

# Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in India: An Evaluation of Startup TN's Thozhili Women Bootcamp *Survey and Interview-Based Evidence from Tamil Nadu*

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## ABSTRACT

The rise of women entrepreneurship in India signifies a vital socio-economic shift. StartupTN's Thozhili Women Bootcamp, conducted across five Tamil Nadu locations (July 2024–March 2025), aimed to bridge gender gaps in entrepreneurship. Using surveys and interviews with 300 participants, this study evaluates skill development, support service access, and growth outcomes. Over 70% benefited, though gaps persist in awareness and advanced strategy. Strengthened mentorship, wider outreach, and sustained engagement are proposed to foster women-led entrepreneurial development.

## KEYWORDS

Women Entrepreneurship, Socio-economic shift, Boot Camp Impact, gaps, skill development, Tamil Nadu

## 1. Introduction

India's startup ecosystem has emerged as a global innovation hub, driven by policy support, digital adoption, and entrepreneurial dynamism. Tamil Nadu, a leader in inclusive development, has prioritized gender-focused programs such as Thozhili—an exclusive boot camp for women entrepreneurs launched by StartupTN.

Thozhili provides capacity-building workshops, mentorship, funding access, and incubation support tailored to women entrepreneurs. Conducted across five locations—Coimbatore, Nagercoil, Erode, Chennai, and Thanjavur—the program aimed to benefit over 75% of its 300 participants through structured interventions.

This paper analyzes the effectiveness of Thozhili in promoting skill acquisition, business initiation, and access to entrepreneurial resources among women.

## 2. Objectives

- To assess whether the boot camp achieved its stated goal of empowering women with business skills and startup support.
- To identify gaps in program delivery and areas for improvement.
- To evaluate the long-term entrepreneurial impact of participation.
- To derive actionable recommendations for scaling similar interventions.
- To contribute to the discourse on gender-inclusive economic growth.

## 3. Scope and Methodology

This study focuses on evaluating the post-impact of StartupTN's Thozhili Women Bootcamp conducted across five locations in Tamil Nadu between July 2024 and March 2025. The scope is limited to analyzing participants' improvements in entrepreneurial skills, access to support services, and challenges faced after the program. It does not assess long-term business outcomes but provides actionable insights for enhancing the design, execution, and sustainability of future women-focused initiatives.

This study adopted a **concurrent mixed-methods design**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate a comprehensive understanding of the post-impact of the Thozhili Bootcamp. The methodology ensured triangulation of data sources for reliability.

### 3.1 Research Design

- **Quantitative Component:** Structured close-ended questions were used to measure participants' improvement in entrepreneurial skills (finance, marketing, branding, compliance) and access to Startup TN's support services.
- **Qualitative Component:** Open-ended questions and telephonic interviews captured detailed narratives, enabling researchers to analyze experiences, challenges, and long-term aspirations through thematic and narrative analysis.
- **Cross-sectional Approach:** Data was collected post-boot camp, across five regional centres, to facilitate comparison between locations.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Both registered participants and non-participants were studied, offering insights into perceived benefits and reasons for disengagement.

### 3.2 Sampling Design

- **Population:** The total population was 516 women (341 participated, 176 did not).
- **Sampling Technique:** Simple Random Sampling (SRS) was adopted to ensure unbiased representation. To maintain validity, stratification was applied
  - **Stratum 1:** Registered and Participated
  - **Stratum 2:** Registered but Not Participated
- **Sample Size:** Using Cochran's formula at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the required sample size was calculated as 181 (Stratum 1) and 121 (Stratum 2). Location-wise proportional distribution was maintained.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

- **Primary Data:** Telephonic interviews for in-depth participant feedback; Google Forms for large-scale structured responses; Email and WhatsApp follow-ups to ensure higher response rates.
- **Secondary Data:** Attendance records and registration sheets from StartupTN, Program agendas, sessions and modules

### 3.4 Questionnaire Design

The instrument was structured into six sections: demographics, participation & satisfaction, skill development impact, access to services, entrepreneurial outcomes, and suggestions. It combined:

- **Close-ended questions:** for measurable data and statistical analysis.
- **Likert scales:** to evaluate intensity of skill improvement and satisfaction.
- **Open-ended questions:** to capture qualitative feedback and improvement areas.

### 3.5 Tools for Analysis

- **Microsoft Excel:** for preliminary cleaning, coding, and pivot table analysis.
- **Power BI:** for visualization and creation of comparative dashboards across locations.
- **Thematic Coding:** for identifying recurring patterns in qualitative feedback, such as barriers, motivations, and improvement suggestions.

