TPM Vol. 32, No. S8, 2025
ISSN: 1972-6325
https://www.tpmap.org/

Open Access

ASSESSING ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION AND PERCEPTION OF SUPPORT MECHANISMS: A STUDY OF POSTGRADUATES IN INDIA (DELHI NCR)

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Abstract
This research investigates the entrepreneurial inclination of postgraduate students in Delhi NCR, focusing on their awareness and perception of government support and design thinking methodologies. Nearly half of the 212 participants in the study, who came from a variety of academic backgrounds, showed a strong interest in or active inclination toward entrepreneurship. However, there were still major obstacles, such as a lack of knowledge, mentorship, and financial resources. Despite broad faith in the government's intent to promote entrepreneurship, specific awareness of support schemes and access remained low, with only a quarter of entrepreneurially inclined students perceiving government policies as beneficial or accessible. Although there was little exposure to design thinking workshops, there was a high conceptual understanding of its importance in user-centric solutions and business innovation. The findings highlight the need for improved visibility, accessibility, and curriculum integration for government support and design thinking, offering actionable insights for educational institutions and policymakers to nurture an effective entrepreneurial ecosystem among postgraduate students.
Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Intention, Entrepreneur, Perception, Design Thinking, Government Support, Postgraduate Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship stands as one of the cornerstones of modern economic development, driving innovation, creating job opportunities, and stimulating economic growth. It involves the process of identifying opportunities, taking calculated risks, and innovating to create products or services that meet unmet needs in the market. Entrepreneurship is, ultimately, a dynamic and competitive business environment that can elevate entire communities and nations (Shane, 2009; Drucker, 1985). In this context, understanding entrepreneurship is not just a matter of business development but a crucial element for the broader economic health of any society.

The importance of entrepreneurship to an economy cannot be overstated. Entrepreneurs are the catalysts of change, introducing new technologies, processes, and business models that not only benefit their ventures but also contribute to the broader economic ecosystem (Baumol, 2002). They drive job creation, increase productivity, and diversify economies, particularly in emerging markets. Entrepreneurship has become a key driving force to economic growth, societal well-being, and poverty reduction (Acs & Varga, 2005).

At the heart of this entrepreneurial dynamism is government support, which plays an essential role in cultivating the necessary environment for business ventures to thrive. While individual entrepreneurs may drive innovation, it is government intervention that creates the framework in which they can succeed. Policies and initiatives such as tax incentives, funding opportunities, infrastructure development, and legal frameworks are designed to lower barriers for entrepreneurs and encourage them to take risks. Government ventures such as Startup India, for example, help entrepreneurs by providing financial support, mentoring, and access to networks so as help them transform their ideas into successful enterprises (Singh, 2016). These

measures significantly reduce the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and foster a thriving startup culture (OECD, 2017).

However, to fully leverage the opportunities that entrepreneurship provides, it is imperative for the youth to understand its significance. Global youth unemployment is on the increase, especially in emerging economies, and entrepreneurial thinking can be a strategic response for young people. Entrepreneurship enables youth to create job opportunities for themselves and others, contributing to economic resilience. Furthermore, developing an entrepreneurial mindset at an early age nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities—skills that are necessary to navigate the complexities of modern economies. Thus, entrepreneurship is so much more than just a professional choice; it actually contributes to the solution to economic woes and a future of prosperous sustainable development. As the world shifts towards an increasingly globalized and competitive landscape, entrepreneurship offers a viable career path that not only provides economic independence but also creates avenues for social impact. Encouraging young individuals to explore entrepreneurship helps build a resilient and innovative workforce, crucial for addressing societal challenges and ensuring long-term sustainability (Lichtenstein & Lyons, 2001; OECD, 2017).

The importance of entrepreneurship extends beyond individual empowerment, emphasizing the need for formal education to foster this vital skillset. Entrepreneurship education is essential in nurturing the next generation of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship education is essential to train the next generation and equip them with the skills, knowledge and ways of thinking to recognize opportunities, weigh risks, and bring about business wisdom (Neck & Greene, 2011). It also promotes creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills—competencies that are valuable across various professional domains (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). The importance of entrepreneurship education lies not only in fostering successful business ventures but also in contributing to the development of a more innovative and agile society.

