

Employment Challenges and Opportunities for Performing Arts Graduates in Kerala: An Analytical Study

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Abstract: The performing arts sector in Kerala is a major area signifying the cultural value of the state and it acts as an essential component in promoting artistic identity of India. However, these section of the economy faces serious multifaceted issues which affects the livelihood of these people in the state. The major affecting part is the employability of performing arts graduates in Kerala which is mainly due to financial constraints, changing preferences of audience and also a transition from traditional to modern market driven economy. the present study focusses on the employment challenges and opportunities of performing arts graduates in Kerala by taking the key institutions offering graduate courses in performing arts in Kerala and also examining the employment trends, income pattern and job satisfaction of these performing arts graduates. The study findings point to the need and role of government intervention, skill enhancement programmes and integration of digital platforms to improve the career opportunities.

Keywords: Employability, Classical Dance Graduates, Performing Arts, Career Opportunities, Barriers to Employment, Cultural Employment, Performing Arts Education, Job Market Analysis

1. Introduction

The performing arts hold a significant place in Kerala economy culture. The cultural diversity and integrity of the state is well praised by connecting with performing arts. Every occasions and festivals place a key role to some forms of performing arts in Kerala. Despite this rich history and cultural significance, this sector faces huge struggles in many ways, especially in finding their desired job and thereby following their passion. Prestigious establishments like Kerala Kalamandalam, has produced thousands of artists trained in classical and traditional art forms. However, the life of these graduates after their education level are not much protected or improved. The job availability and

accessibility to them is really a troubled part for them as it have changed due to the transition from traditional patronage to a market-driven economy. The artists really play a major role in the life of many, directly or indirectly by linking the audiences and performers with feelings, stories, and customs that cut beyond linguistic and cultural barriers. This bonding is very essential in establishing cultural identity, encouraging society involvement, and refining personal development.

For a long period of time, this performing art was praised for their role in inherent cultural and social influence, but this traditional concept is changed in the recent years. The performing arts now become a professional course and career path, which can become a source of livelihood for many desired artists. There are much scope for the performing arts graduates, especially in this digital era with high influence of social media, video streaming services, and even the advent of virtual reality options. All these platforms have given enough ways to connect with the audience, the society and even every corner of the world. But, there lies a problem of skill gap at this juncture, where this connectivity and digitalisation requires new skills including digital content creation and online marketing methods. Also financial constraints is another major setback to these artists. The area is really underfunded by government and authorities as they rely mostly on ticket sales and sponsorship from private parties. This can make these artists vulnerable to any dips in the economy. Also, the change is social perspectives and ideas of the modern audience make them more stressful as they are forced to change the kinds of performance and stories that they present. This brings both opportunities and difficulties for these artists who constantly trying to stay influential and uptodate.

In the present days, many improvements are also observed in the field. One such initiative is by the Kerala Cultural Policy which prioritizes the promotion and preservation of traditional arts while providing artists with opportunities and financial support. Central government programs like Guru Shishya Parampara Scheme and Zonal Cultural Centres provides funding possibilities and training for the performing arts people. Also, the interested students in music, dance, theatre, and other artistic areas have the possibility to enroll in any of Kerala's performing arts graduate programs in different Universities, schools, and specialist organizations that are devoted to protecting and advancing both classic and modern art forms by providing these courses.

The present study is focused on performing arts such as Bharatnatyam, mohiniyattam, kuchipudi, keralanadanam, music, drama, theatre and instruments and also focused on institutions such as Kerala kalamandalam, RLV college, sree sankaracharya university of sanskrit, and also the distance education offered by Tamil university.

2. Objectives

1. To examine the current employment status of performing arts graduates
2. To identify and analyze the problems, challenges, and barriers faced by performing arts graduates in securing employment.

3. Methodology of Study

The present study focuses on the employability of performing arts graduates in Kerala. It mainly concerns the employability of performing arts graduates along with their income patterns, expenditure patterns, and the challenges they face in pursuing their desired job. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected using a sample method, with samples from 40 performing arts graduates in Kerala chosen randomly. The data was collected through telephone interviews, with the graduates using a questionnaire.

The secondary data is collected from websites and apps like the National Portal of India, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Academia.

4. Review of Literature

The article by Dr. Ismail Thamarasseri and Ramdas K.S. on “**Cultural and Educational Values among the Learners of Performing Arts at Kerala Kalamandalam**” offers a good insight into the role of performing arts education in bringing transmission to cultural and educational values.