### 3.6 Data Analysis Plan

1. **Quantitative Analysis:** Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean scores), cross-tabulation (e.g., location vs. benefit), and graphical representation (bar and pie charts).
2. **Qualitative Analysis:** Narrative and thematic analysis to derive deeper insights into participant perspectives. Themes such as “mentorship gap,” “financial access,” and “digital skills” were identified and compared regionally.
3. **Comparative Analysis:** Location-based differences were studied to highlight regional strengths and weaknesses in program implementation.

## 4. Literature Review

Research consistently highlights women entrepreneurship as a catalyst for socio-economic progress (Minniti, 2009; Henry et al., 2016). Barriers such as limited access to finance, gender bias, and lack of networks are common challenges across developing economies (Brush et al., 2018). Training and mentorship programs have been found to significantly enhance women’s entrepreneurial readiness and confidence (Patil & Bhatia, 2021). The Thozhili Bootcamp aligns with global best practices by providing targeted interventions such as mentorship, financial literacy, and exposure to networks, but also reflects regional gaps in outreach and continuity. This study contributes by offering an evidence-based evaluation of a government-led women-exclusive program in Tamil Nadu, a context rarely explored in prior research.

## 5. Result and Discussion

The Thozhili Bootcamp demonstrated measurable improvements in entrepreneurial skills and confidence among women participants. Over 70% reported benefits from StartupTN services, particularly in branding, ideation, and networking opportunities. Younger participants (18–25 years) found the program useful for exposure, while those aged 31–40 years gained more in terms of practical business development. Regional variations were evident: urban centers like Chennai and Coimbatore recorded stronger entrepreneurial outcomes, while semi-urban centers such as Nagercoil and Thanjavur revealed untapped potential but also higher logistical challenges. Graphical analysis confirmed statistically significant improvements in skills and awareness among active participants compared to non-participants.

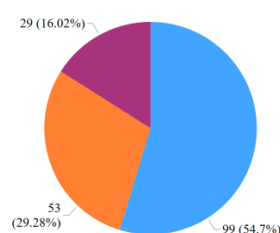


Fig 1: participants by category

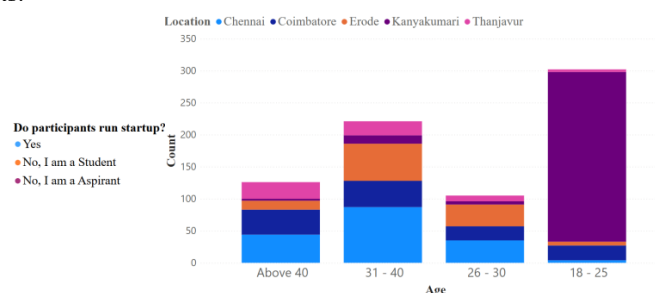


Fig 2: Age group with respect to location

Despite these achievements, gaps persisted in areas such as financial access, digital adoption, and continuous mentorship. Many respondents emphasized the need for advanced training in financial planning, export readiness, and pricing strategies. Transport barriers and limited awareness of event schedules affected attendance, particularly among rural women. These findings underline the importance of tailored support, stronger outreach, and continuity in mentorship to sustain entrepreneurial momentum beyond the bootcamp.

## 6. Findings

The study found that the Thozhili Bootcamp made a significant contribution to enhancing entrepreneurial awareness, skills, and confidence among women participants across Tamil Nadu. More than half of the respondents were already managing startups, which positioned them to immediately apply the learnings from the sessions. Students and aspirants, on the other hand, gained valuable exposure to the entrepreneurial ecosystem and reported increased motivation to pursue business opportunities in the future.

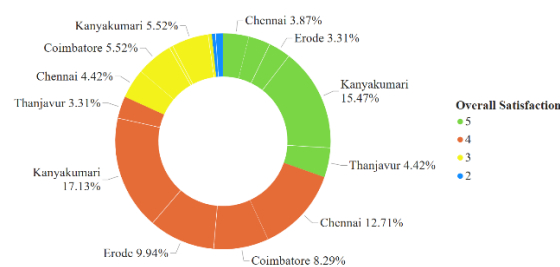


Fig 4: Satisfaction rating

A majority of participants acknowledged improvements in ideation, branding, and marketing skills, indicating that the program successfully addressed fundamental aspects of business development. Financial literacy and compliance-related sessions, though useful, were rated slightly lower, pointing to the need for more in-depth and practice-oriented training in these areas. Participants also highlighted that access to StartupTN's support services—such as incubation, mentorship, and funding guidance—was one of the most valuable outcomes of the bootcamp.

