the academic curriculum, particularly in regions with high youth unemployment. This study recommends that students should be encouraged to develop an interest in entrepreneurship and related skills through the college and school curriculum. Such education reform, integrated with guidance schedules and supportive policies, could foster a new generation of successful entrepreneurs capable of addressing both unemployment and regional underdevelopment.

2. Research Gap:

Various education and procedures have highlighted entrepreneurship as a possible method to decrease graduate unemployment. Namely, the text Promoting Entrepreneurship to Reduce Graduate Unemployment (2022) examines how entrepreneurship can create career through the organized efforts of government, educational institutions, and the private sector. However, this career lacks a detailed examination of the unique socio-economic realities faced by rural graduates, especially in states like Tamil Nadu. The challenges related to infrastructure, rural-graduates mindset, and access to entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas remain underexplored.

Similarly, Balraj & Velmurugan (2017) identify key skill sets (soft skills, technical skills, business and communication skills) necessary for rural entrepreneurial success. By assessing the extent to which rural graduates have developed these skills, the government and educational institutions can determine the specific training and support required. This approach can help address unemployment and foster entrepreneurial success, aligning with the core objective of this research.

Additionally, while many studies discuss the "education-to-employment mismatch," they do not specifically explore which entrepreneurial sectors rural graduates prefer, what local markets or infrastructure limitations exist, or how to align academic curricula with entrepreneurial aspirations at the grassroots level.

Additionally, educational institutions are often expected to encourage entrepreneurship, it remains unclear whether they are truly equipping rural students with the skills and opportunities needed for entrepreneurial success, or merely creating surface-level awareness through workshops and seminars.
Even though existing works recognize entrepreneurship as a favorable key to graduate unemployment, it lacks a focused investigation into the real-world challenges, skill gaps, institutional contributions, and policy support faced by rural graduates in Tamil Nadu. There is a serious gap in knowledge about how successfully educational institutions, government initiatives, and private supporters team to help rural entrepreneurship. Moreover, the cultural barriers, sector-specific aspirations, and infrastructure limitations unique to rural regions remain under-researched. Thus, this analysis digs into these gaps by examining the entrepreneurial competencies, barriers, and institutional roles in promoting entrepreneurship among rural graduates in Tamil Nadu (Gbore & Simon-Oke, 2020).

.3. METHODOLOGY:

To support rural students in achieving entrepreneurial success, a study was conducted among 630 final-year students from Arts and Science colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, located in Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, South India. Primary data was gathered using a questionnaire involving of Multiple-choice questions and statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, designed in alignment with specific research objectives. Additionally, insights gathered from various literature reviews helped in developing a model aimed at fostering graduate entrepreneurship success.

3.1 Objectives of Study:

- To assess the employment preferences and skill readiness (soft, technical, and educational) of rural graduates in Tirunelveli district, with a focus on their interest in entrepreneurship.
- To identify the key motivational factors and challenges influencing rural graduates' decision to pursue entrepreneurship.
- To evaluate the availability, awareness, and effectiveness of institutional, infrastructural, and policy-based support systems that facilitate entrepreneurial development among rural graduates.

4. Study Analysis and Interpretations:

This portion shows a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected from 630 final-year rural graduates studying in Arts and Science colleges affiliated with Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli district. The analysis covers entrepreneurship interest, self-assessed competencies, institutional support, infrastructure expectations, and entrepreneurship-related challenges. The results are interpreted using descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and factor analysis.

TABLE OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL INTEREST AMONG RURAL GRADUATES'

Analysis Area	Value
Entrepreneurship Interest	92.1% (580 of 630)
Soft Skills – KMO	0.535
Soft Skills - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Soft Skill (Mean)	Adaptability (4.21)
Lowest Soft Skill (Mean)	Verbal Communication (3.68)
Technical Skills – KMO	0.747
Technical Skills - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Technical Skill (Mean)	Digital Communication (4.27)
Lowest Technical Skill (Mean)	Professional Email Writing (3.54)
Academic Knowledge – KMO	0.628
Academic Knowledge - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Academic Factor (Mean)	Subject Knowledge (4.02)
Lowest Academic Factor (Mean)	Hands-on Project (3.70)
Entrepreneurial Influence – KMO	0.607
Entrepreneurial Influence - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Influence Factor (Mean)	Desire for Independence (4.75)

Support System – KMO	0.773
Support System - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Support Factor (Mean)	Mentorship (4.48)
Infrastructure – KMO	0.621
Infrastructure - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Infrastructure Factor (Mean)	Market Access (4.11)
Entrepreneurship Challenges - KMO	0.785
Entrepreneurship Challenges - Bartlett's Sig.	0
Top Challenge Factor (Mean)	Lack of Finance (4.23)

4.1 Entrepreneurial Interest and Skill Confidence

From the 630 respondents, 580 (92.1%) conveyed interest in aiming entrepreneurship, Any of the two part-time or full-time. Within these:

- 520 (89.7%) preferred part-time entrepreneurship.
- 60 (10.3%) opted for full-time entrepreneurship.

