International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Application | IJAMA
Volume 3 Issue 11 Nov2026
ISSN No: 3048-9350

Kerala Startup Mission Support Mechanisms in Enhancing Startup Survival: A Study Among Startups in Alappuzha District

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Abstract

Startups play an increasingly important role in employment generation, innovation, regional economic development and entrepreneurship-led growth. However, early-stage startups frequently face challenges related to finance, market access, managerial capabilities, technology adoption, skilled human resources and business sustainability. In Kerala, the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) serves as a major institutional mechanism for supporting startups through financial assistance, incubation, mentoring, training, networking, infrastructure and market-related interventions. Despite the expansion of the startup ecosystem, the effectiveness of such support mechanisms in ensuring the continued survival of startups at the district level requires empirical examination. The present study proposes to examine the effectiveness of KSUM support mechanisms in enhancing startup survival, with particular reference to startups in Alappuzha District.

The study focuses on major dimensions of KSUM support, including financial support, incubation support, mentoring and advisory services, training and skill development, networking opportunities, market support, and institutional facilitation. Startup survival is examined through indicators such as business continuity, financial stability, adaptability, customer retention, and future sustainability. Adopting a conceptual and analytical research design, the study relies entirely on secondary data gathered from published reports, policy documents, official portals, academic literature, and institutional databases. Descriptive and qualitative analytical frameworks are employed to examine the structural relationships between KSUM support mechanisms and startup survival. The study is expected to provide useful insights for policymakers, startup-support institutions, incubators, and entrepreneurs, contributing to strengthening the effectiveness of regional startup-support systems.

Keywords: Kerala Startup Mission, startups, startup survival, entrepreneurial ecosystem, incubation, financial support, Alappuzha, Entrepreneurship.

1.INTRODUCTION

Startups constitute an increasingly important component of contemporary entrepreneurial ecosystems. They contribute to innovation, employment creation, commercialization of technology and regional economic development. Unlike established firms, however, startups often operate with limited financial resources, uncertain markets, incomplete organizational structures andrestricted access to managerial expertise.

The early stages of a startup are particularly vulnerable because entrepreneurs must simultaneously develop products, identify customers, establish revenue models, build teams and obtain financial resources. The concept of the liability of newness explains why young firms face difficulties in acquiring resources, information, legitimacy and external connections. Recent OECD analysis similarly identifies access to external resources, information and connections as important challenges faced by newly created ventures.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem surrounding a startup can therefore influence its ability to survive and develop. Research on regional entrepreneurial ecosystems has identified factors such as access to finance, human capital, innovation capacity, entrepreneurial culture and formal support organizations as important dimensions of ecosystem quality. Evidence from a study of 301 U.S. metropolitan areas suggests that stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems are associated with better venture survival

conditions.

In Kerala, the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) is the nodal agency of the Government of Kerala for promoting entrepreneurship and implementing the Kerala Technology Startup Policy. KSUM was established in 2006 and has developed a range of ecosystem interventions covering funding, incubation, mentoring, market access, infrastructure and networking. Its current ecosystem information reports more than 8,000 technology startups, more than 10 lakh square feet of incubation office space, 63 incubators and 550 IEDCs/innovation-related centres across the state.

The district-level dimension is particularly important because startup ecosystems are not spatially uniform. KSUM's current ecosystem portal records 129 Unique-ID startups in Alappuzha District, together with one Mini FabLab and seven IEDCs.
Despite the existence of these support mechanisms, the availability of support does not automatically establish that individual startups survive because of that support. Consequently, there is a need to examine conceptually how different forms of institutional support may address specific survival-related constraints.

This paper therefore focuses on the relationship between KSUM support mechanisms and startup survival, using Alappuzha District as the contextual setting.

Startup survival is influenced by several interconnected factors. Access to finance may determine whether a venture can continue product development and meet operating expenses. Incubation can provide infrastructure, technical resources and business guidance. Mentoring can help founders make strategic decisions, while training can strengthen entrepreneurial and managerial capabilities. Networking can facilitate access to investors, partners, customers and knowledge, whereas market-support mechanisms can assist startups in moving from product development to commercialization.
KSUM has developed support mechanisms addressing many of these constraints. Its current programmes include early-stage funding, incubation and acceleration, coworking facilities, market expansion, government-as-a-marketplace initiatives, mentoring and investment-related programmes.

However, a conceptual issue remains: how do these individual support mechanisms translate into conditions that facilitate startup survival?

This question becomes especially relevant at the district level, where the availability, accessibility and utilization of ecosystem resources may differ from the overall state-level picture.