National Education Policy (NEP 2020) specifically mentions the role of incorporating this area of arts by focusing on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and performing arts into mainstream education to address social justice and critical thinking needs. The study addresses the importance of cultural and educational values in performing arts education at Kerala Kalamandalam and also highlights the institution’s role as a store house of culture and its potential to inspire curriculum reforms in arts education.

The article “**Employability Challenges Facing Vocal Art Graduates in South Africa: A Case Study of Tshwane University of Technology**” (2021) by Sakhiseni Joseph Yende and George Mugovhani explores the disconnection between higher education and industry demands in the performing arts sector, focusing on Vocal Art (VA) graduates. A qualitative research method was employed using approaches such as a review of scholarly writings and interviews with arts graduates, lecturers, employers, VA performers, and selected performing arts industry practitioners and leaders. The findings demonstrated that there are a high number of arts graduates battling to find

employment which is partly attributable to a lack of specific skills not catered for in the present curriculum. The study identified these special and relevant skills crucial for the performing arts industry. The article concludes by affirming that the TUT curriculum has to be redesigned, restructured and aligned with the continuously changing performing arts industry.

The scoping review by Samantha K. Brooks and Sonny S. Patel examines the multifaceted impacts of COVID-19 lockdowns on performing artists, including professionals, amateurs, and students, with a focus on their wellbeing, challenges, and opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns caused widespread disruption across industries, particularly affecting the cultural and creative sectors. Performing artists, who often work in precarious freelance roles, faced severe challenges due to restrictions on in-person activities and venue closures. Reports show widespread income loss in the sector: 76% of surveyed performers experienced reduced income, while 50% lost full-time jobs, highlighting the vulnerability of performing artists to economic crises. Artists faced significant psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, loneliness, and poor sleep, exacerbated by social isolation and the loss of in-person collaborative opportunities. Despite the challenges, many artists demonstrated their potential by adapting their work to online platforms, pursuing new skills, and exploring creative avenues during the lockdown.

The study by Kristel Joy Tabao, “Probing the challenges experienced by performers of culture and the arts” showcases the challenges faced by performers in the Culture and Arts club of Cagayan State University, focusing the balance between academics and performing arts. Performers often do dual roles as students and artists, with teachers and coaching staff recognizing the need to prioritize both aspects of their development. Quantitative research revealed that even without receiving support such as nutritious meals, medical assistance, and vitamins during rehearsals, academic struggles were the most important challenge for student performers. The study highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the unique needs of performers to support their holistic growth in both academics and cultural expression.

K. R. Kavya Krishna’s, “Gender and Performance: The Reinvention of Mohiniyattam in Early Twentieth-Century Kerala” work explores the relationship between the gender, identity, and performance. Traditionally associated with femininity and *lasya* (graceful expression), Mohiniyattam has been framed as an idealized representation of the Malayalee woman’s identity. The study highlights the reinvention of this art form in the 1930s, exploring how it changed the notions of regional femininity and disciplined female bodies to conform to cultural ideals. The research provides crucial ideas into how

cultural practices like dance contribute to the production and perpetuation of gendered identities within historical and cultural contexts.

“Developing Employability in Higher Education Music” by Dawn Bennett addresses the necessity of fostering employability skills in music students. The paper advocates for a holistic approach that includes mentorship, career counseling, and the integration of entrepreneurial and self-management skills into curricula to help graduates navigate dynamic, often fragmented, creative industry careers.

5. Results and Findings

This section analyse the gender, educational qualification, current employment status, income and the challenges they face during achieving their desired job. The section analyse the qualification of the respondent and find out whether they are able to find a job in their desired field. Also tried to find out the challenges faced by them.

5.1. Demographic Profile

Table 1: Gender of The Respondent

<i>GENDER</i>	<i>FREQUENCY</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE</i>
MALE	7	17.5
FEMALE	33	82.5
PREFER NOT TO SAY	0	0
TOTAL	40	100

Source: primary data

The data shows that out of 40 samples 33 of the performing arts graduates are females and only 7 are males. So from the data we can understand that in this field there is gender disparity. Females are more enrolled in dance-based subjects than the male, as it is mainly because of the myth that says dance is for females. Male dancers face discrimination and the society acceptance is comparatively lesser than females.