One effective way to nurture entrepreneurial innovation is through the integration of design thinking—a human-centered approach to innovation—into both business practices and education. In its simplest terms, DT refers to the way designers' think- the way they look at a design problem and come up with viable solutions (Vianna et al., 2012; Warman & Morris, 2014). The design process thus helps to ensure that the end result satisfies all design considerations (Ambrose & Harris, 2010). This methodology plays a significant role in the success of startups. It focuses on understanding user needs, ideating solutions, prototyping, and testing ideas iteratively. It enables entrepreneurs to create products or services that are not only viable and feasible but also desirable for the target audience (Brown, 2009; Dam & Siang, 2018). By integrating design thinking into the development of entrepreneurial solutions for complex problems, there is significant potential for impactful outcomes in both industry and society (Bender-Salazar, 2023). Startups can enhance product development, streamline operations, and increase customer satisfaction, ultimately leading to greater success and growth (Liedtka, 2015; Hobcraft, 2017).

Incorporating design thinking into education systems is crucial to fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among students. Design thinking encourages creativity, empathy, and a focus on practical problem-solving—skills that are essential for aspiring entrepreneurs. By integrating design thinking into entrepreneurship education, institutions can better prepare students to navigate the complexities of the business world and enhance their ability to create impactful, user-centric ventures (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). This approach ensures that entrepreneurship education is not only about theory but also about equipping students with real-world, actionable skills for success.

Together, entrepreneurship, government support, entrepreneurship education, and design thinking create an ecosystem where startups can thrive and contribute to both economic and social progress (Figure 1).

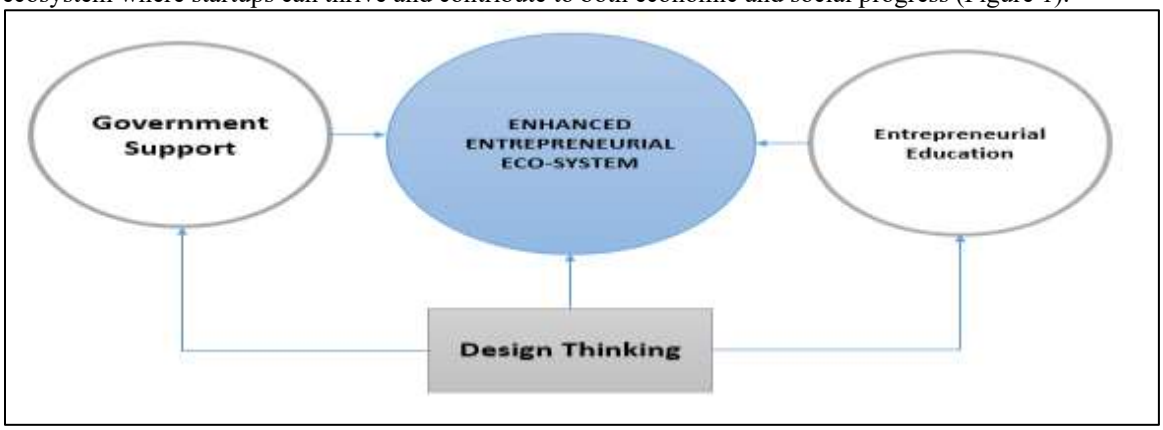

Fig 1: Enhanced Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The success of the above endeavors depends on young graduates' awareness, readiness, and openness to innovative approaches, especially in metropolitan hubs like Delhi NCR. Postgraduate students, at a formative stage in their professional journey, offer unique potential as future entrepreneurs. Understanding their inclination, exposure to entrepreneurial programs, and perceptions of enabling methods such as design thinking is vital for effective intervention design. This study aims to determine the entrepreneurial orientation among postgraduates in Delhi NCR and analyze their awareness of government support mechanisms and design thinking, addressing critical gaps in knowledge, access, and guidance that affect their startup potential. The research is based on the following hypotheses:

H_0 (a): Postgraduate students do not show present or conditional inclination toward entrepreneurship.
H_1 (a): Postgraduate students show present or conditional inclination toward entrepreneurship.
H_0 (b): Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, 50% or fewer are both aware of design thinking and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.
H_1 (b): Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, more than 50% are both aware of design thinking and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.
H_0 (c): Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, 50% or fewer are both aware of government support programs and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.
H_1 (c): Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, more than 50% are both aware of government support programs and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship education has evolved as a key factor in economic development, particularly in postgraduate education (Gartner, 1990). Scholars argue that postgraduate students, given their educational backgrounds and access to resources, are uniquely positioned to launch successful startups. However, several factors influence their inclination toward entrepreneurship, including personal motivation, knowledge of government initiatives, and exposure to design thinking (Brown, 2009; Liedtka, 2018). Design thinking, as a user-centric approach to problem-solving, has gained popularity among startups due to its focus on innovation and iteration (Brown, 2009). Research indicates that design thinking can enhance entrepreneurial decision-making and lead to more innovative product offerings (Liedtka, 2018). The application of design thinking in entrepreneurship education has been linked to higher levels of entrepreneurial activity, with students reporting a stronger inclination to start businesses after exposure to design thinking (Carlgren et al., 2016).

