

Benefits of entrepreneurship training for low-income Women

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review explores the perceived benefits of entrepreneurship education interventions for low-income women. It analyzes 11 empirical articles, identifying 69 benefits categorized into seven groups: financial, social status, mental health and quality of life, skills development, personal development, gender issues, and decision-making power. The review highlights the lack of standardization in data collection among the studies and the variability in benefit perception among women, influenced by individual contexts and intervention complexities. It emphasizes that the authors reviewed are not yet relating to each and there is a need for deeper exploration of the subject to improve our understanding of the contextual factors that can enhance the effectiveness of such interventions, aiming at more substantial practical outcomes.

Keywords: poverty; women's education; youth and adult education; gender; empowerment.

INTRODUCITON

A report by the United Nations, examining poverty across 111 countries and encompassing six billion people, found that 1.2 billion individuals, or a quarter of the population surveyed, live in extreme poverty. This figure significantly exceeds the previous estimates, nearly doubling the number identified as impoverished under the threshold of living on less than \$1.90 a day. The report further highlights that poverty not only differentiates among countries but also reveals patterns of social inequality within them, particularly across various social and ethnic groups (United Nations Development Programme; Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2022).

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a key strategy for mitigating extreme poverty (Sutter; Bruton; Chen, 2019). It is seen as a pathway for individuals to escape the cycle of poverty, particularly in communities at the “base of the pyramid” (BP) (Bruton; Ketchen Jr.; Ireland, 2013). However, the research in this area presents divergent viewpoints and lacks a cohesive scientific consensus (Sutter; Bruton; Chen, 2019), despite agreement on the potential of BP individuals to be innovative and enterprising in establishing businesses that could liberate them and their families from poverty (Bruton; Ketchen Jr.; Ireland, 2013; Shepherd; Parida; Wincent, 2021; Sutter; Bruton; Chen, 2019).

In BP communities, female entrepreneurship is increasingly seen as pivotal for spurring economic growth and modernizing entire communities, regions, and even nations (Amine; Staub, 2009). Given that women are more likely to establish businesses with a social focus, their entrepreneurial endeavors often yield more significant benefits for their families and communities compared to their male counterparts (Minniti; Naudé, 2010). Research, such as that conducted by Downing (1990) and Nichter and Goldmark (2009), demonstrates that female entrepreneurs typically reinvest their earnings into their children’s nutrition, clothing, and education, in contrast to male entrepreneurs, who often prioritize personal expenditures such as clothes, entertainment, alcohol, and food for themselves.

Nonetheless, despite the crucial role of female entrepreneurship in enhancing the conditions of BP communities, this subject remains under-explored and insufficiently theorized, resulting in a limited understanding of these entrepreneurs’ well-being (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022). As noted by Ali, Topping, and Tariq (2011), the existing literature on female entrepreneurship in the BP predominantly focuses on the economic aspects, such as job creation and regional development.

Carranza, Dhakal, and Love (2018) observe that businesses owned by women tend to be economically weaker, smaller, less profitable, slower in growth, and have higher closure rates compared to those owned by men. These researchers also point out that such businesses often have access to lesser external financing, and many women prefer salaried employment over self-employment, frequently driven to entrepreneurship more by necessity than opportunity. Additionally, female entrepreneurs at the bottom of the social pyramid, particularly those with low income, face restricted access to employment and educational opportunities and typically lack experience in external employment settings. They often possess an overly optimistic view of their ventures’ prospects and benefits (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022).

For Chatterjee, Shepherd, and Wincent (2022), this indicates a pressing need for entrepreneurial education targeted at these women, including training in goal-setting strategies.

A educação não transforma o mundo. Educação muda as pessoas. Pessoas transformam o mundo. Se a educação sozinha não pode transformar a sociedade, tampouco sem ela a sociedade muda. (Freire, 2000, p. 67)¹.

Barcelos (2014) contends that education, as an essential human right, transcends traditional schooling and unfolds in various settings, embracing the broader concept of human development and its potential for continuity throughout life. Lifelong learning, as McMahon (2021) elucidates, is a dynamic process that integrates both personal and professional life aspects. This is defined as an ongoing, voluntary, and self-driven quest for knowledge that fosters personal growth, professional responsibility, and enhances overall satisfaction in both personal and professional realms (Roman-Cohen, 2020).

A few studies (Alene, 2020; Berii, 2019) indicate that educational investments play a significant role in women's economic empowerment and their self-perception in a positive economic context. These studies reveal that companies led by highly educated women tend to outperform those headed by women with lower levels of education.

Kleba and Wendausen (2009) describe empowerment as a process that fortifies individuals in areas of social participation and political democratization. This process encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements and manifests across three dimensions: psychological or individual; group or organizational; and structural or political. Herriger (2006) notes that assessing the psychological dimension requires an understanding of an individual's experiences in handling disruptive or threatening situations, the competencies they have developed, their motivations for action, and the positive transformations resulting from these experiences that contribute to the persistence and sustainability of the empowerment process.

The literature extensively discusses the benefits of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education, often through the theoretical framework of potentialities, such as Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991). For instance, studies on poverty alleviation and relief show that entrepreneurial education, particularly in the form of training, is crucial in helping entrepreneurs recognize promising opportunities (Mel; Mckenzie; Woodruff, 2014; Brixiová; Ncube; Bicaba, 2014). However, there is a dearth of empirical research capturing the perceptions of participants in entrepreneurial education programs, leaving a gap in understanding how this education is experienced (Sutter; Bruton; Chen, 2019). The outcomes of the empowerment process should be evaluated not just in terms of tangible goals, like the number of businesses established or income increases, but also in terms of knowledge acquisition, emotional responses, and motivational shifts (Kleba; Wendausen, 2009).

