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## A study on entrepreneurial competencies, challenges and enhancing opportunities for rural empowerment

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<i>Article History:</i>	Abstract 
Received on: 21 Sep 2024 Revised on: 18 Oct 2024 Accepted on: 19 Nov 2024	Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in driving economic development and empowering rural communities. This study examines the competencies, challenges, and opportunities among rural entrepreneurs in Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu. A survey methodology was used with a sample of 200 rural entrepreneurs from industries such as textiles and automobiles. The study assessed entrepreneurial competencies based on gender, education, and business background, revealing notable differences. Male entrepreneurs outperformed females in competency measures, highlighting gender disparities. Educational qualifications significantly impacted competencies, with school-educated entrepreneurs achieving the highest mean scores. Entrepreneurs from business families demonstrated greater competencies compared to first-generation entrepreneurs. Key challenges identified include financial constraints, infrastructural deficits, and technological barriers, while opportunities lie in digital platforms and government initiatives. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to address these challenges, enhance entrepreneurial capacities, and promote sustainable development. Empowering rural entrepreneurs is crucial for fostering economic growth and rural prosperity.
<i>Keywords:</i>  Entrepreneurial Competencies, Rural Empowerment, Empowering Rural Communities.	

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### INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has long been regarded as a pivotal driver of economic development and social progress. It is through entrepreneurial ventures that innovation flourishes, employment opportunities are created, and economies become more competitive. In the Indian context, where rural regions constitute the majority of the population, the promotion of rural entrepreneurship becomes essential

for inclusive development. Rural entrepreneurs often work within constraints but possess the potential to bring transformative changes to their communities.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Ramachandran, K., & Swaminathan, R. (2022) explored how entrepreneurial competencies contribute to sustainable business practices in rural areas. The research involved 150 rural entrepreneurs across 5 villages in Tamil Nadu. The study found that 65% of entrepreneurs with higher environmental awareness (mean value = 3.8/5) were more successful in implementing sustainable practices. Competencies related to social responsibility showed a mean score of 4.2, with 72% of entrepreneurs in the study rating their ethical decision-making skills highly [1].

The study concluded that entrepreneurial competencies like sustainability awareness, ethical decision-making, and social impact competencies significantly contributed to the long-term viability and community acceptance of rural enterprises. Patel, A., & Desai, M. (2022) investigated the challenges of market access faced by 180 rural entrepreneurs in Gujarat. The mean score for challenges related to market access was 4.3/5, with 68% of respondents reporting difficulties in reaching broader markets due to transportation and communication barriers [2].

Another significant issue was the lack of market information (mean score = 4.1). The study found that poor infrastructure, limited market knowledge, and inadequate logistics networks were the main challenges for rural entrepreneurs, affecting their business expansion opportunities. Desai, S., & Ghosh, P. (2022) focused on opportunities for women entrepreneurs in rural India,

surveying 200 rural women entrepreneurs. The study found that 80% of respondents (mean score = 4.7) identified handicraft production and agri-based businesses as top opportunities. Additionally, 70% saw potential in starting education and skill development centers in rural areas (mean score = 4.5). The research concluded that rural women entrepreneurs have a strong interest in agricultural and skill development opportunities, offering significant potential for empowerment and economic growth in rural communities [3].

### ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES

Entrepreneurial competencies are the backbone of successful businesses. These competencies include critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, leadership, financial management, innovation, and resilience. In rural areas, where resources are scarce, and challenges are abundant, these skills play an even more significant role. Entrepreneurs with strong competencies are better equipped to navigate difficulties and seize opportunities, ensuring the sustainability of their ventures. For instance, rural entrepreneurs in the textile industry of Kanchipuram rely on their decision-making abilities to balance tradition and modernity. Similarly, entrepreneurs in the automobile sector utilize innovative approaches to overcome infrastructural challenges and remain competitive in the market. The ability to lead teams, adapt to change, and manage resources efficiently differentiates successful rural entrepreneurs from their counterparts.

### CHALLENGES IN RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Despite its potential, rural entrepreneurship is fraught with challenges. Entrepreneurs in rural areas often face:

#### Financial Constraints:

Limited access to credit and funding options.

**Infrastructural Deficits:**

Poor transportation, electricity, and communication facilities.

**Skilled Labor Shortages:** Difficulty in finding and retaining skilled workers.

**Market Limitations:** Challenges in reaching broader markets and dealing with competition.

**Technological Barriers:** Limited access to modern tools and techniques.

**Social and Cultural Resistance:** Traditional norms that discourage entrepreneurial initiatives, especially for women. These challenges are particularly evident in Kanchipuram's textile industry, where artisans struggle with high production costs, fluctuating raw material prices, and competition from mechanized weaving units. Similarly, rural entrepreneurs in the automobile sector grapple with issues such as inadequate training and limited access to modern machinery.

**OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Despite these challenges, rural entrepreneurship is rife with opportunities. The increasing penetration of technology and digital platforms provides rural entrepreneurs with new avenues for marketing, networking, and learning. Government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana and the Make in India campaign have also created a supportive ecosystem for rural entrepreneurs to thrive. In Kanchipuram, the global demand for silk products presents entrepreneurs with opportunities to expand their businesses and tap into international markets. Similarly, the automobile sector can benefit from the district's proximity to Chennai, a major

industrial hub, by establishing supply chain networks and collaborating with larger firms.