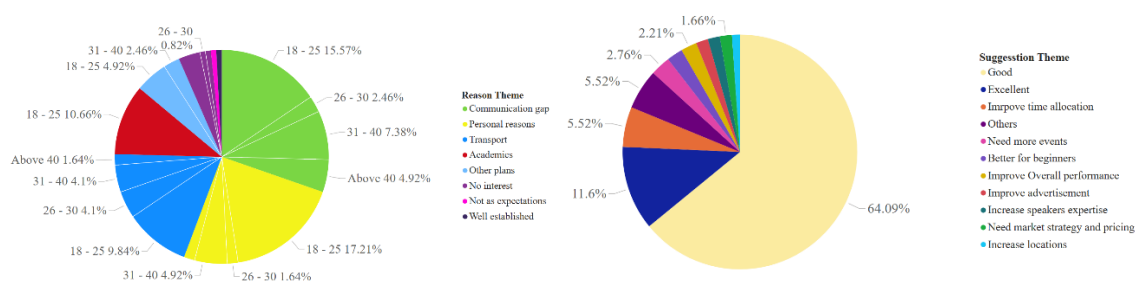


Fig 5: Gaps identified from non- participants Fig 6: Gaps identified from participants feedback

At the same time, several challenges were identified. Many respondents expressed difficulty in accessing continuous mentorship and financial resources post-bootcamp, suggesting that the benefits were not fully sustained beyond the event. Transport and logistical barriers reduced participation, particularly among rural women and college students, while gaps in digital marketing knowledge limited growth opportunities in online

markets. Regional variations also emerged, with urban centres like Chennai and Coimbatore reporting higher levels of entrepreneurial maturity, while semi-urban locations such as Nagercoil and Thanjavur demonstrated strong interest but lacked adequate local infrastructure and support systems.

Overall, the findings indicate that Thozhili successfully delivered short-term skill-building and confidence enhancement for women entrepreneurs, but future editions must focus on sustained mentorship, advanced business strategies, and stronger outreach to rural and semi-urban communities to achieve long-term impact.

## 7. Limitations and Research Gaps

While the study provides meaningful insights into the post-impact of the Thozhili Bootcamp, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is limited to short-term outcomes based on data collected immediately after the bootcamp. Long-term sustainability of participants' businesses, revenue growth, or employment generation could not be assessed within the study's timeframe. A longitudinal follow-up study would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the bootcamp influences entrepreneurial trajectories over time.

Second, the study relied heavily on self-reported data collected through surveys and telephonic interviews. While this method was practical for capturing large-scale responses across locations, it may carry response bias, as participants could overstate their improvements or underreport challenges. Triangulation with independent performance metrics such as financial statements, startup registrations, or market linkages would improve validity.

Third, the geographical scope was restricted to five locations in Tamil Nadu, which, although diverse, may not fully represent the entire state's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Regional variations in socio-economic conditions, infrastructure, and cultural attitudes toward women entrepreneurship were not deeply explored. Expanding the study to include additional districts and rural belts could reveal more nuanced patterns of participation and impact.

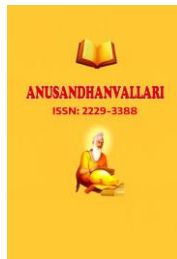
Fourth, the study focused primarily on general entrepreneurial skill-building and access to StartupTN services. However, sector-specific differences—such as those between food processing, textiles, IT services, or crafts—were not analyzed in depth. Understanding sectoral challenges and tailoring interventions accordingly remains a critical research gap.

Finally, the study did not include perspectives from other stakeholders such as mentors, investors, or policymakers. Including multiple viewpoints would provide a holistic understanding of the ecosystem and identify systemic barriers beyond participant experiences.

These gaps highlight the need for future research to adopt a multi-dimensional, longitudinal, and sector-sensitive approach to evaluating women-focused entrepreneurship initiatives like Thozhili.

## 8. Conclusion

The Thozhili Women Bootcamp represents a meaningful step in bridging gender gaps in Tamil Nadu's entrepreneurial ecosystem. While immediate outcomes show significant improvements in entrepreneurial skills, awareness, and networking, gaps in financial access, mentorship continuity, and regional inclusivity remain. Addressing these through structured follow-up, expanded outreach, and advanced business strategy training can enhance the sustainability and long-term impact of such programs. Thozhili demonstrates the potential of



inclusive, state-supported initiatives to catalyze women-led growth in India's startup ecosystem.

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