A cross-tabulation revealed that:

- 34% of part-time entrepreneurship aspiring graduates and 31.7% of full-time aspiring graduates noticed sure about keeping the required skills to form a business.
- Around 51% of both groups reported having partial skills.

Interpretation:

Rural graduates show strong entrepreneurial interest, specifically in part-time enterprises, although a majority feel only partially equipped with the necessary skills. This highlights a significant gap in skill readiness despite motivation.

4.2 Self-Evaluation of Soft Skills

Factor assessment verified that the soft skill dataset was adequate (KMO = 0.535; Sig. = 0.000). Descriptive research highlighted:

- Highest average: Adaptability to new work environments (M = 4.21)
- Lowest average: Verbal communication in English (M = 3.68)

Understanding:

Rural graduates show strength in adaptability and written communication, but struggle with verbal English communication — a critical area for entrepreneurial and employability development.

4.3 Self-Evaluation of Technical Skills

Having good sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.747), the descriptive statistics displayed:

- Most intense skills: Digital communication tools (M = 4.27), basic computer operations (M = 4.22)
- Most delicate skills: Writing professional emails (M = 3.54), data visualization (M = 3.79)

Understanding:

While rural graduates are digitally aware, their weaknesses in advanced communication and interpretation tools suggest the need for focused digital upskilling.

4.4 Academic Knowledge and Employability Readiness

Academic learning was measured in two distinct categories.

- High strength: Clear knowledge of major subjects (M = 4.02)
- Weaknesses: Practical application and project experience (M = 3.70–3.78)

Interpretation:

Theoretical knowledge is strong, but hands-on learning and real-world application are underdeveloped, indicating a gap between academic learning and entrepreneurial readiness.

4.5 Motivational Factors on Entrepreneurship

Factor analysis confirmed the data's suitability (KMO = 0.607). The Leading motivations were:

- Aspiration for independence (M = 4.75)
- Passion for business idea (M = 4.32)

Understanding:

Autonomy and personal passion are the key drivers for entrepreneurship. Structural motivators like lack of jobs or income were less influential, indicating a positive entrepreneurial mindset.

4.6 Support Systems for Entrepreneurship

Support systems were validated (KMO = 0.773). Top supports expected:

- Mentorship (M = 4.48)
- Family support (M = 4.17)
- Online resources and business programs (M = 4.00+)

Understanding:

Graduates seek strong mentorship and family encouragement. This highlights the importance of community-based entrepreneurial ecosystems and mentorship platforms.

4.7 Infrastructure Expectations

Data was moderately suitable (KMO = 0.621). Top expected infrastructure:

- Market access (M = 4.11)
- Internet access (M = 4.09)
- Digital marketing support (M = 4.07)

Understanding:

Digital infrastructure and market connectivity are top infrastructure needs. These findings support targeted rural infrastructure policy recommendations.

4.8 Challenges to Rural Entrepreneurship

Sampling adequacy was high (KMO = 0.785). Top challenges:

- Lack of finance (M = 4.23)
- Lack of awareness of government schemes (M = 3.94)
- Competition and inadequate transport (M = 3.82–4.05)

Understanding:

Financial access and lack of government scheme awareness are critical barriers. These insights suggest a need for microfinance access and widespread scheme literacy.

5. Rural Graduate Entrepreneurship Success Model:

This research presents a model under the title of Soft Skills, Technical Skills, Entrepreneurial Skills, Academic Skills, and Government and Education Institution Support Through Entrepreneurship Interested Graduates. This model was developed with the aim of creating the best model for success in rural entrepreneurship for graduates, based on a literature review and a study conducted among rural entrepreneurship-interested graduates in the Tirunelveli region. The research provides the following explanation for this model.

5.1 Soft Skills:

In various research, soft skills like adaptability, communication skills, leadership skills, and problem-solving skills have been commonly identified as important for the development of rural graduates, whether for employment or entrepreneurship success. Recent research on achieving successful entrepreneurship further identified the need for all these skills. This research has included these in the skills required for entrepreneurship success.

5.2 Technical Skills:

Technical skills where rural graduates are lagging have been identified. For rural entrepreneurship success, technical skills such as computer operating, digital communication, and industry-needed technology were identified. Generally, in today's technology-updated world, computer operation is considered a very basic need. Digital communication is important because current communication networks are based on digital technology. Digital communication is identified as a crucial skill to survive in today's labour market. Furthermore, industry-needed technology refers to the necessity for entrepreneurs to learn the technology that will be helpful for their chosen business. This research broadly includes these under the term 'industry-needed technology'.

