



The Rise of Hustle Culture in Bangalore College Students: Navigating Ambition and Academic Balance

Aashika P Mukherjee¹, Aditi Jain², Chippy Mohan³, Sandhya D⁴

^{1,2} School of Business & Management, Christ University, Bangalore

^{3,4} Assistant Professor, School of Business & Management, Christ University, Bangalore

Abstract

Hustle culture has become a prominent part of college student life in Bangalore, blending entrepreneurial ambition with the pursuit of financial independence and self-actualization. This study investigates the driving factors behind student hustling, its effects on academic performance and personal well-being, and the long-term implications for career development. Through a combination of literature reviews, surveys, and interviews, the research explores both the benefits, such as skill-building and professional networking, and the risks, including burnout, stress, and poor work-life balance. The findings aim to provide insights into how educational institutions can better support students in managing the challenges of balancing hustle culture with academic success.

Keywords: Hustle culture, College students, Entrepreneurship, Academic performance, Well-being, Burnout

Introduction

Hustle culture has increasingly permeated college student life, particularly in dynamic, fast-growing urban centers like Bangalore. The term "hustling" often refers to the pursuit of multiple goals simultaneously, typically combining education, part-time work, entrepreneurial ventures, and extracurricular activities. For college students, hustling represents a blend of financial necessity, self-actualization, and professional ambition (Cavazos & Chavez, 2018). In a city like Bangalore, known as India's Silicon Valley, the entrepreneurial spirit is heightened, further encouraging students to adopt this lifestyle as they seek to develop skills, networks, and financial stability alongside their studies. This paper seeks to explore the nature of hustling among Bangalore's college students and the myriad factors driving its widespread adoption.

The rise of student hustling can be traced to several socio-economic factors. As higher education costs continue to rise, many students find themselves working part-time or engaging in side projects to meet financial demands (Miller & Jennings, 2020). Beyond financial necessity, the changing nature of the job market, with its emphasis on skills,

experience, and networking, encourages students to engage in entrepreneurial or freelance activities to enhance their employability (Simmons & Elwood, 2019). In Bangalore, where start-up culture thrives, many students are driven to "hustle" as a way of gaining real-world experience, a trend that has profound implications for their academic, professional, and personal lives.

However, while the hustle culture offers students opportunities to gain valuable skills and establish early professional networks, it is not without challenges. One of the significant risks associated with student hustling is the potential for burnout. Studies have shown that over-engagement in multiple roles can lead to physical and mental exhaustion, negatively impacting students' academic performance and well-being (Jones & Thomas, 2017). The constant pressure to balance coursework, part-time jobs, and entrepreneurial activities may lead to stress, lack of sleep, and decreased focus, which in turn hampers academic achievement.

The impact of hustling on students' mental health has been widely documented. A study by Ryan and Deci (2019) found that students who engage in too many activities simultaneously are at risk of experiencing chronic stress and anxiety. While some students thrive in a high-pressure environment, others may struggle with time management and the emotional toll of maintaining multiple responsibilities. In the context of Bangalore, where the fast-paced, competitive environment adds to the intensity of academic life, students are particularly vulnerable to these adverse effects.

Educational institutions in Bangalore and beyond are increasingly recognizing the challenges posed by the hustle culture. Many universities and colleges are introducing support systems, such as mental health services, time management workshops, and flexible learning schedules, to help students balance their academic responsibilities with external commitments (Patel & Sharma, 2021). However, there is still a need for more comprehensive approaches to support students who are deeply engaged in hustling, particularly as they attempt to navigate the complex intersection of academic, professional, and personal lives.

