

## A STUDY ON ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN TIRUNELVELI

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### KEYWORDS

*Entrepreneurial orientation,  
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### Abstract

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) among youth is widely recognised as a catalyst for economic development and employment generation, yet empirical evidence from Tier-II Indian cities, particularly among college student populations, remains sparse. This study investigates the entrepreneurial orientation of college students in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, examining five interrelated dimensions: individual EO traits, influencing factors, institutional support, ecosystem awareness, and perceived barriers. A structured questionnaire was administered to 72 college students selected through convenience sampling across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA, chi-square tests, and Pearson correlation. The findings reveal a moderately high overall EO score ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$  on a 5-point scale), with resilience in failure ( $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ) and goal-orientation ( $\bar{x} = 3.97$ ) as the strongest individual traits. Inspirational role models were the most influential external factor ( $\bar{x} = 3.79$ ), while awareness of financial assistance mechanisms was the lowest-rated ecosystem variable ( $\bar{x} = 2.81$ ). ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in EO scores across courses of study ( $F = 5.303, p = 0.002$ ). Pearson correlation confirmed significant positive associations between institutional college support and EO ( $r = 0.418, p = 0.0003$ ) and between entrepreneurial ecosystem awareness and EO ( $r = 0.290, p = 0.013$ ). Lack of mentorship and guidance emerged as the most severe perceived barrier ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ). The study offers evidence-based recommendations for institutions, policy-makers, and educators seeking to strengthen entrepreneurial culture among students in non-metropolitan contexts.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as a critical driver of economic growth, innovation, and employment creation, particularly in emerging economies such as India. With over 65% of its population below the age of 35 years, India's demographic dividend presents a singular opportunity to harness youthful energy and creativity for entrepreneurial value creation (NASSCOM, 2023). In this

context, understanding entrepreneurial orientation (EO) broadly defined as an individual's propensity to identify opportunities, take calculated risks, and pursue innovative action in business among college students is of strategic importance for institutions, policy-makers, and industry stakeholders.

The Government of India has actively cultivated an entrepreneurial

ecosystem through landmark initiatives such as Startup India (2016), Atal Innovation Mission (2016), Stand-Up India, and the National Entrepreneurship Awards. Tamil Nadu, with its robust network of educational institutions and small and medium enterprises, has emerged as one of India's leading states for startup activity. Yet the benefits of this ecosystem have been unevenly distributed, with Tier-II cities such as Tirunelveli receiving comparatively less scholarly and policy attention than metropolitan centres such as Chennai and Coimbatore.

Tirunelveli, historically a commercial hub of southern Tamil Nadu, hosts a dense network of arts, science, and professional colleges affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University. These institutions enrol thousands of students annually across diverse disciplines students who represent a large, largely untapped reservoir of potential entrepreneurial talent. Understanding the factors that shape, enable, or inhibit their entrepreneurial orientation is thus both academically significant and practically urgent.

### 1.1 Research Gap

While a growing body of literature examines student entrepreneurship in metropolitan India (Bhat & Singh, 2018; Nabi et al., 2017), there is a conspicuous dearth of empirical studies focusing specifically on college students in Tier-II cities of southern Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, most existing studies address only individual attitude or intention dimensions, neglecting the broader ecosystem including institutional support, government scheme awareness, and perceived barriers that together constitute

the entrepreneurial environment. The present study addresses these gaps through a multi-dimensional investigation of entrepreneurial orientation in Tirunelveli.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualisation of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) at the individual level draws from a rich tradition of scholarship. Miller (1983) first articulated EO as a firm-level construct comprising innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness, a tripartite model that has been widely adapted to individual-level analysis in entrepreneurship education research. Lumpkin & Dess (1996) expanded this model by adding competitive aggressiveness and autonomy, while subsequent scholars have emphasised self-efficacy as a critical mediator of EO and entrepreneurial intention.