The present study therefore develops a conceptual framework linking KSUM support mechanisms with dimensions of startup survival in Alappuzha District.

The study has the following objectives: to examine the major startup-support mechanisms provided by Kerala Startup Mission; to examine the startup ecosystem context of Alappuzha District using secondary data; to conceptually analyse the role of financial support in startup survival; to examine how incubation, mentoring, and training may contribute to startup continuity and adaptability; to examine the potential contribution of networking and market-support mechanisms to customer retention and business sustainability; to develop a conceptual framework linking KSUM support mechanisms with startup survival; and to identify gaps in existing secondary evidence and suggest directions for future empirical research.

2.MATERIAL AND METHODS

This section outlines the research design, data sources, and analytical procedures used to examine the role of the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) in enhancing startup survival, with particular reference to Alappuzha District.

Research Design

The study adopts a conceptual research design based exclusively on secondary data. It does not involve the collection of primary data from startup founders through questionnaires or interviews. Instead, the study synthesizes available documentary and academic evidence to establish a conceptual understanding of how KSUM support mechanisms—such as financial assistance,

incubation, mentoring, training, networking, market support, and institutional facilitation—contribute to startup survival. Startup survival is evaluated conceptually through five key dimensions: business continuity, financial stability, adaptability, customer retention, and future sustainability. Rather than establishing a statistical causal relationship for individual firms, the study maps the structural linkages between institutional support systems and the operational viability of ventures, contextualized within Alappuzha District.

Sources of Secondary Data

The study draws upon qualitative and quantitative secondary information retrieved from official institutional repositories and academic literature, including:

- Kerala Startup Mission ecosystem portals and startup directories
- KSUM scheme guidelines, notifications, and policy documents
- KSUM annual reports and ecosystem performance records
- Government of Kerala policy documents and administrative reports
- Published peer-reviewed research articles and books on entrepreneurial ecosystems

Analytical Approach

The investigation applies several analytical techniques appropriate for documentary and conceptual research:

- **Documentary Analysis:** Systematic evaluation of official reports, policy texts, and scheme guidelines.
- **Descriptive Analysis:** Examination of ecosystem figures, such as incubator counts and registered startup distributions.
- **Thematic Analysis:** Categorization of support mechanisms into distinct functional dimensions (finance, incubation, mentoring, training, networking, and market support).
- **Comparative Interpretation:** Reviewing how various institutional interventions align across different stages of the startup lifecycle.
- **Conceptual Synthesis:** Integrating literature findings to build a framework linking support mechanisms, resource development, and business survival.

3.RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study conceptually investigates the role of the Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) support mechanisms in enhancing startup survival, with specific reference to Alappuzha District. Because this research adopts a conceptual design based on secondary data rather than primary survey data, the "results" are synthesized from documentary evidence, official KSUM metrics, ecosystem repository statistics, and literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems. The findings are structured sequentially around the research objectives, incorporating analytical tables and a conceptual framework figure.

3.1 Overview of KSUM Support Mechanisms and District Ecosystem Context

To address the initial objectives of examining major KSUM support interventions and mapping the startup ecosystem context of Alappuzha District, secondary data were compiled from official KSUM portals and administrative records.

The ecosystem architecture in Kerala relies heavily on multi-tiered institutional interventions ranging from early-stage financial grants to market access programs. Table 1 summarizes the core dimensions of KSUM support, their primary operational instruments, and their expected conceptual contributions to startup survival.

Table 1: Dimensions of KSUM Support Mechanisms and Their Conceptual Link to Startup Survival

Support Dimension	Key KSUM Instruments & Interventions	Target Operational Stage	Conceptual Contribution to Startup Survival
Financial Support	Seed Support Scheme, Scale-up Seed Fund, Grants	Prototype to Early Revenue	Secures working capital, funds product testing, and mitigates early financial failure.
Incubation Support	Pre-incubation, Incubation, Accelerators, Infrastructure	Idea to Growth	Lowers overhead costs, provides physical space, and grants technical resource access.
Mentoring & Advisory	Expert mentoring networks, advisory sessions	Validation to Market Entry	Improves managerial decision-making, addresses information gaps, and refines business strategy.
Training & Skill Development	Capacity-building workshops, pitching sessions	Idea to Incubation	Enhances entrepreneurial competence, technology adoption, and financial literacy.
Networking Support	Ecosystem meets, investor roundtables, partner links	Market Entry to Sustainability	Facilitates strategic alliances, investor readiness, and collaborative opportunities.
Market Support	Government as a Marketplace, Market Expansion	Market Entry to Growth	Provides initial customer validation, procurement opportunities, and revenue channels.
Institutional Facilitation	Unique ID registration, DPIIT integration	Throughout Lifecycle	Reduces administrative friction and simplifies navigation of regulatory frameworks.

