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Challenges and opportunities in agri-entrepreneurship: Insights from the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP) in Rajasthan

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges and opportunities faced by agriculture students of four constituent colleges' *viz*., SKNCOA Jobner (Jaipur), COA Lalsot (Dausa), COA Fatehpur-Shekhawati (Sikar) and COA Kumher (Bharatpur) during their participation in the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP). By analyzing responses from 142 undergraduate students, the research highlights key areas such as entrepreneurial competencies (innovativeness, risk-taking, general skills, persistence), major constraints in establishing agri-enterprises, and emerging entrepreneurial prospects. The findings reveal that students exhibit moderate entrepreneurial skills, and face challenges like limited capital, lack of mentorship, and poor market linkage. However, opportunities exist in protected cultivation, organic farming, and value-added products. Conclusions include improved support systems, mentorship access, and targeted skill development.

Keywords: Agri-entrepreneurship, ELP, entrepreneurial competency, challenges, opportunities, agriculture students

Introduction

Entrepreneurship in agriculture offers transformative potential, particularly through the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP), aimed at practical skill development and enterprise readiness. The ELP, introduced by ICAR, seeks to equip students with hands-on knowledge, encouraging them to become job creators. In an age where self-employment and innovative agribusiness models are being promoted globally, India too is recognizing the need to transform agricultural graduates into entrepreneurs who can lead the sector's growth. However, the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical entrepreneurship skills persists. ELP bridges this gap by providing a platform for students to engage in enterprise activities during their undergraduate program. This initiative helps in instilling key entrepreneurial traits and exposes them to real-world challenges. This paper focuses on evaluating the extent to which ELP fosters entrepreneurial competencies, and examines the primary challenges and emerging opportunities from the students' perspective.

The present study was undertaken to establish whether or not the objectives of Experiential Learning Programme have been met in principle and identify factors which facilitated the implementation of the programme. Findings of the study will bring out salient issues for the policymakers to know what has been so far achieved through the programme and pathways for the implementing agencies of such programmes of what needs to be done to have a successful entrepreneurship development programme. Keeping in view the above discussed facts of sufficient information and sparce related research, the present investigation was undertaken to find out the "Challenges and Opportunities in Agri-Entrepreneurship: Insights from the Experiential Learning Programme (ELP) in Rajasthan" during the academic session of 2021-22.

Materials and Methods

An ex-post-facto design was adopted to study the outcomes after the intervention had taken place. The study was conducted among students from four constituent colleges' *viz*., SKNCOA Jobner (Jaipur), COA Lalsot (Dausa), COA Fatehpur-Shekhawati (Sikar) and COA Kumher (Bharatpur) which directly comes under the administrative jurisdiction of Sri Karan Narendra Agriculture University, Jobner. The students who were registered in the ELP Programme during the academic session 2021-22 will be taken for the study so that after completing their degree they have sufficient time to start any enterprise.

Sampling procedure

Selection of Colleges: Out of four constituent of SKNAU, Jobner which had conducted ELP programme during the academic session 2021-22, Two Colleges, one having maximum number and second having minimum number of students registered in the ELP programme was selected for the study.

Table 1: Constituent colleges of SKNAU, Jobner where ELP was conducted

S. No.	Name of constituent colleges	Number of students Conducting ELP programme during 2021-22
1.	SKNCOA, Jobner (Jaipur)	114
2.	COA, Lalsot (Dausa)	49
3.	COA, Fatehpur- Shekhawati (Sikar)	54
4.	COA, Kumher (Bharatpur)	28

Thus, SKNCOA, Jobner (Jaipur) having maximum no of students i.e. 114 and COA, Kumher (Bharatpur) having minimum number of students i.e. 28 were selected for the present study.

Selection criteria: The selection of these students depends on variables like independents variables *viz*. family background and personal attributes of ELP students as well as dependent variable of entrepreneurial competency among the students.

A structured questionnaire was developed covering four main entrepreneurial traits innovativeness, risk orientation, general skills, and persistence which are widely acknowledged in literature as vital components of entrepreneurial competency. Additionally, students were asked about the perceived challenges and opportunities they encountered or envisioned during their ELP experience. The quantitative data were classified, tabulated and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and other appropriate statistical tools.

Results and Discussion

The results (Table 2) indicate that the entrepreneurial competency is a composite measure encompassing several traits that are required for success in initiating and managing ventures. The current study measured four such traits: innovativeness, risk orientation, general skills, and persistence.

Innovativeness: The data indicate that majority of the respondents (60.56%) shown medium level of innovativeness whereas 21.13 per cent of them indicate low and 18.31 per cent high innovativeness. Therefore, it can be concluded that majority of the respondents were in medium innovativeness category.

Risk orientation: The data furnished that 61.97 per cent of respondents had medium level of risk orientation whereas 19.72 per cent of them had high and 18.31 per cent of them had low level of risk orientation. Consequently, it can be concluded that maximum number of the respondent were in medium risk orientation category.

General skills: The data revealed that 56.34 per cent of respondents had medium level of general skills whereas 23.94 per cent of them had high level of general skills and about one fifth (19.72%) indicated low level of general skills. Consequently, it can be concluded that maximum number of the respondent were in medium general skills category.

Persistence: The data exerted that 52.11 per cent of respondents had medium level of persistence whereas 36.62 per cent of them had high and 11.27 per cent of them had low level of persistence. Consequently, it can be concluded that maximum number of the respondent were in medium persistence category.