¹ Translation: "Education does not transform the world. Education changes people. People transform the world. If education alone cannot transform society, neither can society change without it." (Freire, 2000, p. 67, editorial translation).

Blank and Dorf (2014) note a paradigm shift in entrepreneurial education in developed nations since the early 2000s, emphasizing skills for managing uncertainty. While some educational approaches have focused on discovering, creating, and exploiting new business opportunities (Alvarez; Barney, 2014), entrepreneurial training in contexts of poverty often centers on basic business skills (Karlan; Valdivia, 2011).

Sutter, Bruton, and Chen (2019) suggest that future research in this area should aim to understand how individuals engaged in entrepreneurship in impoverished settings identify opportunities, who benefits most from such training, and empirically test new training methodologies to ascertain best practices in these contexts.

Studies like that of Chatterjee, Shepherd, and Wincent (2022) present intriguing insights into the perceptions and experiences of impoverished female entrepreneurs within patriarchal societies in rural India. This research delves into the microprocesses of these women's participation in entrepreneurial education and its impact on their expectations and well-being.

Therefore, this research seeks to synthesize and critically evaluate the existing scientific literature on the perceptions of low-income women regarding the advantages of entrepreneurial training, pinpointing recommendations and identifying gaps for future inquiries.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a systematic literature review methodology, adhering to the guidelines of the internationally recognized Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension -- PRISMA (Tricco *et al.*, 2018), and incorporating the methodology proposed by the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI). Systematic reviews are instrumental in collating and synthesizing knowledge from primary studies, thus aiding in conducting comprehensive research on a specific topic (Dresch; Lacerda; Antunes Junior, 2015).

For the purpose of analysis, the collection of articles forming the basis of this review was sourced from three scholarly databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC. Scopus and Web of Science were selected due to their multidisciplinary nature and stringent indexing criteria, while ERIC was chosen for its specificity to the field of Education, covering a substantial range of publications pertinent to the research theme.

The study utilized the SPIDER acronym - Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research - as it aligns closely with the central research question of this review: What are the perceptions of low-income women regarding the benefits of engaging in entrepreneurship training?

Additionally, various thesauri were employed for keyword searches and the broadening of search terms, including IEEE; ERIC; UNESCO; GEMET. The keywords corresponding to the elements of the SPIDER acronym were utilized to formulate the search strategy, as elaborated in the final line of Table 1.

Table 1 - Detailing the use of the acronym SPIDER

SPIDER	Sample	Phenomenon of Interest	Design	Evaluation	Research type
Objective/ Problem	What is the perception of low-income women regarding the benefits of participating in entrepreneurship training?				
	Low-income women	Entrepreneurship training	Interviews	Positive (benefits)	Case study
Extraction	Low-income women	Entrepreneurship training	-	Women's perception	-
Conversion	Low-income** women*	Entrepreneurship**** training***	Data collection method	Perception	Qualitative research
Combination	Education; Continuing education; Training; Educational courses; Adult education; Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial; Business	Woman; Women; Females; Girls; Poor; Economically Disadvantaged; Economically Deprived; Low Income Groups; Poverty	Questionnaire; survey; interview; focus group; case study; observation	Perception; experience; opinion; feel	Qualitative research; qualitative studies; qualitative study
Construction	((Education OR "Continuing education" OR Training OR "Educational courses" OR "Adult education") AND (Entrepreneurship OR Entrepreneurial OR Business))	((Woman OR Women OR Females OR Girls) AND (Poor OR "Economically Disadvantaged" OR "Economically Deprived" OR "Low Income" OR Poverty))	(questionnaire OR survey OR interview OR "focus group" OR "case study" OR observation)	(perception OR experience OR opinion OR feel)	("qualitative research" OR "qualitative studies" OR "qualitative study")*****
Use	((Education OR "Continuing education" OR Training OR "Educational courses" OR "Adult education") AND (Entrepreneurship OR Entrepreneurial OR Business)) AND ((Woman OR Women OR Females OR Girls) AND (Poor OR "Economically Disadvantaged" OR "Economically Deprived" OR "Low Income" OR Poverty)) AND (questionnaire OR survey OR interview OR "focus group" OR "case study" OR observation) AND (perception OR experience OR opinion OR feel)				

Source: Created by the authors.

* Women: Woman; Women; Females; Girls

** Low income: Poor; Economically Disadvantaged; Economically Deprived; Low Income Groups; Poverty

*** Training: Education; Continuing education; Training; Educational courses; Adult education

**** Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial; Business

***** The inclusion of specific research-related terms in the search strategy led to a 10% reduction in results.

Consequently, these terms were omitted from the search string. However, this criterion was still taken into account during the review of the articles collected.

All papers were initially selected without regard to the number of citations, h-index, or journal quality, and there were no time restrictions on publication dates. The initial search, conducted in July 2022, yielded 162 articles from Scopus (title, abstract, keywords), 58 from Web of Science (topic), and 21 from ERIC (without filters), totaling 241 articles. These were then processed using Rayyan.ai software (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016), resulting in the removal of 31 duplicates. After reviewing the titles and abstracts, 185 articles were excluded, leaving 25 for full review based on the established criteria.