As shown in the table, KSUM's multi-pronged approach addresses distinct vulnerabilities across the entrepreneurial lifecycle. However, ecosystem metrics reveal a decentralized distribution of support across districts. Focusing specifically on Alappuzha District, secondary data from the KSUM ecosystem portal indicate a localized support infrastructure comprising 129 Unique-ID registered startups, 1 Mini FabLab, and 7 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Centres (IEDCs) hosted in regional

academic institutions. These ventures span diverse sectors including food processing, IT services, renewable energy, and healthcare.

3.2 Conceptual Framework and Lifecycle Stage Mapping

To understand how these institutional interventions translate into business continuity, the study mapped support mechanisms against the startup lifecycle (addressed via objectives regarding financial, incubation, mentoring, and networking contributions).

The conceptual synthesis reveals that startup survival is not a function of a single isolated intervention, but rather a sequential accumulation of capabilities. Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual framework, mapping the structural flow from institutional support inputs to resource development, dynamic adaptability, and final survival outcomes.

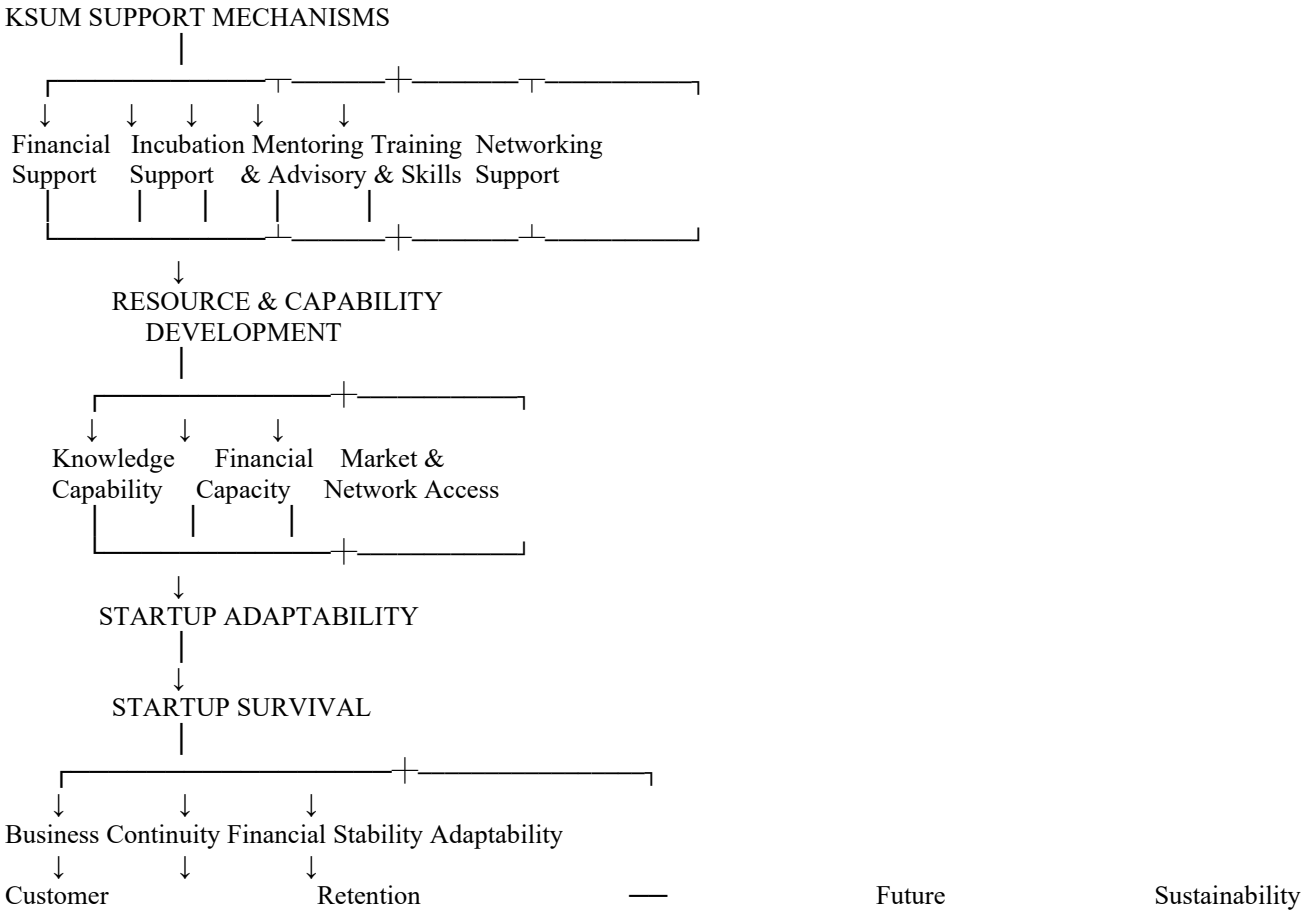


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Linking KSUM Support Mechanisms to Startup Survival