Government support programs, such as funding schemes and mentorship initiatives, are often touted as crucial for the growth of startups (Davis & Lee, 2018). While some studies show that government programs can significantly impact entrepreneurial success, others argue that students' awareness and access to such resources remain major barriers (Audretsch et al., 2014). The effectiveness of these programs is also often questioned, as entrepreneurs may perceive them as insufficient or difficult to access (Siegfried & Welsch, 2007). Therefore, understanding the relationship between students' awareness of these resources and their entrepreneurial intentions is critical for policymakers and educational institutions.

Entrepreneurship has long been considered a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and job creation. As the global economy faces increasingly complex challenges, the need for innovative solutions and entrepreneurial initiatives becomes ever more crucial. Governments worldwide have recognized the importance of entrepreneurship, leading to the development of various support mechanisms designed to foster business creation. The role of entrepreneurship education and its integration with methodologies such as design thinking further highlights the significance of nurturing entrepreneurial mindsets, particularly among the youth, to ensure future economic prosperity. This literature review explores the key themes of entrepreneurship, government support, entrepreneurship education, and design thinking, particularly in their roles in promoting startup success and economic development.

2.1 Entrepreneurship: A Catalyst for Economic Prosperity

Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in the economic development of a nation. The definition of entrepreneurship, as articulated by Schumpeter (1934), revolves around the concept of creative destruction—entrepreneurs introduce new innovations and technologies that replace outdated systems and processes. This constant innovation process accelerates economic growth and fosters competitiveness in the global market. According to Baumol (2002), entrepreneurs create new industries and disrupt existing ones, which can lead to higher productivity and overall societal wealth.

The importance of entrepreneurship to an economy extends beyond the direct economic benefits. It plays a significant role in job creation, poverty alleviation, and social mobility (Acs & Varga, 2005). In developed economies, it contributes to diversifying economic activities, reducing dependency on traditional sectors, and enhancing the flexibility of the economy. In emerging markets, entrepreneurial ventures are often the

backbone of economic growth, as they create jobs and stimulate local economic activities (Shane, 2009). Therefore, fostering an entrepreneurial culture is crucial for ensuring long-term economic sustainability.

2.2 The Power of Government Support in Nurturing Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Government support for entrepreneurship is integral in establishing a conducive environment for business formation and growth. According to the World Bank (2017), entrepreneurial ecosystems thrive when governments provide adequate resources, legal frameworks, financial incentives, and mentorship programs. Governments can reduce barriers to entry by simplifying regulatory requirements and improving access to funding. Through programs like Startup India, governments can offer incentives such as tax exemptions, seed funding, and infrastructure support (OECD, 2017). These initiatives aim to foster a more vibrant startup ecosystem by supporting young entrepreneurs and reducing the risks associated with starting new businesses. In their study, Hwang and Horowitt (2012) emphasized that government interventions in the entrepreneurial ecosystem have a significant impact on the success of startups. They argue that government support provides the necessary capital, networks, and infrastructure that allow entrepreneurs to experiment and innovate. Such initiatives not only create opportunities for entrepreneurs but also serve to reduce market failures and provide a more level playing field, especially in economies where access to finance is limited (Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Li, 2010). Thus, the role of government policies in entrepreneurship is not only to provide resources but also to create an environment that encourages innovation and reduces the risks associated with entrepreneurial ventures.

