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Developing an Empowerment Model for Entrepreneurial Training Targeting Rural Women

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Abstract

This study aims to develop an empowerment model for entrepreneurial training specifically targeting rural women in Malaysia, recognizing the critical role of women's empowerment in achieving gender equality and enhancing their contributions to society and the economy. Despite various governmental initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment, significant gaps persist, with rural women facing unique challenges compared to their male counterparts. Key barriers identified include structural differences, lack of experience, and familial responsibilities that hinder participation in entrepreneurial training programs. The research objectives focus on identifying the challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs, determining essential technical and psychological training themes, and developing a tailored empowerment model. A qualitative research design utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will explore the experiences of rural women who have participated in government-sponsored entrepreneurial training. Data collection will involve semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with both successful and non-successful entrepreneurs. The findings will inform the development of an empowerment model that integrates technical skills and psychological readiness, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of entrepreneurial training programs for rural women. This research is significant as it seeks to bridge the gap between policy initiatives and actual outcomes, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of rural women in Malaysia. By addressing the unique challenges faced by these women, the study aims to foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers rural women to thrive as entrepreneurs.

1. Introduction

A key idea in society, women's empowerment promotes women's equal rights, opportunity, and involvement in a range of activities. It includes the idea that women ought to be empowered to choose, follow their dreams, and make significant contributions to the advancement of society, the economy, and politics. Breaking down barriers, confronting misconceptions, and creating an atmosphere where women can flourish as people and essential contributors to the development of communities and countries are all part of

empowering women. Acknowledging and advancing women's empowerment is not only a question of fairness and equality, but it also serves as a spark for greater prosperity and advancement in society.

As of 2023, the demographic makeup of Malaysia revealed a narrowing gender difference. The ratio, which stands at 100:110, suggests that if we want to strengthen Malaysia as a nation, we must empower women in the economy. Looking at the high costs of living and unpredictability of the economy, it is impossible to achieve quality of living by depending only on the male counterpart of the country. The realization had come a long way, hence numerous initiatives to promote economic empowerment of women are actively being carried out by the government. In 2019, Women has been embedded as one of the pillars in the policy under Ministry of Rural and Regional Development.

However, the national data shows discrepancy between the initiatives and the outcome. Across the globe, women entrepreneurs tend to own smaller scale of business, have their business development lagging behind, lower growth expectations and higher business discontinuance relative to men entrepreneurs (Basit et al, 2020). This is consistent with previous literature review written by Said et al (2014) which exposed that These studies argue that women entrepreneurs have not succeeded at the same rate in their business performance as compared to their men counterparts. A study among UUM local graduates and students who came from all over the country shows that men has greater entrepreneurial intention (54%) than women (46%) despite the respondents were 58% women and 42% men. Hence, it is crucial that training programs be effective enough that they empower women in terms of their entrepreneurial skills and molding the right psychological profile of entrepreneurs.

1.1 Problem Statement

There are a few challenges that account for women's lag in business development. Said et al acknowledged the structural differences between men and women entrepreneurs despite having the same business processes. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs lack experience and are mostly involved in less profitable sectors. Hence, despite their quantitative survey results show that female entrepreneurs score higher on average for entrepreneurial orientation, product service innovation and marketing strategy, these qualities are against their literature reviews on the lower rate of women success.

A mixed method study conducted by Omar et al (2014) found that women entrepreneurs with the following criteria: low income, micro-enterprise business in service sector reported that they have to tolerate the loss of daily income if they are to join any training. 85% of women entrepreneurs in this study also reported childcare as their inhibitor from joining training programs. Studies have been looking at entrepreneurship development from them.

Hence the classical debate in psychology comes in: are successful entrepreneurs born with these characteristics or are they developed? Contemporary psychologists believe that as much as psychological profiles can be inherited through genetics, there is a very remarkable chance for the developmental process to alter the psychological profile.

1.2 Research Objective

1. RO1: To identify the key challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs to join entrepreneurial training.
2. RO2: To identify technical and psychological training theme for rural women entrepreneurs
3. RO3: To develop an empowerment model for entrepreneurial training targeting rural women.

1.3 Research Question

1. What are the key challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs to join entrepreneurial training?
2. What are the technical and psychological training theme for rural women entrepreneurs?
3. What are the components of empowerment model for entrepreneurial training targeting rural women?

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is crucial in improving the effectiveness the entrepreneurial training programs targeting rural women. As reviewed by Lopez Nunez (2020), there are specific psychological characteristics that must be

instilled into entrepreneurial trainees in order for them to become a successful entrepreneur. Choosing the right model for the training programs could save millions of bucks compared to focusing solely on the technical parts where the trainees do not have the capacity to even apply them.

1.6 Scope of Study

This study would cover the rural women in Malaysia who have joined the entrepreneurial trainings provided by the government. Exemplary entrepreneurs should be included as a point of reference for best practices and non-successful entrepreneurs are recruited as the point for problem identification.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set the ground for the proposal of the research, justifying why the research is significant and how it can have contributed to solving the social and economic problems specifically among rural women. The objectives and questions to be answered are also outlined as grounds for the choice of methods and literature review that will be discussed in the next chapters.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to review past studies and identify the patterns of existing information. Besides that, it serves a ground for the development of interview protocol and data collection. Underpinning theory is also identified as a base for the existence of the phenomenon.