Linan & Chen (2009) proposed the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ), grounding entrepreneurial intention within Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Their work established that personal attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are robust predictors of entrepreneurial intention among university students findings replicated across multiple cross-cultural settings. Krueger et al. (2000) similarly demonstrated that entrepreneurial intentions are better predicted by antecedent beliefs than by situational variables alone.

In the Indian context, Bhat & Singh (2018) studied entrepreneurial intent among MBA students in northern India and found that self-efficacy and access to capital were the two most influential

determinants. Paray & Kumar (2020) examined the role of entrepreneurship education in shaping entrepreneurial attitude among students in Jammu and Kashmir, finding that structured exposure to entrepreneurial content significantly elevated perceived desirability and feasibility of new venture creation.

Regarding institutional factors, Fayolle & Gailly (2015) conducted a longitudinal study across European universities and found that entrepreneurship programmes produced significantly higher entrepreneurial intentions compared to control groups—though the effects were moderated by programme design and instructor enthusiasm. Solesvik et al. (2014) demonstrated that university environments rich in practical industry engagement (visits, incubators, mentoring) were associated with significantly stronger entrepreneurial orientation than those relying solely on classroom instruction.

On the challenge dimension, Hessels & van Stel (2011) identified capital constraints, information asymmetry, and regulatory complexity as the dominant barriers to youth entrepreneurship in developing economies. More recently, Singh & Raghuvanshi (2012) found that Indian students perceived lack of mentorship and guidance as the most significant obstacle to new venture formation, a finding that resonates strongly with the present study's results.

Despite this rich international and national literature, studies specifically examining the multi-dimensional EO of college students in southern Tier-II Tamil Nadu cities remain absent, underscoring

the contextual originality of the present investigation.

### 3. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

#### 3.1 Research Objectives

- To analyse the socio-demographic profile of college student respondents in Tirunelveli.
- To measure the entrepreneurial orientation of students across five dimensions: individual traits, influencing factors, institutional support, ecosystem awareness, and perceived challenges.
- To identify the key individual-level entrepreneurial traits and external influence factors shaping student EO.
- To assess the quality of institutional (college) support for entrepreneurship and its relationship with overall EO.
- To examine student awareness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (government schemes, incubation, funding) and its relationship with EO.
- To statistically test the associations between demographic variables, course of study, income, and entrepreneurial orientation.

#### 3.2 Research Hypotheses

H<sub>10</sub>: There is no significant association between gender and entrepreneurial interest level.

H<sub>11</sub>: There is a significant association between gender and entrepreneurial interest level.

H<sub>20</sub>: There is no significant difference in entrepreneurial orientation scores across different courses of study.

H<sub>21</sub>: There is a significant difference in entrepreneurial orientation scores across different courses of study.

H<sub>30</sub>: There is no significant association between monthly family income and willingness to take business risks.

H<sub>31</sub>: There is a significant association between monthly family income and willingness to take business risks.

H<sub>40</sub>: There is no significant relationship between institutional college support and entrepreneurial orientation score.

H<sub>41</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between institutional college support and entrepreneurial orientation score.

H<sub>50</sub>: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem awareness and entrepreneurial orientation score.

H<sub>51</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem awareness and entrepreneurial orientation score.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive and analytical research design. A structured questionnaire was developed drawing on validated scales from the entrepreneurship education literature, including dimensions adapted from Miller (1983), Liñán & Chen (2009), and Fayolle & Gailly (2015). The instrument was distributed digitally via Google Forms during October - December 2020 to college students in Tirunelveli.

### 4.2 Sample and Sampling Method

Convenience sampling was employed to collect responses from 72

students across commerce, science, arts, and professional degree programmes in Tirunelveli. The sample included both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students. Although modest, the sample size is commensurate with primary survey-based studies on student entrepreneurship in comparable Indian Tier-II city settings (Paray & Kumar, 2020; Bhat & Singh, 2018).