From these, two were not accessible in full, and another 12 were excluded after a full-text review, culminating in a final selection of 11 articles (refer to Table 2). The exclusion criteria (EC) for articles were as follows:

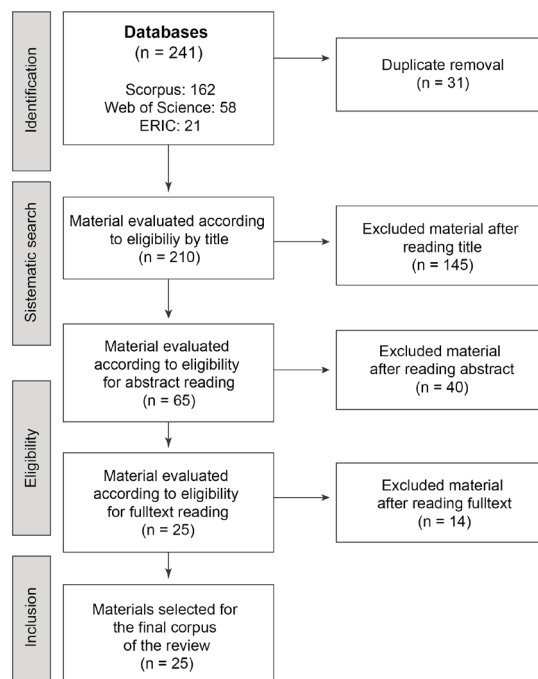
- EC 1: Papers that do not include interviews with women (e.g., theoretical, referential, reviews, empirical studies not collecting women’s opinions).
- EC 2: Studies not related to entrepreneurship or dealing with other types of training.
- EC 3: Research focusing on a target audience that is either mixed inseparably or only men.
- EC 4: Studies targeting women who are not classified as low-income.
- EC 5: Articles without relevance to the theme.

The final inclusion of articles in this review’s corpus involved an analysis of bias, using a checklist adapted from the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist For Qualitative Research (summarized in Figure 1 and detailed in Table 2).

Following the PRISMA protocol filtering process (Aromataris; Munn, 2020), after reading the titles, abstracts, and full texts, the checklist from Table 2 was applied to each of the 11 papers comprising the final corpus. Critical items for the decision to include or exclude an article were identified as questions 7, 8, 9, and 10 from Table 2.

For clarity, Table 3 lists the articles in the final corpus, including the publication year, title, journal, and citation to identify the main author.

Figure 1 - PRISMA Flowchart.



Source: Created by the authors.

Table 2 - Checklist for the bias analysis of articles

n°	Question	Source
1	Is there congruence between the declared philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
2	Is there congruence between the research methodology and the question or objectives of the research?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
3	Is there congruence between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
4	Is there congruence between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
5	Is there congruence between the research methodology and the interpretation of the results?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
6	Are the participants and their voices adequately represented?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
7	Do the conclusions drawn in the research report stem from the analysis or interpretation of the data?	JBI - Checklist for Qualitative Research
8	Is the number of people researched representative? (where < 3 is very low (= no); between 3 and 10 is medium (= unclear); > 10 is good (= yes))	Authors' inclusion
9	Does the article clearly define the target audience researched?	Authors' inclusion
10	Is the article directly related to entrepreneurship training?	Authors' inclusion

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 3 - Articles that make up the final corpus of this systematic review

Year	Title	Journal	Citation
2000	The Impact of Training on Women's Micro-Enterprise Development. Education Research Paper. Knowledge & Research.	Department For International Development Education Papers	(Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2000)
2002	Using the Life Histories of Community Builders in an Informal Settlement To Advance the Emancipation and Development of Women.	Houle Scholars in Adult and Continuing Education Program Global Research Perspectives.	(Daniels, 2002)
2002	Exploring the Self/Group Initiated and On-the-Job Learning Activities of Low Income Women.	Annual Meeting of the Adult Education Research Conference	(Butterwick, 2002)
2002	Putting Bread on the Table: Literacy and Livelihood in Kenya. Knowledge and Information Management.	Knowledge and Information Management.	(Thompson, 2002)
2014	Experience of entrepreneurial training for female farmers to stimulate entrepreneurship in Uganda	Gender in Management	(Lourenço <i>et al.</i> , 2014)
2017	No sex for fish: empowering women to promote health and economic opportunity in a localized place in Kenya	Health Promotion International	(Nathenson <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
2019	Cash plus: exploring the mechanisms through which a cash transfer plus financial education programme in Tanzania reduced HIV risk for adolescent girls and young women	Journal Of The International Aids Society	(Pettifor <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
2019	A mixed-methods evaluation of community-based healthy kitchens as social enterprises for refugee women	Bmc Public Health	(Sahyoun <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
2021	Women empowerment through entrepreneurship: case study of a social entrepreneurial intervention in rural India	International Journal Of Organizational Analysis	(Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021)
2021	Usefulness and expectations on skills development and entrepreneurship among women of low socioeconomic status in Ogun State, Nigeria	African Journal Of Reproductive Health	(George <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
2022	Women's entrepreneurship and well-being at the base of the pyramid	Journal Of Business Venturing	(Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincet, 2022)

Source: Created by the authors.

The systematic literature review process involved extracting data from the selected

articles and organizing it into a synthesis matrix. This matrix included categories such as the title, publication year, authors, journal, country of origin of the lead author, country where the studied women lived, evaluated benefits, description of the women’s group, offered training or capacity-building, type of research, summary of the methodology, benefits pointed out by the women, how the outcome was measured, number of women involved, and limitations of the research as reported by the authors.