Table 2: Educational Qualification

<i>QUALIFICATION</i>	<i>FREQUENCY</i>	<i>PERCENTAGE</i>
UG	10	25
PG	26	65
PhD	4	10
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary data

The data above shows that 26 out of 40 are post graduates, 10 have undergraduate degrees and 4 out of them possess PhD. So, from the data we can understand that they possess higher qualifications.

5.2. Employment Status and Income

Table 3: Employed or Not

EMPLOYED OR NOT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
YES	33	82.5
NO	7	17.5
TOTAL	40	100

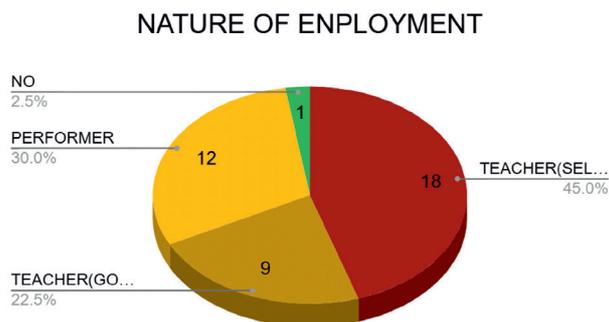
Source: Primary Data

33 of the graduates are employed in their respective field and 7 out of them are not employed in this field. One difference of performing arts graduates than conventional degree graduates is that they are passion driven. So that most of them try to find a job in this field and they find any possible way to stick on with their respective field. Even before they get enrolled in the under-graduation programme, they have a strong foundation in dance, music etc. years of training and experience may find them a job.

Table 4: Nature of Employment

NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
TEACHER (SELF OWNED CLASSES)	18	45
TEACHER(GOVTORNONGOVTINSTITUTION)	9	22.5
PERFORMER	12	30
NO	1	2.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary Data



Source: Primary Data

18 out of the 40 sample are employed as teachers but they are self-owned classes and 12 out of them are performers. Only 9 out of them are employed as teachers in govt or non govt organisations. With Years of training and experience they are able to start self owned classes and to be a performer. These jobs are not consistent in nature. By this we can understand that there is severe unemployment in this sector.

Table 5: Career Aspirations

<i>Career aspirations</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Be a mentor	2	5
Be a mentor / performer	12	30
renowned performer	17	42.5
Own production	1	2.5
Actress	1	2.5
PhD	2	5
No	5	12.5
TOTAL	40	100

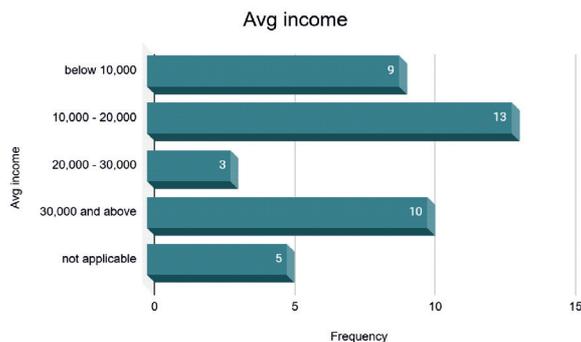
Source: Primary Data

The data highlights diverse career aspirations among performing arts graduates in Kerala. 17 respondents aspire to establish themselves as renowned performers, indicating a strong desire for professional recognition and success in their respective fields. 12 respondents expressed an interest in pursuing careers as both performers and mentors, showcasing a blend of creative ambition and a passion for teaching or guiding others. However, 5 respondents reported having no specific career aspirations, which may reflect uncertainty or a lack of motivation regarding their professional future. Among the more specific aspirations, 1 respondent wishes to become an actress and establish their own production company, while 2 respondents aim to achieve a PhD, highlighting a commitment to academic excellence and research in performing arts.

Table 6: Average Income

AVG INCOME	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
below 10,000	9	22.5
10,000 - 20,000	13	32.5
20,000 - 30,000	3	7.5
30,000 and above	10	25
not applicable	5	12.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary Data



Source: Primary Data

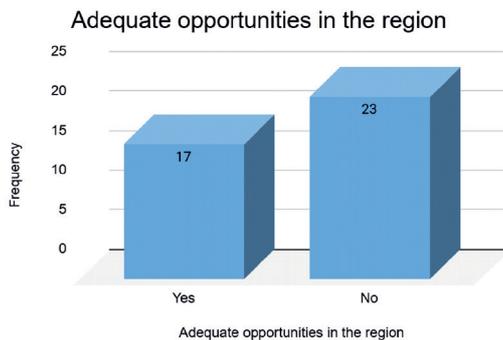
The analyses of the avg income shows that they earn less income. The teachers who have self owned classes earn their income from the fees from the students. So if the students are less, the income is also less. While in the case of the teachers in govt institutions they are not in a permanent post so that they have an avg income 14,000 and in the case of non govt institutions they have daily wages. The government institutions are not having permanent posts for the teachers in performing arts.