This paper aims to analyze the factors driving college student hustling in Bangalore, explore its positive and negative impacts, and propose strategic interventions that educational institutions can adopt to support students in this multifaceted lifestyle. By conducting in-depth surveys, interviews, and literature reviews, the study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the student hustle and how it shapes the overall college experience in one of India's most dynamic educational hubs.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of "hustling" among students has been widely examined in international contexts, particularly in relation to the pressures of balancing academics, employment, and entrepreneurial activities. In the U.S., Cavazos and Chavez (2018) highlighted the financial necessity driving students to adopt multiple roles, noting that many students work part-time jobs to cover tuition and living costs while simultaneously engaging in side hustles to gain practical experience. This dual pressure often affects students' academic performance and well-being, with consequences such as time management difficulties, stress, and burnout. Similarly, Miller and Jennings (2020) explored how the rising cost of higher education in Western countries has compelled students to seek out additional sources of income, leading to increased engagement in freelance and entrepreneurial ventures. This international

perspective shows a strong correlation between financial constraints and student hustling, with implications for both academic success and mental health.

In Europe, the entrepreneurial spirit among students has also been examined. Sahlberg (2011) studied the Finnish education system and found that while academic pressure in Finland is less intense due to its educational policies, students are still increasingly engaging in side projects and part-time jobs to enhance their employability. Finland's supportive educational infrastructure allows students to juggle these roles more effectively than in other countries where institutional support may be limited. However, even in countries with less emphasis on a "hustle culture," the global trend toward entrepreneurialism is becoming more prominent in student life, as young people seek to build skills that will make them competitive in the global workforce (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The rise of gig economy platforms such as Uber, Fiverr, and TaskRabbit has also influenced the global student hustle culture. In countries like Australia and Canada, studies by Ng (2019) and Geiger (2018) have shown that students increasingly rely on gig work for flexible, immediate income. While these platforms provide opportunities to earn money, they can also exploit students' time and energy, further complicating the balance between academics and financial independence. This aspect of student hustling is critical as it indicates the growing overlap between the academic environment and the labor market, pushing students to make difficult choices about how they allocate their time and resources.

In the Indian context, hustling among college students has been gaining attention, particularly in metropolitan areas like Bangalore. Varghese (2019) noted that Bangalore's thriving startup ecosystem has encouraged many students to become involved in entrepreneurial ventures while pursuing their degrees. The allure of early financial independence, coupled with Bangalore's reputation as a tech hub, leads students to take on multiple roles, such as working part-time in startups, freelancing, or launching their own businesses. However, the study also identified significant challenges, including time management issues and the mental health consequences of balancing academic workloads with professional aspirations.

Rana (2019) explored the growing trend of students engaging in hustling to enhance their employability in the highly competitive Indian job market. The pressure to gain early professional experience and financial independence is compounded by the societal expectations placed on students to succeed academically and professionally. In cities like Bangalore, where job opportunities are abundant but highly competitive, students face a unique set of challenges in maintaining academic excellence while engaging in various side projects. The study emphasized the lack of institutional support for students who juggle multiple roles, which can lead to stress and poor academic performance. Patel and Sharma (2021) examined the mental health implications of the hustle culture in Indian universities. Their research found that while students are driven by the desire to build their careers early, the constant juggling of responsibilities often leads to burnout, anxiety, and reduced academic focus. The authors argued that while hustling can provide students with valuable skills and networking opportunities, universities need to implement stronger support systems to help students manage the negative consequences of this lifestyle. This study underlines the importance of providing mental health services and flexible academic structures to better support students engaged in hustling.

While both international and national literature have explored the motivations behind student hustling and its implications for academic performance, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the specific challenges and opportunities that arise in regional contexts like Bangalore. The existing literature often focuses on Western or pan-Indian perspectives without considering how local factors, such as the startup culture in Bangalore or the unique demands of Indian education systems, influence student hustling. Moreover, most studies have concentrated on either the positive or negative aspects of hustling but have not sufficiently explored how institutions can mediate between these two extremes. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the student hustle culture in Bangalore, considering both its benefits and risks, and offering recommendations for educational institutions to better support students in navigating this complex environment.

The Evolution of Student Work and Entrepreneurship

The involvement of students in work, particularly in entrepreneurial activities, has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Historically, students were primarily expected to focus on academic pursuits, with any form of work or entrepreneurship often seen as a distraction. However, as global economies have shifted toward knowledge-based industries and competitive job markets, students are increasingly seeking opportunities to gain practical experience and financial independence alongside their studies. This shift has been driven by a range of factors, including rising tuition fees, the need for real-world experience, and the increasing prominence of entrepreneurship in the global economy (Carter et al., 2017). As a result, student engagement in work and entrepreneurship has transitioned from a marginal activity to a mainstream expectation, particularly in urban educational hubs such as Bangalore.

Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in shaping student entrepreneurship. The advent of the internet, social media, and digital marketplaces has made it easier for students to engage in entrepreneurial ventures, often with minimal initial capital. Platforms like Etsy, Upwork, and YouTube have enabled students to monetize their skills and creativity, providing them with the flexibility to balance work and academic responsibilities. According to research by Stokes et al. (2020), the rise of the gig economy has been a major contributor to the surge in student entrepreneurship, as it allows students to work on a freelance basis, tailoring their work schedules around academic commitments. This flexibility has made it increasingly viable for students to pursue entrepreneurial activities, thereby transforming the traditional student work experience. The shift toward entrepreneurship among students is not solely driven by financial necessity; it is also fueled by a desire for personal growth and professional development. Many students view entrepreneurship as an opportunity to develop leadership, problem-solving, and decision-making skills that are not always emphasized in formal academic settings. According to Zappe and Moreno (2019), student entrepreneurship provides a unique learning experience that complements traditional education by fostering creativity, resilience, and adaptability. Moreover, universities have recognized this trend, and many have incorporated entrepreneurship education into their curricula, offering workshops, incubators, and mentorship programs to support student-led ventures. This institutional support has further normalized entrepreneurship as a key aspect of the student experience.

Despite the many benefits associated with student entrepreneurship, there are also challenges and risks. Juggling entrepreneurial responsibilities with academic commitments can lead to stress, burnout, and a decline in academic performance. Additionally, the high levels of uncertainty and risk involved in entrepreneurial ventures can be discouraging, particularly for students who lack financial resources or business experience. Studies by Miller and Jennings (2020) indicate that while student entrepreneurship can provide valuable experience and financial rewards, it also requires careful time management and emotional resilience. Universities and educational institutions, particularly in fast-paced environments like Bangalore, must recognize these challenges and provide appropriate support systems, such as counseling services and flexible academic schedules, to ensure that students can thrive both academically and entrepreneurially.

The rise of the "passion economy," a concept popularized by Adam Davidson (2020), has significantly reshaped how college students engage with work. Increasingly, students are monetizing their unique skills and hobbies through various digital platforms, diverging from traditional part-time jobs. These passion-driven side projects allow students to align their personal interests with long-term career aspirations, offering both productivity and satisfaction (Davidson, 2020). Social media plays a crucial role in amplifying this trend by showcasing the success stories of young entrepreneurs who have transformed their side hustles into flourishing businesses. This portrayal often suggests that hustling is a shortcut to financial independence and success. However, such a romanticized depiction can lead to conformity, stress, and burnout among students, as well as foster an unrealistic perception of what success truly entails (Smith, 2022; Johnson, 2021).

Effects on Academic Performance & Well-Being Implications

Research on the impact of student work on academic performance yields conflicting results. Some studies suggest that engaging in work or starting a business can help students develop better time management skills, enabling them to balance multiple responsibilities effectively, which can lead to improved academic outcomes (Hirschi, 2013). For these students, the ability to juggle academic commitments with work may foster a sense of discipline and responsibility, enhancing their overall performance in school. Conversely, other studies indicate that the demands of work can negatively affect academic achievement. For instance, Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) found that students who work more than 20 hours per week are more likely to report adverse outcomes, including lower grades and increased dropout rates. This suggests that while some students may thrive under the pressure of balancing work and academics, others may struggle to cope, leading to diminished academic performance.

The complexities of student work extend beyond academic performance and into the realm of personal well-being. While some students find fulfillment and meaning in their side hustles, contributing positively to their overall sense of purpose, others experience significant stress due to the competing demands of their academic and entrepreneurial pursuits (Gordon, 2019). The dichotomy between personal satisfaction and overwhelming pressure can create a challenging environment for students trying to succeed in both areas.