2.3 The Economic Impact of Youth Engagement in Entrepreneurship

In today's fast-paced and ever-changing global economy, it is essential for youth to understand the importance of entrepreneurship. As countries transition from traditional industries to knowledge-based economies, entrepreneurial ventures become central to economic development. Youth unemployment, particularly in developing countries, is a pressing issue, and entrepreneurship presents a viable solution to creating job opportunities (UNDP, 2016). Furthermore, entrepreneurship is seen as a critical tool for addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges, including poverty, inequality, and climate change (OECD, 2017)

Understanding entrepreneurship is particularly vital for the youth as it prepares them to tackle the economic challenges of the future. According to Lichtenstein and Lyons (2001), entrepreneurship education fosters an entrepreneurial mindset that encourages risk-taking, innovation, and perseverance. It empowers young people to view challenges as opportunities, equipping them with the necessary skills to create sustainable businesses. As the future leaders and economic contributors, the youth must be given the tools and knowledge to actively engage in the economy and drive innovation through entrepreneurship (Lundström & Stevenson, 2005).

2.4 Entrepreneurship Education as a Key Driver for Innovation and Economic Growth

Entrepreneurship education is recognized as one of the most effective ways to prepare individuals for successful entrepreneurial careers. According to Neck and Greene (2011), entrepreneurship education provides students with the knowledge, skills, and practical experience needed to understand and navigate the entrepreneurial process. It is not merely about teaching students to start businesses but rather about fostering the mindset of opportunity recognition, risk management, and value creation. As such, entrepreneurship education fosters creativity, leadership, and problem-solving skills that are vital for navigating today's rapidly changing world (Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

Moreover, entrepreneurship education has been shown to improve economic outcomes by reducing the barriers to entrepreneurship, especially for underrepresented groups. According to Gorman, Hanlon, and King (1997), entrepreneurship education significantly enhances the likelihood of individuals starting businesses and pursuing entrepreneurial careers. The benefits of entrepreneurship education extend beyond business creation; it also contributes to the overall development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem by producing highly skilled and resourceful individuals capable of tackling complex business challenges (Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

Entrepreneurship education also plays an essential role in shifting societal attitudes toward entrepreneurship. According to Frank et al. (2010), exposure to entrepreneurial principles and real-world business scenarios fosters positive attitudes towards risk-taking and innovation. By instilling a sense of possibility and self-efficacy in students, entrepreneurship education contributes to a more resilient, agile workforce capable of driving economic change.

2.5 Harnessing Design Thinking for Building Successful Startups

Design thinking, a methodology that prioritizes empathy, creativity, and user-centered innovation, has gained significant traction in the startup ecosystem. The design thinking process, as outlined by Brown (2009), involves five key stages: empathizing with users, defining problems, ideating solutions, prototyping, and testing. The approach is rooted in understanding the real needs and problems faced by users, ensuring that the solutions developed are both practical and desirable.

For startups, design thinking offers a competitive advantage by enabling them to create products and services that resonate with customers, thus increasing their chances of success. According to Liedtka (2015), startups that adopt design thinking can differentiate themselves in the market by focusing on solving customer pain points rather than merely creating products based on market assumptions. By leveraging iterative testing and feedback, design thinking allows entrepreneurs to refine their ideas, ensuring that they remain aligned with user needs and preferences.

The role of design thinking in successful startups is also evident in its ability to foster innovation. Brown and Wyatt (2010) argue that design thinking helps startups cultivate a culture of creativity and experimentation, which is essential for sustaining long-term business growth. This approach encourages entrepreneurs to embrace failure as part of the learning process and continuously refine their solutions. In doing so, design thinking empowers startups to remain flexible, adaptive, and customer-focused, which are critical attributes in an ever-evolving business landscape.

2.6 Design Thinking in Education: A Pathway to Nurturing Entrepreneurship

The integration of design thinking into entrepreneurship education is essential for fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among students. By incorporating design thinking principles into curricula, educational institutions can provide students with the tools to approach business challenges creatively and systematically. According to Brown (2009), design thinking cultivates an innovation-driven mindset, which is crucial for students looking to navigate the complex business environment of the 21st century. Through experiential learning, students can learn to apply design thinking techniques to solve real-world problems and build innovative business models.

Incorporating design thinking into entrepreneurship education also helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. As noted by Liedtka (2015), design thinking is a hands-on approach that enables students to engage in the entrepreneurial process through ideation, prototyping, and testing. This practical approach equips students with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills needed to succeed in the entrepreneurial world. By focusing on user-centric solutions, design thinking ensures that students understand the importance of empathy and market fit in the business creation process.