### 4.3 Research Instrument

The questionnaire comprised 47 items organised into six sections: (i) socio-demographic profile (Q1–Q10); (ii) individual entrepreneurial orientation traits measured on a 5-point scale (Very Weak to Very Strong) across 10 items covering interest, risk-taking, creativity, initiative, self-confidence, decision-making, challenge orientation, failure resilience, and goal-setting (Q11–Q20); (iii) influencing factors covering family, peers, social media, role models, skills, financial background, and education (Q21–Q27); (iv) institutional support encompassing college environment, teacher motivation, syllabus quality, guidance, programmes, and industrial visits (Q28–Q34); (v) entrepreneurial ecosystem awareness including government schemes, financial assistance, incubation centres, startup institutions, legal procedures, online platforms, and training programmes (Q35–Q41); and (vi) perceived challenges (Q42–Q47).

### 4.4 Scoring and Reliability

Likert-scale responses were coded numerically: Very Strong / Very High / Fully Aware / Very Severe = 5; Strong / High / Aware = 4; Moderate / Somewhat = 3; Weak / Low / Slightly = 2; Very Weak /

Not Aware / Not a Challenge =

1. Composite scores were computed as mean values for each thematic section. The internal consistency of the 10-item EO scale (Q11–Q20) yielded an estimated Cronbach's  $\alpha \approx 0.78$ , indicating acceptable reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

#### 4.5 Statistical Analysis

Data were analysed using Python (pandas, scipy). Techniques employed included: (a) descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations); (b) chi-square test of independence for categorical associations; (c) one-way ANOVA for inter-group mean comparisons; and (d) Pearson product-moment correlation for continuous variable relationships. All tests were conducted at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

### 5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Socio-Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 72 respondents. Females dominated the sample (88.9%), reflecting the gender composition of commerce and arts colleges in Tirunelveli where the survey was primarily administered. The majority were aged 18–20 years (81.9%), in their third year of study (80.6%), and pursuing undergraduate programmes (88.9%). Commerce was the most prevalent discipline (59.7%), followed by Science (18.1%), Arts (12.5%), and Professional courses (9.7%). Nuclear families were more common (70.8%), and fathers were predominantly daily-wage earners (40.3%), while 75.0% of mothers were homemakers indicating a largely first-generation potential entrepreneur profile. The most common income bracket was Rs. 10,000 – Rs. 20,000 per month (34.7%).

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 72)**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	8	11.1
	Female	64	88.9
Age Group	Below 18	1	1.4
	18–20	59	81.9
	21–23	9	12.5
	Above 23	3	4.2
Course	Commerce	43	59.7
	Science	13	18.1
	Arts	9	12.5
	Professional	7	9.7
Level	Undergraduate (UG)	64	88.9
	Postgraduate (PG)	7	9.7
Year of Study	First Year	6	8.3
	Second Year	8	11.1
	Third Year	58	80.6
Family Type	Nuclear	51	70.8
	Joint	21	29.2

Father's Occupation	Daily Wage	29	40.3
	Self-Employed	15	20.8
	Private Sector	15	20.8
	Government	10	13.9
Monthly Income	Below Rs. 10,000	16	22.2
	Rs. 10,000 – Rs.20,000	25	34.7
	Rs. 20,000 – Rs. 30,000	8	11.1
	Above Rs.30,000	23	31.9

### 5.2 Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation Traits

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the ten individual EO trait items. The overall composite EO score was 3.73 (SD = 0.50), indicating a moderately high orientation towards entrepreneurship. 'Learning from failure and trying again' (Q19:  $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ) and 'setting and achieving goals consistently' (Q20:  $\bar{x} = 3.97$ ) registered the highest mean scores, suggesting that resilience and goal-directedness are the strongest latent entrepreneurial traits in the sample. In contrast, 'willingness to take calculated risks' (Q12:  $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ) and 'entrepreneurial interest' (Q11:  $\bar{x} = 3.60$ ) scored relatively lower, indicating that while students admire entrepreneurship, hesitancy around risk remains a significant psychological barrier.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Individual Entrepreneurial Orientation Traits (Q11-Q20)**

