

Student entrepreneurship in Kerala-an interview report**Prof .Dr.HareeshRamanathan****Head of the Department****Toc-H Institute of Management, Arakunnam, Cochin-682313****Deepa Unnithan, Asst.Professor****Bhavan's Royal Institute of Management, Near Hill Palace****Thiruvankulam, Cochin-682305****ABSTRACT**

Student entrepreneurship is gaining traction in the state of Kerala with an unprecedented focused emphasis. A rigorous entrepreneurship vigour is instilled in the economy through various activities, start-up cells, student entrepreneurship policies , entrepreneurship education etc. Many youth have already taken the major step and started their own start-up ventures parallel to education or immediately after completion of course. In order to identify the salient nature of student entrepreneurs who are the torch bearers of start-up culture in Kerala,a set of 18 start-up firms operating in Kerala were visited and an interview was conducted among their founders using an interview schedule. This report summarises the results of interviews conducted with these student entrepreneurs in Kerala. All interviewees were those who ideated their business during their studentship itself. However their reasons for entrepreneurial intention were varied, with factors like passion, interest in self-mastery and lack of satisfactory campus placement opportunities. Most of them bank on the financial support from family for business and they shared their sentiments on the difficulty to avail funding from other publicised sources.

Keywords: student entrepreneurship, start-ups, entrepreneurial intention, business incubator

Student entrepreneurship in Kerala-an Interview report

The recent upsurge in student entrepreneurship in Kerala is a welcome move towards creation of a self-reliant generation. Considering the traditional 'good education, good job' attitude of Malayalis, this is a paradigm shift which would result in ripple effects in economy as a whole. To substantiate this development, Government has identified the student entrepreneurship in the state with needed emphasis and is working on a "Start –up Policy "meant to promote these student businesses.

In order to explore the salient nature of student entrepreneurs who are the torch bearers of start-up culture in Kerala, a set of 18 start-up firms operating in Kerala were visited and personal interview was conducted among their founders using an interview schedule .This is a report of interview summary which looks into the details of student entrepreneurship .

1. When did this business idea came to you?

Founders of all these 18 ventures had ideated their business during their studentship.15 of these business start- ups were conceptualised and developed by Engineering students during their college time ,non-technical students also has ventured to the start-up scene. Two firms were results of an early entrepreneurial spark sometime during schooldays itself.

2.When did you start business?

Though most of them started business paralleled with studies, a few others waited to finish course or even worked for a year or two after completing the course.

3. Are you a student now?

Out of these 18 business start-ups, founding members of 12 are currently pursuing their course, mostly in final years.

4. What is the reason for starting a business?

When asked about the reason for start-up, business owners of 12 ventures attributed it to their strong passion for entrepreneurship, which points towards an extremely high degree of entrepreneurial intention.3 firms were results of an interest to be self-mastered. Only one start-up was formed as an extension of family business and another one student business was due to lack of placement opportunity. One among these 18 start-ups was by students who set up a business for the need of supporting family at a very young age itself.

5. Elaborate about the formative structure of business.

From the response to this question, it can be understood that these start-up firms are fine products of teamwork among enterprising youngsters. Except for two, all were either friends group or other likeminded students coming together and working on a business idea.12 start-ups had 3-4 members in

their founding team and another 3 was formed by 2 members each. There were two cases which were run solely by the founder himself and one had 6 friends coming together to start business.

6.Can you tell me about the support from your family to your business?

This question raised mixed responses from the start-up firms. Family support was the main pillar of strength for 11 student entrepreneurs while seven are yet facing opposition from family for not pursuing a steady job than going after a business idea. Most of the youngsters in the latter group hope things will change as they progress in business.

7.How much support do you receive from your educational institution?

Only 9 out of 18 start-ups vouched on their support from educational institution, mostly by way of needed guidance and leeway in class attendance. This points towards the reality of implementation of Start-up support policy in educational institutions.