Furthermore, design thinking offers a way to integrate interdisciplinary learning, allowing students to combine knowledge from fields such as technology, business, and the arts. This interdisciplinary approach fosters creativity and cross-functional collaboration, which are crucial for successful entrepreneurship (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). By applying design thinking in entrepreneurship education, institutions can better prepare students to lead innovative and sustainable ventures that can thrive in the competitive global market.

In summary, Entrepreneurship is a vital driver of economic growth, innovation, and social progress. It is an essential tool for addressing the challenges faced by modern economies, particularly in creating jobs and driving innovation. The importance of government support, entrepreneurship education, and design thinking in fostering entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated. Government policies that reduce barriers to entry and provide financial and technical support create an environment conducive to business growth. Entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in equipping individuals, particularly the youth, with the skills and mindset needed to succeed in the business world. Finally, design thinking offers a powerful methodology for startups to create customer-centric solutions, fostering innovation and success. Together, these elements form an ecosystem that supports the growth of startups and promotes economic development.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology employed for this research to assess the entrepreneurial inclination of postgraduate students, their awareness of government support programs, and design thinking. The study aimed to explore various factors influencing students' career preferences, barriers to entrepreneurship, and their perceptions of government initiatives and design thinking as a catalyst for entrepreneurship. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool, followed by appropriate statistical techniques to test the hypotheses.

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study is quantitative in nature, employing a cross-sectional survey approach. This design allows for the collection of data at a single point in time from a large sample of postgraduate students, providing a snapshot of their career preferences, awareness of government support, and familiarity with design thinking. The use of a structured questionnaire ensures that the data is collected in a consistent manner, making it suitable for statistical analysis. The research focuses on examining the relationships between different variables and understanding how they collectively influence students' entrepreneurial behaviors.

3.2 Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 212 postgraduate students from various academic disciplines. These students were selected from universities offering postgraduate programs, ensuring a diverse representation of academic backgrounds. The sampling technique used was non-probability, specifically convenience sampling, which allowed the researcher to select participants based on their availability and willingness to participate. The total sample of 212 students provided sufficient data for statistical analysis while representing a broad spectrum of students' views on entrepreneurship, design thinking, and government support programs.

3.3 Tools

A structured questionnaire was developed as the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire was divided into several sections to gather relevant data regarding the respondents' demographics, career preferences, barriers to entrepreneurship, awareness of government support programs, and familiarity with design thinking principles. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing for quantifiable responses that could be subjected to statistical analysis.

. The questionnaire was structured into five sections:

1.Background Information

2.Entrepreneurial Inclination (Measured using a 5-item Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)

3.Awareness of and Perceived Usefulness of Government Support (Assessed through a 5-item Likert scale and one binary (Yes/No) item

4.Awareness and Perceived Usefulness of Design Thinking (Measured with a 5-item Likert scale)

5.Barriers and Motivators (Multiple-choice items identifying perceived barriers and key motivations toward entrepreneurship)

Each construct was measured using multiple items, enabling psychometric testing such as reliability analysis and construct validity. The tool was designed based on a comprehensive review of literature in entrepreneurship education, government startup policies, and innovation pedagogy (specifically design thinking). The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of postgraduate students to ensure clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility of the questions. Based on the feedback, minor revisions were made to ensure that the tool accurately captured the respondents' perceptions.

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through the administration of the structured questionnaire to the selected postgraduate students. The survey was conducted through both online and paper-based formats to maximize reach and ensure a diverse sample. The students were given a clear explanation of the study's objectives, ensuring informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the responses.

Upon distribution, the questionnaires were collected over a period of two weeks, during which a reminder was sent to those who had not responded initially. The completed questionnaires were then reviewed for completeness and accuracy. The final dataset included 212 valid responses, which were then input into a statistical software program for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis for this research was meticulously structured to uncover the entrepreneurial inclination of postgraduate students in Delhi NCR, as well as their awareness and perceptions of government support programs and design thinking methodology. The process commenced with the compilation and cleaning of survey responses from 212 participants, ensuring accuracy and consistency across demographic and analytical variables. Demographic data such as age, gender, academic program, and field of specialization were reviewed to establish representativeness across the sample, facilitating subgroup analyses to explore differences and patterns among varied cohorts.

To evaluate the primary objective—determining entrepreneurial inclination—a five-item scale was constructed, with each item measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." These items spanned interest, exploration of business ideas, preference for entrepreneurship over conventional employment, perceived desirability of entrepreneurship, and confidence in launching an enterprise. This scale not only assessed current inclination but also served as a foundation for more advanced inferential analyses. After confirming scale reliability and descriptive statistics, the next step was the application of statistical tests designed to examine associations, proportions, and significance levels within the sample.