Q No.	Entrepreneurial Trait	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. Dev. ( $\sigma$ )
Q11	Strong interest in becoming an entrepreneur	3.60	0.85
Q12	Willingness to take calculated risks	3.42	0.78
Q13	Enjoyment of experimenting with new ideas	3.65	0.87
Q14	Creative thinking when solving problems	3.78	0.91
Q15	Taking initiative when identifying opportunities	3.76	0.76
Q16	Confidence in successfully running a business	3.50	0.90
Q17	Confidence in making independent decisions	3.83	0.95
Q18	Enjoyment of challenging and competitive tasks	3.77	0.80
Q19	Learning from failures and trying again	4.06	0.82
Q20	Setting and consistently achieving goals	3.97	0.77
	Overall EO Score (Composite Mean)	<b>3.73</b>	<b>0.50</b>

### 5.3 Factors Influencing Entrepreneurial Orientation

Table 3 summarises the influence of seven external and personal factors on student entrepreneurial orientation. Inspiration from successful entrepreneurs (Q24:  $\bar{x} = 3.79$ ) was the most influential factor, closely followed by education (Q27:  $\bar{x} = 3.63$ ) and personal skills (Q25:  $\bar{x} = 3.61$ ). Social media motivation (Q23:  $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ) ranked fourth, reflecting the increasingly important role of digital entrepreneurship narratives in shaping aspirations. Family support (Q21:  $\bar{x} = 3.48$ ) and peer encouragement (Q22:  $\bar{x} = 3.41$ ) registered moderate

influence, while financial background (Q26:  $\bar{x} = 3.32$ ) was the least influential factor—suggesting that students' EO is more strongly shaped by motivational and human capital factors than by inherited wealth.

**Table 3: Influence Factors on Entrepreneurial Orientation (Q21–Q27)**

Rank	Influence Factor	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Interpretation
1	Successful entrepreneurs inspire me (Q24)	3.79	High
2	Education influences entrepreneurial thinking (Q27)	3.63	High
3	Personal skills influence entrepreneurial plans (Q25)	3.61	High
4	Social media motivates entrepreneurship (Q23)	3.59	Moderate
5	Family support influences entrepreneurial interest (Q21)	3.48	Moderate
6	Friends encourage starting a business (Q22)	3.41	Moderate
7	Financial background influences business decisions (Q26)	3.32	Moderate

#### 5.4 Institutional (College) Support for Entrepreneurship

Table 4 presents respondents' ratings of their college's entrepreneurial support environment. Overall institutional support was rated positively, with all items scoring above 3.7 on the 5-point scale. Teacher motivation (Q29:  $\bar{x} = 3.96$ ) and industrial visits and workshops (Q34:  $\bar{x} = 3.96$ ) were the highest-rated dimensions—suggesting that human interaction and experiential learning are the most valued institutional inputs. College promotion of entrepreneurial activities (Q28:  $\bar{x} = 3.89$ ) and well-organised programmes (Q33:  $\bar{x} = 3.83$ ) also received positive ratings. Curriculum adequacy (Q30:  $\bar{x} = 3.74$ ) was the lowest-rated dimension, pointing to a gap between the inspirational college environment and the formal curriculum's capacity to translate motivation into actionable entrepreneurial knowledge.

**Table 4: Institutional Support for Entrepreneurship (Q28–Q34)**

Rank	Institutional Support Dimension	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Rating
1	Teachers motivate students towards entrepreneurship (Q29)	3.96	Good
2	Industrial visits and workshops are useful (Q34)	3.96	Good
3	College promotes entrepreneurial activities (Q28)	3.89	Good
4	Entrepreneurship programmes are well organised (Q33)	3.83	Good
5	College guidance is helpful for business ideas (Q32)	3.78	Good
6	College environment encourages innovation (Q31)	3.77	Good
7	Syllabus provides adequate entrepreneurial knowledge (Q30)	3.74	Good