2.2 Challenges for Women as Rural Entrepreneurs

Challenges for rural women in venturing into entrepreneurship have been studied in many parts of the world. Their challenges specifically differ from urban women. A study by Sivanesan (2014) compared the challenges faced by rural and urban women entrepreneurs in India. He found that for urban women, financial challenges come as the top challenge for them to sustain their business compared to rural women who perceived social challenges as more crucial than financial changes. Apart from that, a vast majority of the rural women are married and with kids while only half of the urban women are married and have kids. It seems that society in urban areas is more open to women pursuing their goals, yet the cost of living and running a business hinders them from success. Meanwhile, it is harder for rural communities to accept women prioritising their goals and access to childcare is also very scarce.

In Egypt, rural women struggle with culture, but it is rather the culture of career preference. Families would prefer their children to work in paying jobs rather than starting a business. The lack of acceptance results in lack of support and makes it harder when these women need help with their errands. Meanwhile in Oman, apart from family issues, the geographical barrier in rural areas becomes a concern. Their secluded area is not just secluded, it is far away and the geographical shape of their area disrupts the process of connectivity and logistics (Suhail, Omar and Gerard,2021).

2.3 Personality Traits of Successful Entrepreneurs

There are attempts to identify specific personality traits influencing the success of entrepreneurs. Karimi, Kloshani, and Bakhshizadeh (2012) defined a successful business owner as a business owner who succeeds in overcoming different challenges and problems and can still survive in difficult situations. Using this definition, Lopez Nunez (2020) conducted personality research and managed to produce a personality profile of a successful entrepreneur. The successful profile shows high scores on extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, and ambiguity tolerance while demonstrating low scores on agreeableness and neuroticism. Hence, it is crucial for training programs not to only focus on technical skills but to mold the trainees into these characteristics.

2.4 Underpinning Theory

The underpinning theory chosen for this research is McClelland's Theory of Motivation. This theory posits that every human being has three basic psychological needs: affiliation, power and achievement (Monday and Samuel, 2017). While everybody has similar needs, the dominance of need differs from one person to another. Some individuals need achievement more than affiliation and power, and vice versa. People who dominantly needs power are the people who desires to change or influence others' behaviour the preferable way to them. Among the characteristics of people with dominant need for power include the desire to influence and direct someone, the desire to control others and the urge to maintain the leader-follower relation with other people. People who dominantly needs achievement on the other hand, are the people who driven by mastery. They would like to gain accomplishments and thrive in their activities. People with these needs tend to be motivated by tangible outcomes. The character of these people include perceived sense of responsibility to solve a problem, have measureable and achievable goals, have the urge to receive performance feedbacks, take moderate and calculated risks, and love challenges. People who dominantly needs affiliation on the other hand are the people who are driven by belongingness. They tend to seek for approval and acceptance from other people, value others' emotion and tends to conform to others' wishes, especially the ones they value in terms of companionship.

2.5 Summary

This chapter managed to identify a few existing key challenges faced by rural women in various parts of the world, when it comes to building and sustaining a business. Besides, the underpinning theory is identified, providing a solid framework for the research to be employed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods that would be chosen to be employed in this research. Components of methods include the sample selection, research design instrument, development, and considerations. At the end of the chapter, it will be clear about how this research is going to be employed.

3.2 Research Design

This exploratory research will be employed using the qualitative design. The method chosen under the qualitative design would be the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a method that allows researchers to discover how respondents make sense of their experiences. The researcher would explore the respondent's experiences in joining training and post-training experiences, especially in running a business.

3.3 Population and Sampling

This study will cover the rural women in Malaysia who have joined the entrepreneurial training provided by the government. Three samples of exemplary successful entrepreneurs and three samples of non-successful will be recruited. Those who are considered successful are the ones who earn above RM2500, contribute yearly tax, and conduct CSR activities. The sampling method would be snowball sampling, as the respondent would be recommending other eligible respondents from their circle.

3.4 Research Instrument

This study will be conducted using a self-developed, semi-structured interview protocol. The instrument would cover questions on key challenges and needs of training among rural women. Semi-structured interview is chosen because it allows more flexibility and deeper exploration on the client's experiences based on what they could recall.

3.5 Data Collection Technique

The researcher would employ the Focus Group Discussion as a method to collect data. In the discussion, six members would be included from the successful and non-successful entrepreneurs. This method is chosen as it allows the sharing of experiences and provides a more comfortable space for clients to speak out.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data would be analysed using thematic analysis. From this method, the researcher would identify the patterns and themes in the data. These themes and sub-themes would be the basis for components in the empowerment model.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has successfully outlined the method of the research. The choice of design, which is qualitative would allow the researcher to explore the experiences of the respondents beyond the choices of answers. Besides, the sampling method would save cost, and time and allow more targeted respondents to be recruited.

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