5.3 Academic Skills:

No individual research has specifically studied the importance of academic skills for entrepreneurship success. However, we have considered academic skills as important for entrepreneurship success because this research aims to highlight its importance to graduating students. We want to emphasize that they should effectively utilize the subject knowledge gained through their academic curriculum and the opportunities like internships and projects that provide labour market experience. This is necessary for their entrepreneurship success. The explanation for how it is needed is that the subject knowledge gained through their curriculum helps students develop adaptability, sustainability, a new learning process, and practical knowledge. This research has identified that this provides excellent knowledge and experience

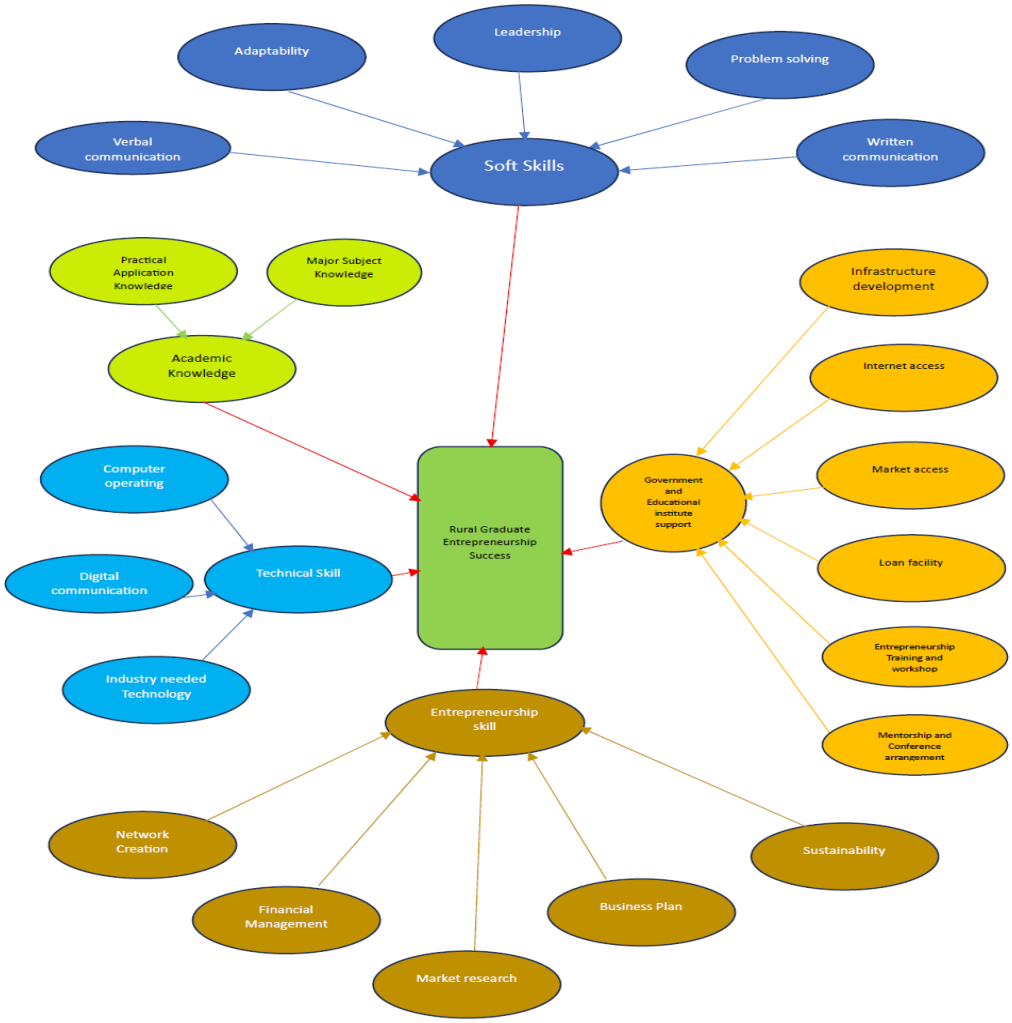
for handling all situations they may face in their future entrepreneurship journey and has recommended that academic skills are also important for the entrepreneurship success model.

5.5 Entrepreneurial Skills:

Based on the research paper by Chegg India under the title "Successful Entrepreneurs in India"(Kundanika, 2025) and various literature reviews on entrepreneurship, this research has identified skills like network creation, financial management, market research, business planning, and sustainability under the heading of "Entrepreneurial Skills." Network creation is an important skill for an entrepreneur because building a strong network is crucial for success in entrepreneurship. Furthermore, financial management is also a key skill needed in entrepreneurship. Market research, business planning, and sustainability are all important skills required for an entrepreneur to become successful in their venture. This research has included these as crucial skills in this model.