Key statistical techniques employed included the Chi-square test for independence and the binomial test of proportions. The Chi-square test was used to analyze hypothesis 1: whether postgraduate students exhibit present or conditional entrepreneurial inclination. By cross-tabulating responses regarding current entrepreneurial interest and the willingness to consider entrepreneurship given adequate resources and support, the test aimed to determine the statistical significance of these relationships, revealing whether conditional interest effectively augments the proportion of potential entrepreneurs in the population.

For hypotheses 2 and 3—relating to awareness of design thinking methodology and government support schemes—a composite variable was developed from five Likert-scale items each. Responses were dichotomized: "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" were coded as positive (1), while "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree" were coded as non-positive (0). To ensure meaningful analysis, a threshold rule was applied: respondents were classified as possessing positive awareness if they marked three or more items positively. The binomial test was then implemented to compare the observed proportion of positive awareness (of design thinking and government support) against a predetermined benchmark of 0.5. This test assessed whether more than half of the entrepreneurially inclined students could be considered substantially informed and perceiving these enablers as beneficial.

Throughout the analysis, descriptive statistics were used to highlight key patterns—such as the prevalence of barriers, motivations, and access gaps—while inferential tests provided rigor to the conclusions. These analytical strategies ensured that the study moved beyond simple frequency counts, enabling a nuanced understanding of the factors that govern entrepreneurial interest and readiness among postgraduates, and quantifying areas where institutional or policy interventions could have the strongest impact.

4. RESULTS AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data analysis revealed several insightful and actionable outcomes regarding entrepreneurial orientation, perceived barriers, and the role of government support and design thinking among postgraduate students.

4.1 Demographic Profile

The demographic review confirmed that the respondent pool was diverse—predominantly aged 22–25, with a majority female representation (68%), and spanning fields from business to nutrition, finance, HR, science, and humanities. Approximately 46.2% had participated in entrepreneurship-focused programs, signifying a split in prior exposure and readiness for entrepreneurial ventures.

4.2 Entrepreneurial Inclination

Hypothesis 1

H_0: Postgraduate students do not show present or conditional inclination toward entrepreneurship.

H_1: Postgraduate students show present or conditional inclination toward entrepreneurship.

The five-item entrepreneurial inclination scale demonstrated that nearly half (48.1%) of students were strongly inclined toward entrepreneurship, consistently agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements reflecting interest, active exploration of business ideas, preference for entrepreneurship over employment, desirability of entrepreneurship, and confidence in starting a business. A corresponding segment remained neutral (around 40–45% across items), highlighting latent potential that could be realized through targeted interventions. Only a small fraction openly opposed entrepreneurship, suggesting overall positive attitudes in the cohort.

Table 1: Student Inclination toward Entrepreneurship

Interest in Entrepreneurship	Present Inclination (Ready now)	Conditional Inclination (With resources)	Total
Extremely High / High	102 (Present)	0	102
Neutral / Low / Extremely Low	0	76 (Conditional)	76
Total	102	76	178

Table 2: Consideration of Entrepreneurship Given Right Opportunities

Consideration	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Definitely	40	36.36
Probably	36	32.73
Not sure	30	27.27
Probably not	4	3.64
Definitely not	0	0
Total	**110**	**100**

Inferential analysis using the Chi-square test showed a statistically significant association between entrepreneurial interest and the willingness to pursue entrepreneurship conditionally, given adequate support and resources. With a Chi-square value of 178 and p-value < 0.001, the study rejected the null hypothesis that postgraduates do not show inclination toward entrepreneurship. Instead, the relationship confirmed that students either have present readiness or would consider entrepreneurship under favorable circumstances, underscoring how practical enablers can expand the pool of future entrepreneurs.

Examining barriers, the most formidable deterrents for those with neutral or low entrepreneurial interest were lack of financial resources (80%), insufficient mentoring and guidance (60%), and inadequate knowledge (54.55%). Job security concerns (29.09%), societal or family pressure (16.36%), and fear of failure (1.82%) added further complexity, but were less prominent. Despite these obstacles, more than a third (36.36%) of students in the neutral/low group reported they would definitely consider entrepreneurship if these barriers were addressed, with another third indicating probable consideration—demonstrating responsiveness to targeted programs such as mentorship, funding, and education.