To further elaborate on the stage-specific nature of these interventions, Table 2 delineates how KSUM support aligns with developmental milestones.

Table 2: Stage-Wise Alignment of KSUM Support and Survival Outcomes

Startup Lifecycle Stage	Primary KSUM Intervention	Core Capability Developed	Survival Outcome Dimension
Idea / Pre-incubation	Training, IEDCs, Mini FabLabs	Entrepreneurial knowledge & mindset	Business Continuity
Prototype Development	Seed Support, Incubation space	Technical feasibility & product readiness	Financial Stability
Validation / Early Revenue	Mentoring, Customer discovery	Market-fit & strategic adjustment	Adaptability
Market Entry / Growth	Market Support, Government Procurement	Customer acquisition & brand credibility	Customer Retention
Sustainability / Scale-up	Scale-up Fund, Investor networking	Long-term operational viability	Future Sustainability

3.3 Discussion of Findings in Comparison with Previous Literature

The findings of this study offer critical insights when evaluated against existing entrepreneurship literature. Prior studies on regional innovation systems (e.g., Audretsch & Belitski, 2020; Stam & Spigel, 2016) emphasize that the mere presence of institutional actors or physical infrastructure does not automatically guarantee firm survival. The analysis of Alappuzha District reinforces this perspective: while 129 Unique-ID startups and 7 IEDCs exist within the district, registration does not inherently prove active utilization of funding or successful incubation.

Furthermore, the literature frequently debates the deterministic value of financial capital versus managerial mentorship. While early-stage scholars often highlight capital constraints as the primary cause of startup mortality (Cassar, 2004), the conceptual framework developed here highlights that financial support must be coupled with non-financial interventions—such as mentoring, institutional facilitation, and market access (e.g., government procurement initiatives like the Kerala Maritime Board vendor selection observed in Alappuzha)—to foster true organizational adaptability and long-term customer retention.

Compared to empirical studies that rely on primary founder surveys, this conceptual secondary-data analysis contributes a structured mapping model that bridges the gap between macro-level government policy and micro-level firm survival indicators. It underscores that regional support agencies like KSUM must transition from quantitative tracking (such as counting total registrations or square footage of incubators) toward outcome-oriented tracking metrics (such as survival duration, revenue growth, and follow-on investments).

4.CONCLUSION

The study set out to conceptually examine the role of Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) support mechanisms in enhancing startup survival, with a specific focus on Alappuzha District. Through a systematic synthesis of secondary sources, policy guidelines, and ecosystem data, the investigation achieved its objectives by mapping the core support dimensions—financial assistance, incubation, mentoring, training, networking, market access, and institutional facilitation—and contextualizing them within Alappuzha's regional infrastructure of 129 Unique-ID startups, one Mini FabLab, and seven IEDCs.

The primary contribution of this research lies in the development of a structured, district-focused conceptual framework that traces the pathway from institutional support inputs to resource and capability development, subsequent organizational adaptability, and ultimate startup survival dimensions (business continuity, financial stability, adaptability, customer retention, and future sustainability). The analysis underscores that institutional interventions operate most effectively as a stage-specific continuum rather than isolated measures, highlighting that financial injections must be reinforced with non-financial enablers like mentoring, market linkage, and institutional guidance.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

Despite its theoretical contributions, this study has inherent limitations. Because it relies exclusively on secondary data and documentary evidence, it maps potential structural linkages rather than empirically proving causal relationships at the individual firm level. Furthermore, registry counts such as Unique IDs or incubator figures reflect ecosystem availability rather than actual resource utilization or firm-level performance.

These limitations open clear avenues for future research. Subsequent studies should build upon this conceptual foundation by adopting an empirical research design, collecting primary data from startup founders and co-founders in Alappuzha District through structured questionnaires or interviews. Utilizing advanced statistical tools such as structural equation modeling on primary survey data would enable researchers to empirically test the hypothesized relationships, measure the actual impact of specific KSUM interventions, and provide actionable, data-driven insights for policymakers and regional incubation managers.

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