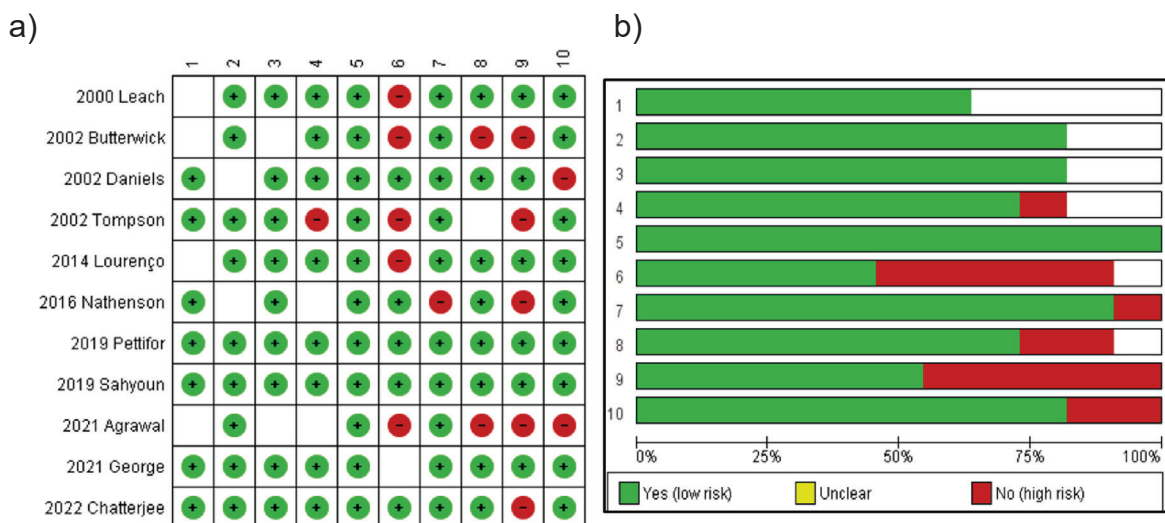
For the bibliometric analysis, the Vosviewer tool was employed. The Grading of the Quality of Evidence and the Strength of Recommendations (GRADE) system, adapted from Balshem *et al.* (2011), was utilized to assess the quality and contribution of each article. The meta-analysis aimed to identify the benefits of participation in entrepreneurship training and capacity-building programs as reported by low-income women who took part in these programs. This analysis involved listing all benefits reported by the women during data collection. These benefits were then categorized into groups based on similarities identified in the evaluations provided in the research. The thematic analysis approach of Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015) was used for this categorization.

RESULTS

BIAS ANALYSIS

To ensure a systematic literature review with minimal bias, each of the 11 included studies was evaluated according to the criteria presented in Table 1. The results are presented in Figure 2 (a and b).

Figure 2 – a) Bias risk analysis summary: review of the authors’ judgment on each bias risk item for each included study; b) Bias risk graph: review of the authors’ judgment on each bias risk item presented as a percentage in all included studies.



Source: Created by the authors.

The bias analysis in your systematic review serves to identify potential methodological

flaws in the included empirical studies, which could skew the results and introduce biases into the review. This analysis is crucial in ensuring the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn from the review.

In Figure 2 (a), it is possible to visualize the response of each item of the checklist for each article of the final corpus of this review, with green = yes; red = no; and white = unclear. According to Canto (2020), an article is considered to have a HIGH recommendation for inclusion if it has less than 30% negative responses ('no'), and MODERATE if this percentage is between 31% and 50%. Based on this criterion, all articles were included in your review, with only the article by Agrawal, Gandhi, and Khare (2021) receiving a MODERATE recommendation.

Figure 2 (b) shows two of the ten questions in the bias risk analysis checklist had percentages below 70% (questions 6 and 9), with two other questions having values close to this threshold (questions 4 and 8)

This suggests that while the overall quality of the systematic review is high, there are areas where the included studies exhibit potential biases, particularly regarding the clarity in defining the target audience (question 9) "Does the article clearly define the researched target audience?".

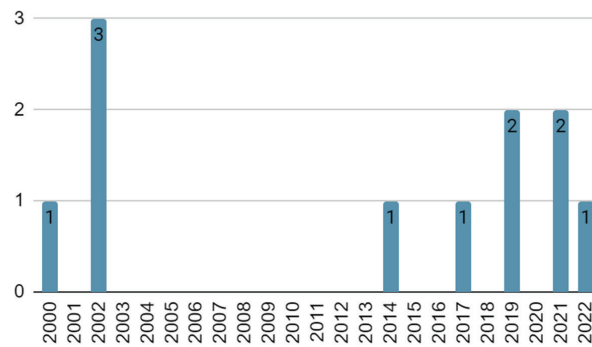
The lack of detailed socioeconomic information about the women studied in these papers could be a limiting factor, potentially affecting the depth and applicability of the review's conclusions.

GENERAL ASPECTS

The final collection of articles in our corpus comprises 11 distinct studies, each authored independently with no overlap in authorship across publications. When examining the distribution across years (as depicted in Graph 1), it becomes evident that the initial publications emerged in the early 21st century, notably in 2002, which saw three publications. This initial activity was followed by a 12-year hiatus in output. Since 2014, there has been a resurgence in publications, albeit at a more consistent rate, typically marked by the appearance of one or two works at intervals ranging from one to three years.

Regarding the country of origin of the first author, the highest representation corresponds to the United Kingdom and the United States of America, with two articles each. The remaining are from different countries, with one article from each: South Africa, Sierra Leone, Canada, Finland, India, Lebanon, and Nigeria. A difference is noted when observing the country of origin of the researched women, who reside in: India (3), Kenya (2), Canada (1), South Africa (1), Lebanon (1), Nigeria (1), Peru (1), Sudan (1), Tanzania (1), Uganda (1).

Graph 1 – Distribution of research over the years



Source: Created by the authors.