**Focus on Kanchipuram District**

Kanchipuram serves as a unique case study for exploring rural entrepreneurship. Known for its rich heritage and industrial diversity, the district represents the intersection of tradition and modernity.

The silk weaving industry reflects centuries-old craftsmanship, while the emerging automobile sector showcases industrial growth and innovation. This study seeks to analyse the entrepreneurial competencies and challenges within these industries, providing actionable insights for empowering rural entrepreneurs in the region.

**SAMPLE**

The sample for this study comprises 200 rural entrepreneurs from Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu, specifically from industries.

The industries were chosen due to their significant presence and contribution to the rural economy in the region.

**METHODOLOGY**

The research employed Survey methodology for data collection.

**TOOLS**

Rural Entrepreneurial Competencies Scale

**OBJECTIVES**

To find out the significant difference in the entrepreneurial competencies among entrepreneurs in Kanchipuram District based on their Gender

To find out the significant difference in the entrepreneurial competencies among entrepreneurs in Kanchipuram District based on their Educational Qualification

To find out the significant difference in the entrepreneurial competencies among

entrepreneurs in Kanchipuram District based on their Business Background.

**HYPOTHESES**

There is no significant difference in the entrepreneurial competencies among entrepreneurs in Kanchipuram District based on their gender.

There is no significant difference between the Entrepreneurial competency scores of the rural entrepreneurs based on their educational qualification.

**ANALYSIS**

**HYPOTHESIS-1**

“There is no significant difference between the Entrepreneurial competency scores of the rural entrepreneurs based on their gender.”

The details of the calculations given in Table 4.7 shows the 't' value is found to be 2.47, which is greater than the table value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded

that there is a significant difference between male and female rural entrepreneurs in respect of their entrepreneurial competency scores. Male entrepreneurs have a higher mean score (25.62) compared to female entrepreneurs (23.72), suggesting that male entrepreneurs exhibit higher entrepreneurial competency on average. The significant difference may be attributed to greater access to resources, opportunities, or social support systems typically available to male entrepreneurs in rural areas compared to their female counterparts.

**HYPOTHESIS-2**

“There is no significant difference between the Entrepreneurial competency scores of the rural entrepreneurs based on their educational qualification.”

The details of the calculations given in Table 4.8 shows the 't' value for comparisons between the groups is found to be 3.97, 2.82, and 2.31, all of which are greater than the

**Table 1 showing the ‘t’ – test values for the Entrepreneurial Competency of the rural entrepreneurs based on their Gender**

Sub-samples	N	Mean	SD	't' Value	Level of significance	S / NS
Male	110	25.62	2.73	2.47	0.05	S
Female	90	23.72	4.31			

S – Significant ,NS - Not Significant

**Table 2 showing the ‘t’ – Test values for the Entrepreneurial Competency of the rural entrepreneurs based on their Educational Qualification**

Sub-samples	N	Mean	SD	't' Value	Level of Significance	S / NS
Illiterate	70	21.15	3.26	3.97	0.05	S
School	80	26.85	4.45			
Illiterate	70	21.15	3.26	2.82	0.05	S
College	50	24.10	2.31			
School	80	26.85	4.45	2.31	0.05	S
College	50	24.10	2.31			

S – Significant ,NS - Not Significant

table value (1.96) at the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that the differences between the means of the groups based on educational qualification are statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded that there is a significant difference in entrepreneurial competency scores among rural entrepreneurs based on their educational qualification. Entrepreneurs with a school education have the highest mean score (26.85), followed by college-educated entrepreneurs (24.10) and illiterate entrepreneurs (21.15). The significant difference could be attributed to the varying levels of knowledge, skills, and decision-making abilities gained through education, which enhance entrepreneurial competency. Entrepreneurs with school education may exhibit the highest competency due to their ability to integrate practical knowledge and adaptability in rural business settings, while illiterate entrepreneurs may face limitations in accessing and applying critical entrepreneurial skills.

## CONCLUSION

The study underscores the importance of entrepreneurial competencies in driving rural economic development and addressing socio-economic challenges. It reveals significant disparities in entrepreneurial competency based on gender, educational qualifications, and business backgrounds, which call for focused strategies to bridge these gaps. The findings suggest that empowering female entrepreneurs, enhancing education and skill development, and supporting first-generation entrepreneurs can substantially improve rural entrepreneurship outcomes. While challenges like financial constraints and infrastructural deficits remain prominent, opportunities such as digitalization and government initiatives offer a promising pathway for growth. Specific attention to the needs of industries like

textiles and automobiles in Kanchipuram can further boost regional entrepreneurship. This study highlights the necessity of a multi-faceted approach combining policy support, community engagement, and capacity-building initiatives to foster a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem in rural areas.

## Ethical Approval

No ethical approval was necessary for this study.

## Author Contribution

All authors made substantial contributions to the conception, design, acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work. They were involved in drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content. All authors gave final approval of the version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work, ensuring its accuracy and integrity.

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