8.Were you inspired for business by your academic project?

Only 6 out of 18 start-ups were formed as an extension of the project done as part of their academic requirement.

9.What is your source of investment for business?

While half of these business start-ups were funded by families of its founders, the remaining half had risen the fund by themselves through other jobs. Still, not even a single student business which was studied, had been funded by any angel investor or bank loan. Difficulty in availing a bank loan for students was pointed out by many start-ups. Those business ideas which have got wide media attention had got offers from angel investors, but the high equity claim by them discouraged these youngsters to take up that offer.

10. What is your current stage of business development?

12 of these business start-ups, despite being less than 3 year old, are commercially generating business. Remaining 6 are in prototype stage. A few of them like Qbotics, Demustango etc. have got recognitions and popularity at their early stages itself.

11. Have you applied for any Intellectual Property Right for your business idea or product?

Out of these 18 novel business start-ups, only 2 have filed for patent application and is in processing. Most of the respondents are more concerned about the commercial success and are oriented towards that than protecting their Intellectual property.

12.What is your stream of education?

15 start ups were established by BTech students or BTech graduates .Start-ups by non -technical people like Blissing Doors and Bookmycruise proves larger scope of start-up culture. Sreedevi industries is run by 2 youngsters who decided to pursue their business interests right after their schooling.

13. Are you attached to any Business Incubators?

Only 6 out of 18 business start-ups were incubated under an incubator .Two of them were attached to TTBI-Thiruvananthapuram while 4 were incubated in Start-up Village-Cochin.

14.What are the challenges faced by you as a start-up business?

The main problems highlighted by the participants in the interview was related financial requirement .Inability to raise funds is hindering not only development, but commercialisation and expansion also. Those start-ups in their prototype stage are worried about techno-commercial feasibility of their product. Non-technical start-ups consider vulnerability to competition by established players as the main challenge. Though most of these start-ups are technically sound and innovative, lack of marketing skills of these student entrepreneurs is another major problem.

FINDINGS HIGHLIGHT

- 1.All start-ups participated in the interview were products of a business ideation which had essentially happened during studentship, despite the business was started simultaneously with studies or after completion of the course.
2. The entrepreneurial intention can be identified and worked upon even during school days itself, though it become obvious during later stages of college education.
3. The educational profile of student entrepreneurship in the state is primarily technical with more engineering students. But non-technical students have also started to join the foray.
4. A characteristically strong Entrepreneurial intention is supposed among students of Kerala, which needs empirical verification, as most of the business start-ups are running parallel with their education.
5. Family support for business, financial and non-financial, is not very encouraging for student entrepreneurs in Kerala.
6. Educational institutions are yet to provide the needed handholding to student business in Kerala at the required levels.
- 7.Team based formation by friends or likeminded youngsters are more ubiquitous than by a single individual.
8. Inspiration drawn from an academic project to start a business is comparatively less among Kerala students.

9. Despite several schemes, Student Entrepreneurs are facing difficulty in availing financial support from banks and other financial resources.
10. Though novel business ideas, most of the start-ups are not very much concerned about protecting the IP rights mostly due to lack of awareness and exclusive focus on commercial success.
11. Only a few start-ups participated in the study were attached to any business incubator and others are independently operating.
12. Inability to raise needed finance is a main problem confronted by the student entrepreneurs in Kerala at all stages of development.
13. Though most of these start-ups are technically sound and innovative, lack of marketing skills of these student entrepreneurs is another major problem.

CONCLUSION

Student entrepreneurship in Kerala is a promising move towards a much needed transformation for self-reliant economy. Though the young business people of Kerala are brimming with enthusiasm, the needed moral and material support is a poignant challenge they are facing. Further research is needed for identifying the level of Entrepreneurial Intention and ways of supporting it in a practical manner with active involvement of all stakeholders is required to churn in the positive benefits of this recent upsurge of student entrepreneurship.