Table 4 – Demographics of research subjects

Year	Source	Population
2000	(Leach <i>et al.</i> , 2000)	Low-income entrepreneurs in Ethiopia, India, Peru, and Sudan
2002	(Daniels, 2002)	Community leaders in South Africa
2002	(Butterwick, 2002)	Low-income women residents of Greater Vancouver, Canada
2002	(Thompson, 2002)	Illiterate women in Kenya
2014	(Lourenço <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	Rural female producers in Uganda
2017	(Nathenson <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	Female fishers and fish sellers
2019	(Pettifor <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Young adult women residing in rural areas
2019	(Sahyoun <i>et al.</i> , 2019)	Women living in Palestinian camps in Lebanon
2021	(Agrawal <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Rural female producers in India
2021	(George <i>et al.</i> , 2021)	Cleaners
2022	(Chatterjee <i>et al.</i> , 2022)	Residents of deeply patriarchal rural communities in India

Source: Created by the authors.

Despite the presence of low-income women and entrepreneurial education programs in all countries, such as Canada, which appeared in one of the papers, there is a concentration of studies in underdeveloped and developing countries, with a focus on India and Kenya. Notably, in five of the papers (45%), the research was conducted in a different country from that of the author's origin, typically in underdeveloped or developing countries. Each of the 11 articles was published in a distinct journal, underscoring the variety of academic outlets. Regarding the methodologies, the studies employed diverse approaches: one used interviews and thematic analysis; seven conducted case studies; two employed mixed methods, integrating quantitative and qualitative research; and one carried out action research. In examining the population studied, some authors highlight women's roles in society, whereas others detail the specific contexts in which these women are located. This leads to a varied representation of women, depicted as: [Continuation of the list of women's representations.

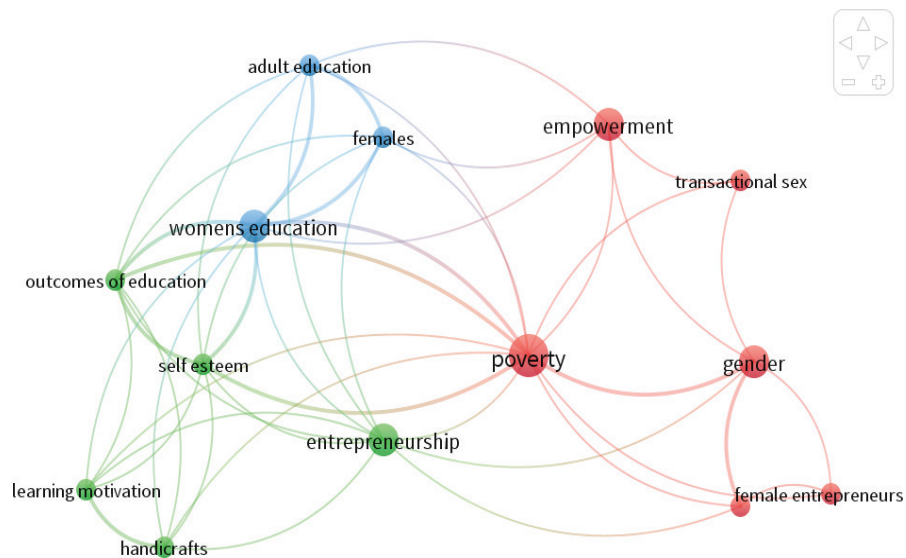
Examining the entrepreneurial education interventions targeted at each group of women reveals a broad spectrum of knowledge areas. These span various aspects of entrepreneurship, income generation, and management, including women's rights, literacy, financial education, good food manufacturing practices, perfumery, fish farming, design, and fabric making. While some interventions encompass financial subsidies, not all explicitly clarify this component.

In the context of this study's primary focus, 69 benefits from participation in entrepreneurship training were identified, as reported by the interviewed low-income women. These benefits have been categorized, based on their nature and the similarities observed in the research findings, into seven distinct groups: financial; social status; mental health and quality of life; skills; personal development; gender issues; and decision-making power.

META-SYNTHESIS AND COMMUNICATION AMONG THE PAPERS

In the citation network analysis, the results showed that there is no communication between the authors. However, the analysis of keywords shows a significant connection between terms, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Network of keywords by occurrence (minimum of two occurrences)

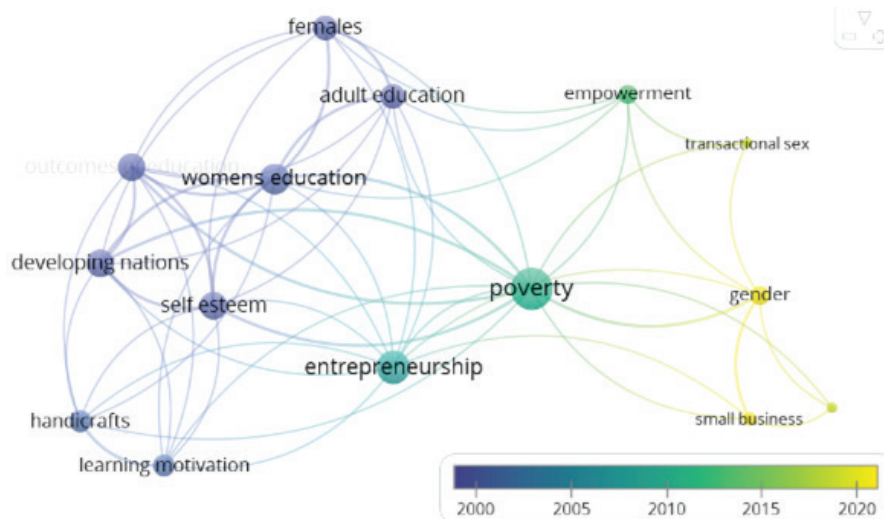


Source: Created by the authors using Vosviewer software.

