Stakeholder Interview 2

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Location: Istanbul, Türkiye
Focus: Entrepreneurial Learning & Digital Empowerment for Youth

1. What motivated you to work with youth on entrepreneurship?
To be honest, I wasn't always an academic. I failed two startups in my early 20s. At the time, I felt ashamed. But those failures taught me more than any MBA ever could. Later, I realized that many young people are afraid to try—not because they lack ideas, but because they lack support. That's why I entered academia—not to teach from a pedestal, but to create a safe space where experimentation is welcomed and failure is part of the process.

2. What do you think entrepreneurship really means for young people today?
It's not about unicorns and Silicon Valley. Entrepreneurship today is a mindset. It's about solving problems, taking initiative, and creating value—whether you're launching a business, leading a community project, or developing a mobile app. It teaches resilience, adaptability, and creative thinking—qualities that are critical in today's volatile world.

3. What's the biggest barrier youth face when trying to become entrepreneurs?
The biggest barrier is fear—of failure, of judgment, and often, of not being "expert enough." The second biggest is lack of access. Many youth, especially from rural areas or low-income families, don't have networks, mentors, or seed funding. That's why inclusive, structured programs are essential.

4. What role does technology—especially AI—play in modern entrepreneurship?
It's a game-changer. AI can streamline customer research, automate marketing, and even help you test business ideas virtually. But the key is *intentionality*—you have to know how to ask the right questions and interpret results. Youth need digital literacy not just as consumers of tech, but as creators and decision-makers.

5. How do you train students who have no entrepreneurial background or role models?
We start with real stories. I bring in guests who failed and got back up. We do empathy-based exercises, and we encourage micro-projects. I tell my students: "Start something small. Bake cookies. Offer tutoring. Organize a free event." Once they realize that entrepreneurship is about *doing*, not waiting, their confidence shifts.

6. What makes projects like *EmpowerInclusive* stand out to you?
It's practical, it's multilingual, and it respects the diversity of youth experiences. The fact that it includes stakeholder interviews, real case studies, and digital guides makes it feel *alive*. It's not just theory—it's mentorship in motion. That's what young people need today—tools *and* connection.

7. What specific elements should an ideal youth entrepreneurship toolkit include?
A step-by-step startup roadmap, templates for business canvases, video stories of local entrepreneurs (especially those who started with little), AI tools for ideation, and maybe even a "fail log"—where youth can document what didn't work and what they learned. Plus, space for peer feedback and mentoring.

8. What's a personal story from your students that moved you?
Last year, one of my students—a 20-year-old girl from Şanlıurfa—created an online marketplace for traditional handmade scarves crafted by local women in her village. She connected culture, technology, and social impact. She started with a Google Form and an Instagram page. Today, she's received funding and employs five women. She taught me that entrepreneurship doesn't need to be flashy to be meaningful.

9. How do you deal with youth who feel entrepreneurship is "not for them"?
I remind them that entrepreneurship isn't always about being the CEO. It's about seeing possibilities where others see problems. Even if you work in a company, being entrepreneurial means you lead with initiative. I often say: "The future belongs to the proactive."

10. What message would you like to give to young people feeling stuck or unsure about their future?
You don't need to be extraordinary to begin. You just need to begin. The world is changing fast—but that means new gaps, new problems, and new opportunities. Look around you. Your idea doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to *matter*. And once you take the first step, you'll be amazed how doors start to open.