#### 5.5 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Awareness

Table 5 reveals a significantly lower level of awareness across the entrepreneurial ecosystem dimensions compared to institutional support. Government start-up schemes (Q35:  $\bar{x} = 3.29$ ) and online platforms for start-ups (Q40:  $\bar{x} = 3.23$ ) were the best-known elements. However, knowledge of financial assistance mechanisms (Q36:  $\bar{x} = 2.81$ ) and incubation centres (Q37:  $\bar{x} = 2.92$ ) were notably low hovering below the mid-point of 3.0. This awareness gap between inspirational institutional exposure and actionable ecosystem knowledge represents a critical bottleneck in converting entrepreneurial orientation into entrepreneurial action.

**Table 5: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Awareness (Q35–Q41)**

Rank	Awareness Dimension	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Level
1	Awareness of government start-up schemes (Q35)	3.29	Moderate
2	Awareness of online platforms for start-ups (Q40)	3.23	Moderate
3	Understanding of legal procedures for starting a business (Q39)	3.08	Moderate
4	Awareness of training programmes for entrepreneurs (Q41)	3.03	Moderate
5	Knowledge of start-up support institutions (Q38)	2.95	Low
6	Awareness of incubation centres (Q37)	2.92	Low
7	Knowledge of how to apply for financial assistance (Q36)	2.81	Low

### 5.6 Perceived Challenges to Entrepreneurship

As shown in Table 6, all five perceived challenge dimensions registered moderate to high severity scores (between 3.53 and 3.73). Lack of guidance and mentors was rated the most severe barrier (Q45:  $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ), followed by lack of capital (Q42:  $\bar{x} = 3.65$ ), difficulty balancing studies and business (Q47:  $\bar{x} = 3.62$ ), and knowledge and market competition barriers (Q43/Q46:  $\bar{x} = 3.53$  each). The joint identification of mentorship scarcity and capital constraints as the primary barriers corroborates findings from Singh & Raghuvanshi (2012) and Hessels & van Stel (2011), reinforcing the need for structured mentorship ecosystems and student-accessible seed funding mechanisms.

**Table 6: Perceived Challenges to Entrepreneurship (Q42–Q47)**

Rank	Perceived Challenge	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Severity
1	Lack of guidance and mentors (Q45)	3.73	High
2	Lack of capital is a major challenge (Q42)	3.65	High
3	Balancing studies and business is difficult (Q47)	3.62	High
4	Lack of business knowledge (Q43)	3.53	Moderate
4	Market competition is challenging (Q46)	3.53	Moderate

## 5.7 Hypothesis Testing

### 5.7.1 Chi-Square Test: Gender and Entrepreneurial Interest Level

**Table 7: Chi-Square Test – Gender vs. Entrepreneurial Interest (Q11)**

Test	Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	Degrees of Freedom	p-value	Decision
Gender vs. Entrepreneurial Interest	4.378	3	0.223	$H_{10}$ Retained

Since  $p = 0.223 > 0.05$ ,  $H_{10}$  is retained (Table 7). There is no statistically significant association between gender and entrepreneurial interest level. Both male and female students display comparable distributions of interest in entrepreneurship, suggesting that gender is not a significant differentiator of entrepreneurial aspiration in this sample, a finding that aligns with recent studies emphasising the closing gender gap in entrepreneurial intention among educated youth in India (Bhat & Singh, 2018).

### 5.7.2 One-Way ANOVA: Course of Study and Entrepreneurial Orientation Score

**Table 8: One-Way ANOVA – Course of Study vs. Overall EO Score**

Test	F-Statistic	Degrees of Freedom	p-value	Decision
Course of Study vs. EO Score	5.303	3	0.002	$H_{20}$ Rejected

Since  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ ,  $H_{20}$  is rejected (Table 8). There is a statistically significant difference in entrepreneurial orientation scores across different courses of study. Arts students recorded the highest composite EO score ( $\bar{x} = 4.17$ ), followed by Professional ( $\bar{x} = 3.93$ ), Science ( $\bar{x} = 3.88$ ), and Commerce ( $\bar{x} = 3.57$ ). The relatively lower EO among Commerce students despite their discipline's direct relevance to business may reflect the large proportion of first-generation college students in commerce programmes for whom entrepreneurship is an aspiration rather than an immediate expectation. The high EO of Arts students may be attributable to the creative and autonomous nature of arts disciplines, which may nurture entrepreneurial thinking (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996).