In the bibliometric analysis, three distinct clusters of terms emerged, each characterized by a specific color: green, blue, and red. These clusters visually represent the occurrence of terms within the texts, their interrelations, and the strength of these connections. The green cluster predominantly focuses on “entrepreneurship,” linking it to concepts such as self-esteem, learning motivation, educational outcomes, and crafts. The blue cluster is oriented around “women’s education,” suggesting a thematic concentration on this area.

The red cluster, which features more prominently in terms of frequency and the extent of its connections, is centered on “poverty.” This cluster not only encompasses the term “poverty” itself but also includes related concepts such as empowerment, gender, female entrepreneurship, and transactional sex, indicating a comprehensive network of themes connected to poverty.

Figure 4 – Keyword Network by Occurrence Over the Years



Source: Created by the authors using Vosviewer software.

Regarding the chronological progression of topics in the literature, a clear evolution in focus is evident. Initial studies primarily concentrated on the education of women, the role of such education in national development, the use of crafts as a means of income generation, the enhancement of women's self-esteem, and their motivation for learning

In the most recent studies, there has been a shift towards addressing poverty alleviation, with a focus on gender issues such as women's empowerment. The establishment of small businesses is increasingly seen as an alternative to generating income through handicrafts. Furthermore, entrepreneurship is emerging as a preferable option compared to transactional sex, which some women engage in with unwanted partners to obtain basic survival necessities.

BENEFITS IDENTIFIED

The benefits identified in the reviewed materials were systematically categorized based on their thematic similarities. Across the 11 works examined, a total of 69 distinct benefits were recognized, with several recurring frequently in the findings (refer to Tables 5 and 6 for a comprehensive overview). Following a thorough analysis and the removal of duplicate entries, the benefits as articulated by the participating women were organized into seven principal categories. These include: financial benefits; enhancements in social status; improvements in mental health and quality of life; skills development; personal growth and development; issues related to gender; and increased decision-making power.

Table 5 – Benefits Identified by Women by Category

	Categories	Benefits
1	Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased income • Business improvement • Extra income increase • Income generation • Household economy • Poverty alleviation • Improved financial situation
2	Social Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive recognition of women by the community • Change in social status • Husband's respect for wife's desire to learn • Increased status in the community • Greater respect from others • Enhanced community status
3	Mental Health and Quality of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More positive attitude • Sense of community • Sense of purpose • Higher levels of motivation • Feeling effective • Feeling valuable • Future aspirations • Sense of achievement • Anxiety reduction • Psychological capital • Well-being • Opportunity to reflect and reassess their lives and activities
4	Skills Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing and bringing out deeply rooted skills • Increased knowledge and competencies • Development of improved survival strategies • Being flexible and responsive to new market demands • Improved communication • Greater sense of responsibility • Teamwork • Adequate task delegation • Knowledge about business or management
5	Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building agency • Empowerment • Self-esteem • Overcoming shyness • More interactive/social • Self-confidence • Thinking like a businesswoman • Confidence
6	Gender Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's union • Change in perception about women's stereotyped roles • Change in gender dynamics • Change in husband's attitude towards household chores • Mutual encouragement • No longer feeling deficient as a woman
7	Decision Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial self-sufficiency • Enabling them to be autonomous • Refusal of unwanted sexual partners • Participation in household decisions / decision-making power • Gaining voice in the community • Increased mobility • Greater safety • Decision-making power • Independence

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 6 - Frequency by Category of Benefits Identified by Women in Each Study

Categories			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Year	Author		Finacial	Social Status	Mental Health and quality of life	Competencies	Personal development	Gender	Power of decision	Total
1	2000	Leach	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	5
2	2002	Daniels	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
3	2002	Butterwick	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	2002	Thompson	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	3
5	2014	Lourenço	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
6	2017	Nathenson	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
7	2019	Pettifor	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
8	2019	Sahyoun	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
9	2021	Agrawal	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	5
10	2021	George	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
11	2022	Chatterjee	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Category frequency			7	4	4	5	5	6	4	
Sample in number of women			178	141	128	239	172	157	98	

Source: Created by the authors.

Legend: 1 = yes; 0 = no

ANALYSIS OF QUALITY AND PROFILE OF EVIDENCE

The evaluation of the quality and contribution of each paper incorporated into the final corpus was conducted using the adapted Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation (GRADE) system. This system facilitated a structured assessment of the articles, with each category under investigation being treated as a distinct outcome, as detailed in Table 7 (Balslem *et al.*, 2011).

Table 7 - Analysis of Quality and Profile of Evidence, as per the adapted GRADE system. Evaluation: Benefit (Evaluation)

Quality Assessment					Quality Number of Studies (Sample)
Outcome	Number of Studies (Sample)	Outcome	Number of Studies (Sample)	Outcome	
Financial	7 (178)	Financial	7 (178)	Financial	7 (178)
Status social	4 (141)	Status social	4 (141)	Status social	4 (141)
Mental Health and Quality of Life	4 (128)	Mental Health and Quality of Life	4 (128)	Mental Health and Quality of Life	4 (128)
Skills	5 (239)	Skills	5 (239)	Skills	5 (239)
Personal Development	5 (172)	Personal Development	5 (172)	Personal Development	5 (172)
Gender	6 (157)	Gender	6 (157)	Gender	6 (157)
Decision-Making Power	4 (98)	Decision-Making Power	4 (98)	Decision-Making Power	4 (98)

Source: Created by the authors.

The outcomes labeled “Financial”, and “Skills” stand out for their large effect magnitude, underscoring their significant role in the research findings. These two categories were the most frequently mentioned benefits among the narratives shared by the women.

In terms of the prevalence of benefits across the seven identified categories within the 11 studies, the most frequently cited were: “Financial,” appearing in seven studies (over 60%), and “Gender” issues, featured in six studies (over 50%). The other five categories were referenced in less than half of the works analyzed.