5.6 Government and Education Institution Support:

Research has identified through various studies that government and education institution support is very necessary for rural entrepreneurship success. Under the name of government support, the research has considered infrastructure development, internet access, market access, and loan facilities. Furthermore, through education institution support, entrepreneurship training and workshops should be provided to graduates effectively through collaboration between education institutions, government, and private institutions. This research, through the Nigerian model, has identified that arranging mentorship and conferences under the collaboration of government and education institutions is a way for graduates to achieve success in entrepreneurship. This research also recommends that necessary policies should be created for rural graduates' entrepreneurship success and that training and awareness programs should be conducted to effectively inform students about the approach of these policies. As mentioned below the Rural Entrepreneurship Success model:



6.FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS:

Through the data analysis is understood that 92% of students having part-time and full-time entrepreneurship interest indicates that rural graduates naturally have an inclination to start a business. However, among these, 89.7% of rural graduates showed their entrepreneurship interest only as part-time. This data suggests that their primary choice is employment. Even though there is an opportunity for economic development if their part-time business idea is fulfilled, this finding highlights a situation where the pressure for employment in the labour market will continue. Furthermore, their entrepreneurship attitude was observed under the question "Graduation Confidence and Starting a Business". The results, showing 34% for part-time and 31.7% for full-time, indicate that they have a moderate level of confidence in starting a business.

By analysing the soft skills required to ensure the success of rural graduates, adaptability and written communication were identified as strengths, while verbal communication was recognized as a delicate skill. This research brings out that a positive outcome is likely if adaptability plays a significant role. At the same time, the identified weak skill (verbal communication in English) is advised by the research to be addressed by the government through educational institutions, ensuring a better environment for rural higher education students to improve their verbal communication in English.

Through the technical skill analysis of rural graduates, the study has found that today's generation of graduates know how to use computer operations and digital communication. Furthermore, the study understands that they are in a state of mind where they can easily grasp deep technical training if provided, giving an insight into rural students in Tamil Nadu.

The analysis of academic knowledge shows that while they are good in major subject knowledge, the study reveals they are weak in practical application and project experience. The results indicate that their employability skills will only be complete when this academic knowledge is combined with practical knowledge. However, the lack of practical knowledge creates an employability gap, leading to a situation where they continue to face unemployment and underemployment. The study recommends that it is important for institutions to make students understand the importance of practical, internships, and projects given through academic education and that educational institutions, with responsibility, should help students with this, which the government should ensure.

Rural graduates have cited their interest and passion as the reasons that stimulate their entrepreneurship interest. This finding indicates that the social environment of the students is favourable and creates a belief that they will succeed.

Under the analysis of the support system for rural graduates in entrepreneurship, they have mentioned mentorship and family support. The study recommends that mentorship help should be provided to rural students by the government and educational institutions. It is not a practical solution for only the students in rural areas to have the desire for entrepreneurship success; their parents should also accept it, trust the students, and allow them. To address this, the study recommends that training and workshops involving parents should be conducted.

Under the analysis of "Infrastructure Expectation," data collected from rural graduates regarding infrastructure needed for rural entrepreneurship reveals the importance of market access, internet access, and digital marketing support. The study suggests that when the government successfully implements efforts to provide this infrastructure, rural entrepreneurship development in Tamil Nadu will be significantly enhanced.

Under the analysis of "Challenges of Rural Entrepreneurship," lack of finance is identified first. Although various government policies are favourable for rural graduate entrepreneurship, the government and educational institutions must ensure that entrepreneurs have a good understanding of them. That is, the study suggests that the government should facilitate both the implementation of policies and their effective reach to educated young people in rural areas who are interested in entrepreneurship.

7. Conclusions:

This study conducted with rural graduates interested in entrepreneurship shows that rural students understand entrepreneurship and recognize its potential to increase their personal income.

This research recommends that rural graduates interested in entrepreneurship should receive necessary soft skills, technical skills, practical experience, and knowledge effectively through educational institutions. Mentorship should be provided to these graduates through collaboration between educational institutions and the government.

It also suggests that their entrepreneurial endeavours will succeed when market access, internet facilities, and frequent transport are well-established through government and private collaboration.
when the successful use of these resources for entrepreneurship success becomes the responsibility not only of the rural graduate entrepreneurs but also of their parents, educational institutions, and the government, the economic development of all parts of our country, without distinction between rural and urban areas, will be significantly enhanced.

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