### 5.7.3 Chi-Square Test: Monthly Family Income and Risk-Taking

**Table 9: Chi-Square Test – Monthly Family Income vs. Willingness to Take Business Risks (Q12)**

Test	Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )	Degrees of Freedom	p-value	Decision
Income vs. Risk-Taking	11.332	12	0.501	H <sub>30</sub> Retained

Since  $p = 0.501 > 0.05$ , H<sub>30</sub> is retained (Table 9). Monthly family income is not significantly associated with risk-taking orientation among students. This counter-intuitive finding suggests that in the student context, risk propensity is not strongly determined by socioeconomic background consistent with Ajzen's (1991) TPB, where personal attitude and subjective norms exert stronger influences on behavioural intention than situational financial constraints.

### 5.7.4 Pearson Correlation: College Support and EO Score

**Table 10: Pearson Correlation – Institutional College Support vs. EO Score**

Variables	Pearson r	n	p-value	Decision
College Support ↔ EO Score	0.418	72	0.0003	H <sub>40</sub> Rejected

The significant moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.418$ ,  $p = 0.0003$ ) between institutional college support and overall EO score confirms that students in more supportive institutional environments exhibit stronger entrepreneurial orientation. H<sub>40</sub> is rejected in favour of H<sub>40</sub>. This finding is consistent with Fayolle & Gailly (2015) and Solesvik et al. (2014), reinforcing the pivotal role of the institutional environment as a lever for entrepreneurship development (Table 10).

### 5.7.5 Pearson Correlation: Ecosystem Awareness and EO Score

**Table 11: Pearson Correlation – Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Awareness vs. EO Score**

Variables	Pearson r	n	p-value	Decision
Ecosystem Awareness ↔ EO Score	0.290	72	0.013	H <sub>50</sub> Rejected

The significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.290$ ,  $p = 0.013$ ) between entrepreneurial ecosystem awareness and EO score indicates that students who are more informed about the support landscape exhibit stronger entrepreneurial orientation. H<sub>50</sub> is rejected. This finding underscores the enabling role of information accessibility: exposure to government schemes, funding mechanisms, and startup platforms translates into stronger entrepreneurial self-belief and motivation (Table 11).

## 6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer a multi-dimensional and theoretically grounded portrait of entrepreneurial orientation among college students in Tirunelveli, advancing both the empirical literature and practical understanding of the conditions that foster or constrain youth entrepreneurship in Tier-II Indian cities.

The moderately high composite EO score ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ) is encouraging, yet the distribution of trait scores is revealing. The dominance of resilience ( $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ) and goal-orientation ( $\bar{x} = 3.97$ ) over risk-taking ( $\bar{x} = 3.42$ ) and entrepreneurial interest per se ( $\bar{x} = 3.60$ ) suggests that students in this cohort possess important entrepreneurial character attributes but lack the bold opportunity-seeking disposition central to Miller's (1983) and Lumpkin & Dess's (1996) EO conceptualisations. This is consistent with Hessels & van Stel (2011), who observed that in resource-constrained environments, risk aversion is a rational rather than purely psychological response.

The strong influence of inspirational role models ( $\bar{x} = 3.79$ ) and the prominent role of social media ( $\bar{x} = 3.59$ ) are consistent with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that observational learning from successful others is a primary mechanism of self-efficacy development. These findings have clear practical implications: role model exposure through entrepreneur talks, case study pedagogy, and curated digital content should be systematically integrated into college entrepreneurship curricula.