The quality of all the identified categories was designated as “Moderate” in accordance with the GRADE system. This classification aligns with their description as “well-designed observational studies with large effect estimates” (Balshem *et al.*, 2011). According to this GRADE system evaluation, none of the categories exhibited indirect evidence or imprecision in the studies reviewed.

DISCUSSION

QUALITY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EVIDENCE

The results indicate a low risk of bias in this systematic review. All 11 articles, included after a thorough reading and analysis of the evidence, were incorporated into the final corpus. This inclusion validates the authors’ adaptation of the JBI checklist.

A critical aspect of this analysis was the precise definition of the study’s target audience. Many authors did not provide detailed socioeconomic information about the women studied, limiting a deeper exploration of the interplay between their context and the benefits of entrepreneurial education, especially for low-income women.

The publications examined showcased a wide range of technical and technological knowledge related to entrepreneurship. This diversity included areas such as agricultural production (George *et al.*, 2021), food preparation and handling (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019; George *et al.*, 2021), cosmetics, perfumery, and fabric design production (George *et al.*, 2021), and solar energy businesses (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2022). Some studies also integrated themes like women’s rights (Daniels, 2002), financial education (Pettifor *et al.*, 2019), and literacy programs (Thompson, 2002).

A notable temporal gap was also noticed, with no publications included between 2002 and 2014. Additionally, it was challenging to identify any single author or journal as being particularly influential in this field.

It is important to highlight to noteworthy aspects: firstly, approximately 27% of the works originated from India, and secondly, in 45% of the cases, the research was conducted by authors from developed countries but carried out in underdeveloped or developing countries.

The quality and contribution of the included evidence were evaluated using the adapted GRADE system (Balslem *et al.*, 2011). All seven benefit categories were classified as “moderate,” affirming the quality of this review.

Regarding the benefits identified by women in these studies, the “financial” and “gender issues” categories were the most frequently mentioned. Additionally, “skills development” and “financial” benefits displayed a large effect magnitude.

The findings related to financial gains and skills development align closely with the goals of entrepreneurship training, which is designed to foster skill development, enabling women to engage in entrepreneurial activities and generate income, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation. However, the emergence of gender issues represents a less expected finding and warrants further discussion.

METASYNTHESIS

The keyword network analysis of the reviewed articles indicates a notable shift in the focus of studies on entrepreneurship training for low-income women over the past 20 years. Earlier works predominantly concentrated on themes such as women’s education, national development, utilizing crafts as an income source, women’s self-esteem, and their motivation for learning.

However, in more recent studies, the emphasis has shifted towards overcoming poverty. This includes exploring gender-related issues like the empowerment of women, the transition from artisanal to small business income generation, and viewing entrepreneurship to avoid transactional sex, where women engage with undesirable partners for basic survival needs.

The current literature still appears to lack in-depth exploration of these topics, suggesting the need for further research to identify key factors that influence the effectiveness of interventions and their practical outcomes.

BENEFITS IDENTIFIED BY INTERVIEWED WOMEN

Foucault (1994) characterizes empowerment as the ability of individuals, groups, or communities to govern their own lives, both individually and collectively, aiming to improve the situation of vulnerable groups.

Expanding on this, Kleba and Wendausen (2009) describe empowerment as a process of strengthening individuals within social participation and political democratization contexts. This involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects and manifests in three dimensions: psychological or individual; group or organizational; and structural or political.

Herriger (2006) suggests that to assess the psychological dimension, it is crucial to understand an individual's experiences in handling disruptive situations, the competencies they have developed, their motivations for action, and the positive changes resulting from these experiences, which contribute to the continuity and support of the empowerment process.

Therefore, the empowerment process's impact should not be evaluated solely based on tangible outcomes, like the number of businesses established or income increases. It should also consider intangible factors such as knowledge acquisition, emotional responses, and motivations (Kleba; Wendausen, 2009).

With that in mind, this paper will focus on analyzing the benefits as they were perceived by women across the seven identified categories and exploring any potential connections these benefits may have with the three dimensions of empowerment.

CATEGORY: FINANCIAL

The category of financial benefits includes enhancements reported by women in areas such as income, savings, and overall living conditions in relation to poverty alleviation. This category consolidates seven key items identified across multiple studies, aligning with the primary objective of entrepreneurship training, which is to assist women in generating income as a means of poverty reduction.

Importantly, the financial dimension extends beyond mere income generation (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021), to include the provision of initial earnings for women who previously had no income. Markedly, there has been an noticeable increase in income (Butterwick, 2002; George *et al.*, 2021; Leach *et al.*, 2000; Nathenson *et al.*, 2017) and the generation or enhancement of additional income (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022; George *et al.*, 2021; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019). This is particularly significant for women who already had some baseline income.

Women who were already entrepreneurs reported benefiting from improvements in their businesses, either through increased revenue (George *et al.*, 2021) or advancements in management (Leach *et al.*, 2000).

Another significant aspect was the improvement in household economics, as women adopted practices to minimize food wastage and optimize shopping strategies (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019).

Overall, this category compiles benefits contributing to the broader financial betterment of women, their families, and in some cases, their communities, thereby facilitating poverty alleviation. It is pertinent to note that poverty eradication in all its forms is the foremost goal among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015), indicating the potential of low-income women's training in contributing to achieving SDG 1.

CATEGORY: SOCIAL STATUS

About one-third (36%) of the studies report an improvement in the social status and position of women, a significant development considering the majority reside in strongly patriarchal societies, where women are often silenced and marginalized (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022). Patriarchy contributes to the marginalization of women within families (Sutter; Bruton; Chen, 2019) and hinders their educational opportunities (Kabeer, 2005).