Among students with high present entrepreneurial inclination, the dominant motivator was financial independence (62.75%), followed by passion for innovation (25.49%). However, even this group cited lack of guidance or mentorship (43.14%), access to funding (25.49%), and market competition (25.49%) as their primary concerns, showing that key enablers are universally valued regardless of initial interest.

4.3 Awareness and perception of Design Thinking & Government Support Programs

Awareness of government support programs and design thinking methodology was then evaluated using binomial tests. The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 2

H_0: Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, 50% or fewer are both aware of design thinking and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.

H_1: Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, more than 50% are both aware of design thinking and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis 3

H_0: Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, 50% or fewer are both aware of government support programs and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.

H_1: Among postgraduate students with present entrepreneurial inclination, more than 50% are both aware of government support programs and perceive it as beneficial for entrepreneurs.

Results indicated that only 25.5% of highly inclined students perceived government support as accessible and beneficial, and 47.1% had strong awareness and positive perception of design thinking. Both figures fell below the 50% benchmark and failed statistical significance, pointing to substantive gaps in knowledge, outreach, and institutional support.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research highlight significant trends and persistent gaps in the entrepreneurial ecosystem affecting postgraduate students in Delhi NCR. First, while nearly half of students display a strong entrepreneurial inclination, a substantial proportion remain neutral or undecided, indicating untapped potential that is hindered by concrete barriers rather than a lack of motivation alone. Financial constraints, lack of mentorship, and insufficient knowledge about entrepreneurship consistently emerge as primary hurdles—echoing global research which identifies these obstacles as exhaustively stalling new business creation among graduates not just in India, but in other developing economies as well (Davis & Lee, 2018). Addressing these barriers is vital for translating latent interest into entrepreneurial action, requiring deliberate investment by both educational institutions and policy-makers in providing accessible funding, guidance, and robust entrepreneurship education. These findings align with existing literature, which suggests that access to capital and mentorship are key factors that either enable or hinder entrepreneurial activity (Gartner, 1990; Audretsch et al., 2014).

Another key outcome revealed in the research is the limited awareness of government support programs such as Startup India, PMMY, and Atal Innovation Mission. Despite favorable opinions about the government's intent to promote entrepreneurship, only a minority of students demonstrate awareness or perceive these schemes as readily accessible or beneficial for their needs. As noted by previous research, government support programs are often underutilized due to poor visibility and complex application processes (Siegfried & Welsch, 2007). This gap is particularly consequential given the documented impact of government initiatives in nurturing startup ecosystems by providing financial support, regulatory relief, skill development, and networking opportunities. The disconnect between positive perception and practical engagement suggests a need for improved communication, targeted outreach, and perhaps renewed curriculum integration—ensuring that government resources and information about policies are not only

visible, but actively demystified and relatable to the real concerns and aspirations of student entrepreneurs. Similar studies reinforce that policy intervention loses its effectiveness unless accompanied by active awareness campaigns and streamlined access to resources.

The role of design thinking as an entrepreneurial enabler introduces further complexity and opportunity. The significance of design thinking in fostering entrepreneurial behaviors is well-documented in the literature (Brown, 2009; Liedtka, 2018). Despite low formal exposure—few students have attended workshops or training—a majority of respondents who understand the concept express strong faith in its value for business innovation and user-centric problem solving. This reveals an intuitive appeal that echoes findings from international research: design thinking can foster creative confidence, align business models with societal needs, and reduce the risk of failure when applied to startup contexts. However, the lack of structured training inhibits actual practice, reinforcing the crucial need for curriculum integration, practical design-led experiences, and institutional support. The potential for design thinking to shift entrepreneurial intention—moving students from passive interest to active application—suggests that embedding such methodologies within university programs, incubators, and government schemes could act as a catalyst for entrepreneurial readiness.