Entrepreneurship is the creative response to an environment that combines innovativeness, readiness to take risk, sensing opportunities, heightened initiative, standard of excellence, persistence in achieving goals, positive orientation to problem solving and constant striving for growth and excellence. When all those attributes are developed in one person, the person can be successful in any field of activity such as industry, business, education, public or professional bodies etc. The findings of Donald (2014) [5], Singh (2016) [18], Otekunrin and Leah (2017) [12], Kris and Kristjan (2017) [6], Kumar (2017) [7], Schneider (2017) [15], Shahiwala (2017) [17], Mahadalle and Kaplan (2017) [8], Modak (2018) [11], Bindiya (2018) [11], Sundaram (2020) [19] Chaithrashree *et al.* (2020) [2] and Mahmood *et al.* (2021) [9] were also on similar trend.

Overall entrepreneurial competency of UG students in agriculture faculty

The data furnished in Table 3 reveal that 60.56 per cent of respondents had medium level of overall entrepreneurial competency whereas 20.42 per cent of them had high and 19.01 per cent of them had low level of overall entrepreneurial competency. Consequently, it can be concluded that maximum number of the respondent were in medium overall entrepreneurial competency category. The results clearly indicate that respondents are sensitized enough on information seeking through ELP. The students need to be made aware about the importance of this approach for self-employment. The findings of Patel *et al.* (2014) [13], Diwakar *et al.* (2015) [4], Chamela (2016) [3], Sane (2017) [14], Modak (2018) [11] and Manjunatha (2019) [10] are also on similar trend.

Key Challenges in Agri-Enterprise Establishment

Despite acquiring basic entrepreneurial competencies, students face a variety of challenges that limit their ability to establish successful agri-enterprises are given in Table 4.

The major challenges perceived by the respondents have been given in Table 4 with rank order. Lack of capital required was the top ranked challenges stated by maximum number of respondents (71.13%) followed by technological adoption (69.01%), non-availability of prepared technical plan, business plan and marketing plan language related problems (66.20%), lack of marketing facilities for processed/ value added products (63.38%), market access and competition (61.27%),weather and climate risk (59.86%), lack of technical guidance (52.82%) and labor shortages stated by 50.70 per cent respondents.

The most frequently reported challenge was the lack of capital, highlighting the necessity for university-level or government-backed seed funding programs. The absence of strong market linkages further demotivates students from pursuing agribusiness.

Opportunities in Agri-Enterprise

Despite the hurdles, a considerable number of students expressed enthusiasm towards future ventures, identifying key areas of opportunity where they could apply their skills are given in Table 5.

Major opportunities experienced by the respondents have been given in Table 5 with rank order. The respondents expressed their views on the basis of future needs. Organic farming was the top ranked opportunities stated by maximum number of respondents (60.56%) followed by Fruit and vegetables production(57.04%), seed Production and nurseries, (54.92%), value added products (52.81%), sustainable Livestock Farming (43.66%) and mushroom cultivation (38.73%).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their Innovativeness, Risk orientation, General skills and Persistence (n=142)

S. No.	Innovativeness	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Low (up to 12)	30	21.13
2.	Medium (13 to 19)	86	60.56
3.	High (Above 19)	26	18.31
Total		142	100
Mean = 15.099 SD = 3.4277			
Risk orientation			
1.	Low (up to 13)	26	18.31
2.	Medium (14 to 19)	88	61.97
3.	High (Above 19)	28	19.72
Total		142	100
Mean = 15.732 SD = 2.8357			
General skills			
1.	Low (up to 35)	28	19.72
2.	Medium (36 to 47)	80	56.34
3.	High (Above 47)	34	23.94
Total		142	100
Mean = 40.88 SD = 5.72			
Persistence			
1.	Low (up to 2)	16	11.27
2.	Medium (3 to 4)	74	52.11
3.	High (Above 4)	52	36.62
Total		142	100
Mean = 3.4296 SD = 0.9557			

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their overall entrepreneurial competency of UG students (n=142)

S. No.	Category	Number of respondents	Percentage
1.	Low (up to 70)	29	20.42
2.	Medium (71-90)	86	60.56
3.	High (Above & 91)	27	19.01
Total		142	100
Mean-80.566 SD- 10.237			

Table 4: Challenges for the establishment of Agri-enterprise (n =142)

S. No.	Challenges	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Rank
1.	Lack of capital required	101	71.13	I
2.	Market access and competition	87	61.27	V
3.	Weather and climate risk	85	59.86	VI
4.	Technological adoption	98	69.01	II
5.	Lack of technical guidance	75	52.82	VII
6.	Labor shortage	72	50.70	VIII
7.	Non-availability of prepared technical plan, business plan and marketing plan	94	66.20	III
8.	Lack of marketing facilities for processed / value added products	90	63.38	IV

Table 5: Opportunities for the establishment of Agri-enterprise (n =142)

S. No.	Opportunities	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Rank
1.	Organic Farming	86	60.56	I
2.	Fruit and vegetables production	81	57.04	II
3.	Mushroom cultivation	55	38.73	VI
4.	Value-Added Products	75	52.81	IV
5.	Sustainable Livestock Farming	62	43.66	V
6.	Seed Production and Nurseries	78	54.92	III

Conclusion

On the basis of this study it is to be concluded that among the parameters chosen for entrepreneurial competency of ELP, revealed that nearly sixty per cent of the UG students had a medium level of innovativeness. While, the respondents expressed their views on perceived challenges and opportunities for the establishment of Agri-enterprise. Lack of capital requirements was among of top ranked challenges stated by maximum number of respondents, followed by technological adoption, non-availability of prepared technical plan, business plan and marketing plan language related problems, lack of marketing facilities for processed/ value added products, market access and competition, weather and climate risk, lack of technical guidance and labor shortages stated by respondents. Organic farming was the top ranked opportunities stated by maximum number of respondents, followed by Fruit and vegetables production, Seed Production and Nurseries, value added products, Sustainable Livestock Farming and Mushroom cultivation.

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