5.3. Availability of Opportunities

Table 7: Adequate Opportunities in the Region

ADEQUATE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	17	42.5
No	23	57.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary Data



Source: Primary Data

23 out of 40 samples say that there are no adequate opportunities in their region. As the samples are from different regions of Kerala, by this data I can analyse that there is a lack of opportunities in Kerala as a whole. Compared to conventional courses not all colleges offer these performing arts courses, so the vacancies in educational institutions are less. Being a performer can't earn them a consistent income. To have a consistent income they need programmes. Only established artists have programmes on a regular basis. Emerging artists find trouble to be performers.

Table 7: International Opportunities

INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	12	30
No	28	70
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary Data

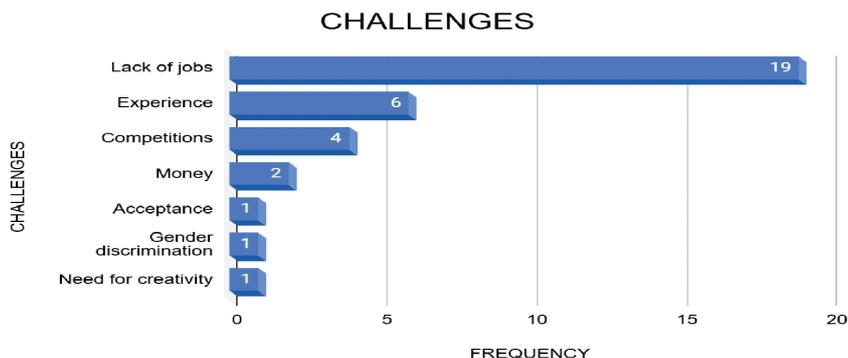
Most of the samples are not even trying to pursue international opportunities. There are international opportunities such as taking online classes, dance or music performances etc. most artists don't prefer online classes as this is an area where physical presence as well as face to face interaction of the students and teachers are important. Dance or music performances abroad are mainly done by renowned performers rather than the emerging artists. Language is a barrier in pursuing international opportunities.

5.4. Challenges Faced By The Artists

Table 9: Challenges Faced

CHALLENGES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Lack of jobs	19	47.5
Experience	6	15
Competitions	4	10
Money	2	5
Acceptance	1	2.5
Gender discrimination	1	2.5
Need for creativity	1	2.5
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary Data



Source: Primary Data

They find challenges in pursuing jobs in their desired field. 19 of the respondents say that there is a lack of jobs in this field. From the previous data we understand that only 9 of them are teachers in govt or non govt institutes. So this data shows that there is a lack of job opportunities in this field. 6 out of the sample say that to find a better job they need experience and also 4 samples indicate that there is competition in this field. Yearly many graduates are passing out and available employment is less so that there is competition in this field. 2 out of them say that money is a matter of finding a job.

Table 10: Societal Challenges

<i>Societal challenges</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	20	50
No	20	50
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Primary Data

The analysis reveals a divided perspective on societal challenges faced by performing arts graduates in Kerala. Approximately 50% of the sample reported encountering societal challenges, while the other half indicated no significant hurdles. This indicates a gradual shift in societal acceptance of artists.

However, the data also highlights a critical gap in awareness regarding educational opportunities and career prospects in performing arts. Many respondents noted that society predominantly perceives performing arts as merely a source of entertainment, with limited understanding of the diverse professional avenues available to graduates in this field.

6. Conclusion

The vast and unique cultural diversity as well as the economic difficulties of the state of Kerala plays a significant role in influencing the employability and empowerment of performing arts graduates in Kerala. These graduates are rich in talent and creativity but they are limited by minimum opportunities in the market, which pulls them back from industrial preparedness and financial security. These limitations can be addressed only with a multifaceted strategy which should include curricular innovation, partnership with industries and also increased government support and encouragement. Integrating performing arts in tourism is a better scope for creating more opportunities and reducing the gaps in the market opportunities. This will bring increased opportunities in performing arts field and also promote Kerala's distinctive cultural legacy.

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