Collectively, these findings position the postgraduate student community in Delhi NCR at a critical juncture: interest and conceptual openness to innovation are evident, but practical, behavioral outcomes are constrained by financial, educational, and informational barriers. Policy-makers and educators must act to lower these barriers through enhanced visibility of government schemes, subsidized or easy-access funding, structured mentorship networks, and formal training in design thinking. Only then can the entrepreneurial potential of young graduates truly be unlocked, fostering a resilient, innovative, and inclusive startup ecosystem capable of sustaining economic growth and job creation. Insights from this study, therefore, are not only diagnostic but strongly actionable—signaling pathways for systemic improvement that could benefit students, educators, and India's broader entrepreneurial landscape.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings of this study have several important implications for practice:

Educational Institutions: Universities and other educational bodies should increase their efforts to expose students to design thinking methodologies. Incorporating design thinking into entrepreneurship education can help foster creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills among students. Additionally, universities should establish more robust mentorship programs to guide students through the early stages of their entrepreneurial journey. These programs can provide valuable guidance, especially for students who feel unsupported in terms of their knowledge and experience.

Government Bodies: The study highlights the need for government programs to be more effectively communicated to students. Government bodies should collaborate with universities to raise awareness about available resources and simplify the application processes. Additionally, governments should consider offering more targeted support, especially for students from underrepresented groups who may face additional barriers to entrepreneurship, such as access to funding or mentorship.

Private Sector and Industry: Private sector organizations, especially those in innovation-driven industries, can play a role in supporting entrepreneurship by offering internships, incubation programs, and financial backing to students with high entrepreneurial potential. Partnerships between the private sector, universities, and government bodies can lead to more integrated ecosystems for entrepreneurial growth.

7. SUMMARY

This study investigated the entrepreneurial inclination of postgraduate students in Delhi NCR alongside their awareness and perceptions of government support programs and design thinking methodology as enablers for startup success. Surveying 212 students across diverse academic disciplines, the research revealed that nearly half of the respondents possess a moderately to highly positive orientation toward entrepreneurship, signaling substantial entrepreneurial potential within this young and educated cohort. However, a significant proportion remains ambivalent, situated in a neutral zone that could be influenced through targeted interventions.

Barriers such as lack of financial resources, insufficient mentoring, limited knowledge about entrepreneurship, concerns over job security, and societal pressures were identified as key deterrents, especially among those with low or neutral entrepreneurial interest. Despite these hurdles, many expressed conditional willingness to consider entrepreneurship if appropriate support mechanisms were provided. Meanwhile, motivated students cited financial independence and passion for innovation as primary drivers but continued to face concerns related to market competition and insufficient mentorship.

Perception of government support programs, while generally positive in intent, manifested as a notable gap in awareness and accessibility. Only a quarter of entrepreneurially inclined students demonstrated strong belief in the availability and usefulness of government schemes. Similarly, although formal exposure to design thinking was limited, the majority recognized its value in creating user-centered solutions and expressed intent to apply it in their entrepreneurial ventures—pointing to an untapped opportunity for curriculum integration and skill development.

Statistical tests confirmed the presence of present and conditional entrepreneurial inclination and revealed that awareness of government support and design thinking among interested students remains moderate but below levels that would fully empower their entrepreneurial journey. The findings collectively emphasize the need for improved outreach, education, mentoring, and financial facilitation to bridge gaps between entrepreneurial intention and actual startup creation.

8. CONCLUSION

The research concludes that postgraduate students in Delhi NCR represent a promising but underleveraged segment of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. While nearly half manifest strong engagement with entrepreneurial aspirations, systemic barriers impede their transition from intent to action. The prominent financial constraints, mentorship deficits, and knowledge gaps identified necessitate urgent attention from policymakers, educational institutions, and startup incubators to establish enabling environments that reduce risk and increase entrepreneurial confidence.

Furthermore, despite favorable perceptions of government initiatives to promote startups, practical awareness, accessibility, and utilization of these programs are insufficient. Strategic focus on awareness campaigns, simplification of access pathways, and integration of these schemes within higher education frameworks can substantially enhance their efficacy. The critical role of design thinking as an innovation and problem-solving approach holds great promise, but its limited structured exposure restricts its transformative impact. Thus, embedding design thinking pedagogy in academic curricula and entrepreneurship programs could be instrumental in equipping future entrepreneurs with essential creative and analytical capabilities.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of a multi-pronged approach—combining financial support, mentoring, policy awareness, and innovation-driven education—to unlock the full entrepreneurial potential of postgraduate students. By addressing these dimensions cohesively, India's startup ecosystem can be strengthened at a foundational level, contributing significantly to economic growth, employment generation, and inclusive innovation. This research offers policymakers and academic leaders empirical insights enabling evidence-based decisions to cultivate a vibrant culture of entrepreneurship among young graduates in Delhi NCR and beyond.

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