The significant ANOVA result ( $F = 5.303, p = 0.002$ ) confirming course-wise differences in EO is particularly

noteworthy. The higher EO of Arts students relative to Commerce students challenges the conventional assumption that business-oriented disciplines naturally produce stronger entrepreneurial orientation. It suggests that creativity, expressiveness, and autonomy hallmarks of arts education may be equally, if not more, generative of entrepreneurial disposition. This has implications for curriculum design: entrepreneurship education should be mainstreamed across all disciplines rather than confined to commerce and management departments.

The convergence of low ecosystem awareness scores (particularly for financial assistance at  $\bar{x} = 2.81$  and incubation centres at  $\bar{x} = 2.92$ ) with the significant positive correlation between awareness and EO ( $r = 0.290, p = 0.013$ ) highlights a critical information gap: students who aspire to entrepreneurship often lack knowledge of the very mechanisms designed to support them. Bridging this gap through structured entrepreneurial ecosystem orientation sessions within colleges could meaningfully elevate both awareness and EO levels.

The identification of mentorship scarcity as the most severe barrier ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ), alongside capital constraints ( $\bar{x} = 3.65$ ), reinforces findings from Singh & Raghuvanshi (2012) and is consistent with broader evidence from developing economy entrepreneurship studies. Mentorship programmes that connect students with successful local entrepreneurs facilitated by colleges, district industry centres, or startup ecosystems could directly address this gap.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS & CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Policy and Institutional Suggestions

- Colleges should establish structured entrepreneurship cells with designated mentors drawn from the local business community, directly addressing the most critical perceived barrier: lack of guidance ( $\bar{x} = 3.73$ ).
- Entrepreneurship education should be integrated as a compulsory or elective module across all disciplines including Arts and Science given the significant inter-disciplinary variation in EO scores (ANOVA:  $p = 0.002$ ).
- District-level bootcamps and awareness workshops on government startup schemes (Startup India, MUDRA, TANSTIA) should be organised within campuses to bridge the critical information gap in financial assistance awareness ( $\bar{x} = 2.81$ ).
- Incubation centres affiliated with Manonmaniam Sundaranar University should be actively promoted within affiliated colleges through regular orientation sessions, mentorship days, and prototype showcases.
- Student seed funds or micro-grants (even in the range of Rs. 5,000–Rs. 25,000) administered through college entrepreneurship committees can partially alleviate capital barriers for early-stage student ventures.
- Role model exposure through inspirational talks, industry visits, and curated social media content

should be systematically built into the entrepreneurship learning ecosystem, given the strong influence of role model inspiration ( $\bar{x} = 3.79$ ).

### 7.2 Conclusion

This study provides the first comprehensive empirical examination of entrepreneurial orientation among college students in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, across five interconnected dimensions. The findings reveal a student population that is moderately but genuinely entrepreneurially oriented, driven by resilience, goal-setting, and inspirational role models, yet constrained by risk aversion, insufficient ecosystem awareness, mentorship scarcity, and capital barriers. The significant association between course of study and EO score, and the positive correlations between institutional support, ecosystem awareness, and EO, establish clear evidence-based levers for educational and policy intervention. These findings contribute original, locally grounded empirical data to the Indian student entrepreneurship literature and offer actionable guidance for institutions, government agencies, and industry partners seeking to cultivate an entrepreneurial generation in Tirunelveli.

### 7.3 Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitations of this study include the convenience sampling approach and the predominantly female sample (88.9%), which may limit the generalisability of findings. The sample size of 72, while adequate for exploratory research, restricts the statistical power of sub-group analyses. Future research should employ stratified random sampling with gender-balanced and institution-diverse

samples. Longitudinal designs could track shifts in EO before and after exposure to entrepreneurship interventions. Structural equation modelling (SEM) would enable rigorous causal analysis of the relationships among institutional support, ecosystem awareness, self-efficacy, and entrepreneurial intention.

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