The pressure to excel academically while simultaneously managing entrepreneurial ambitions can result in burnout, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Clarke and Knights (2018) emphasize that this dual orientation towards success in both academics and entrepreneurship increases the likelihood of students experiencing mental health

issues. As they navigate the complexities of their commitments, many students may find themselves at risk of compromising their well-being, highlighting the need for supportive structures that promote balance and mental health.

International vs. Indian Scenario

Globally, the rise of hustle culture among college students is a growing trend, particularly in countries like the United States, South Korea, and the United Kingdom. In these regions, students are increasingly turning to entrepreneurial ventures, freelancing, and side hustles to supplement their income and gain practical experience alongside their studies (Liu et al., 2021). Countries like the U.S. have established ecosystems that support student entrepreneurship, with incubators, mentorship programs, and flexible academic structures that encourage innovation without compromising academic goals (Miller, 2020). In contrast, in India—especially in cities like Bangalore—the hustle culture is emerging rapidly but faces challenges due to traditional academic expectations and limited institutional support for entrepreneurship.

Bangalore, known as India's Silicon Valley, offers a unique environment for students to engage in entrepreneurial activities, thanks to the city's booming tech industry and startup culture. However, Indian college students often struggle with balancing academic pressure and entrepreneurial ambitions, as the education system places a heavy emphasis on exam performance and grades (Bhattacharya, 2020). In contrast, Western universities often allow more flexible curriculums, internships for academic credit, and access to funding, creating a more conducive environment for students to manage both studies and side ventures (Miller, 2020). This disparity highlights the need for Indian academic institutions to adapt and provide more structured support for student entrepreneurship.

What India Can Learn

To foster a more supportive environment for student entrepreneurs, Indian colleges and universities can adopt several practices from international institutions. One key strategy is creating flexible academic schedules that allow students to pursue entrepreneurial ventures without academic penalties (Liu et al., 2021). Western universities often offer co-op programs, where students alternate between semesters of study and work, gaining real-world experience while maintaining academic momentum. Introducing such programs in India could help students balance their academic responsibilities with the demands of running a business or engaging in side hustles.

Another important practice is the establishment of on-campus startup incubators and accelerator programs. These platforms provide mentorship, funding, and networking opportunities for students to develop their ideas into viable businesses (Markman et al., 2018). By integrating these resources into academic institutions, Indian universities could create a supportive ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation, similar to the models seen in the U.S. and Europe. This approach would help students manage the pressures of hustling while still focusing on their academic goals.

Recommendations

To better support student entrepreneurs and foster a balance between academics and side hustles, Indian academic institutions can adopt several key practices from global models. One recommendation is the introduction of more flexible academic structures, such as co-op programs or internships that offer academic credit for work experience.

Western universities, particularly in the U.S. and Canada, have successfully implemented co-op programs that allow students to alternate between periods of study and work, gaining practical experience without interrupting their academic progress (Liu et al., 2021). Incorporating such programs in Indian colleges would help students manage their time better and balance both academic and entrepreneurial commitments.

Another crucial recommendation is the establishment of dedicated startup incubators and mentorship programs on campus. These resources offer students access to funding, networking, and expert guidance, helping them develop their entrepreneurial ventures while staying focused on their studies. Universities in the U.S. and Europe have created robust ecosystems that support student entrepreneurs by providing a structured environment for innovation (Markman et al., 2018). Indian institutions can adopt similar models, promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing employability by fostering a culture that encourages both academic success and entrepreneurial growth.

Conclusion

The rise of hustle culture among college students, particularly in Bangalore, presents both opportunities and challenges in balancing academic responsibilities with entrepreneurial ambitions. While some students benefit from improved time management and practical experience, others face increased stress and potential academic decline. Adopting global practices, such as flexible academic schedules and on-campus incubators, could enhance support for student entrepreneurs in India. However, future research should focus on understanding the long-term impacts of hustling on students' mental health, academic performance, and career trajectories, as well as developing tailored strategies to help students sustainably manage both spheres. Exploring these research gaps will be crucial in fostering a balanced and supportive environment for student entrepreneurs.

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