Women reported various aspects of social recognition, including respect from their husbands for their desire to learn and acknowledgment from other family members and the community (Leach *et al.*, 2000), leading to positive societal recognition (Nathenson *et al.*, 2017) and enhanced communal social standing (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021; George *et al.*, 2021; Leach *et al.*, 2000; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019).

This shift in social conditions is interconnected with other identified benefits in this study, notably improvements in mental health, gender-related issues, and decision-making power.

CATEGORY: MENTAL HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The analysis of the articles brought to light several nuanced and intangible benefits experienced by the women. In contrast to the tangible gains in income, the category of mental health and quality of life represents a deeply personal enrichment for these women.

Instances of reduced anxiety after concluding the training (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019), increased of positive attitudes (Leach *et al.*, 2000), heightened personal motivation (Leach *et al.*, 2000; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019), and a sense of accomplishment (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019) for completing the training were reported.

Participants also exhibited significant growth in psychological capital, developing a sense of purpose in their lives (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022). They reported that the educational interventions served as catalysts for reflection and reevaluation of their roles in family and community life (Leach *et al.*, 2000). Additionally, future aspirations began to gain prominence in their thoughts (Leach *et al.*, 2000).

There were accounts of enhanced self-perception, with women beginning to see themselves as valuable, effective, and important members of their communities (Leach *et al.*, 2000; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019). Overall, these developments contributed to improved well-being and quality of life (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022).

CATEGORY: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Echoing the financial benefits category, skills development is a central aim of the studies, given their educational nature. The goal of these interventions was to equip the target audience with the skills necessary to initiate or enhance income-generating entrepreneurial activities.

Reports indicated increases in knowledge and competencies essential for entrepreneurship, such as adaptability to market changes (Leach *et al.*, 2000), a sense of responsibility for one's business (Leach *et al.*, 2000; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019), effective task delegation (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019), and business or management acumen (George *et al.*, 2021; Leach *et al.*, 2000). Improvements in communication (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021) and teamwork (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019) were also noted.

Additionally, there was a noticeable enhancement of pre-existing skills, including the reawakening of some previously dormant abilities (Leach *et al.*, 2000). In summary, the women developed more effective survival strategies, frequently by tapping into their creative potential.

CATEGORY: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The fifth category encompasses elements found in the studies that refer to the personal development of women, which is subtly distinguishable from the benefits of mental health and quality of life. However, this category highlights items that represent a clear evolution from the state prior to the interventions and are more easily perceived by the women and those observing them.

Entrepreneurship is a source of empowerment for women, especially in developing countries (Jamali, 2009), with the term “empowerment” being recurrent in works from the last decade and encompassing other identified items, such as building agency over oneself (Pettifor *et al.*, 2019).

Women began to have greater self-confidence and trust in others, whether their colleagues, leaders of the interventions, or other community members (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021; Leach *et al.*, 2000; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019). This contributed to them becoming more interactive and sociable (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021), strengthening their sense of community and belonging (Thompson, 2002), with notable overcoming of shyness for many (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019).

It was also observed that self-awareness and an increase in self-esteem led to positive thoughts, and women began to recognize themselves as businesswomen (Leach *et al.*, 2000; Pettifor *et al.*, 2019; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019).

CATEGORY: GENDER ISSUES

Beyond issues of personal or financial improvement, there were also changes related to gender issues, considered integral components of gender equality as a critical aspect of sustainable development (Chatterjee; Shepherd; Wincent, 2022).

There was an expansion in the limiting perception of women's stereotyped roles in society, such as homemakers and childbearers (Thompson, 2002), and the previously recurrent feeling of being incomplete or deficient as a woman ceased to exist (Leach *et al.*, 2000).

New gender dynamics, different interactions, and relationships between men and women began to be perceived in communities (Nathenson *et al.*, 2017). In the family context, the most notable change reported by women was the shift in their husbands' attitudes, taking on more domestic tasks than before the intervention (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021; Leach *et al.*, 2000).

Increased collaboration among women was also observed, illustrated by their union in facing problems (Daniels, 2002) and, in some cases, for opening collective enterprises, as well as mutual encouragement (Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019).

CATEGORY: DECISION POWER

The last reported category aligns with gender issues and social status, highlighting a change perceived in about a third of the studies in the survey: the autonomy and decision-making power of the women.

The decision-making power extends to the more everyday decisions in these women's lives, with reports of them feeling safer and having greater mobility (Leach *et al.*, 2000). Reports clearly highlight the importance for these women of participating in household decisions (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021) and becoming enabled to be autonomous, micro-entrepreneurs, and independent, financially self-sufficient, able to make decisions about their lives and their children (Agrawal; Gandhi; Khare, 2021; George *et al.*, 2021; Pettifor *et al.*, 2019; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019). The women gain a more active voice within their communities, where their social status was elevated, and they began to be heard and considered (Leach *et al.*, 2000; Pettifor *et al.*, 2019; Sahyoun *et al.*, 2019).

In the investigation by Nathenson *et al.*, (2017) and Pettifor *et al.*, (2019), a shift in sexual dynamics is noted. Financial independence, evolving perceptions of women's roles, and enhanced safety enabled some of the women studied to decline unwanted sexual partners. The practice of transactional sex, where women previously engaged in sexual relations with undesired partners in exchange for food or basic survival necessities, became a thing of the past for some participants.

EMPOWERMENT IN ITS THREE DIMENSIONS

This systematic literature review reveals that entrepreneurial education interventions, as detailed in the 11 articles comprising the final corpus, significantly contributed to women's empowerment and that of their communities across three distinct dimensions.

The psychological or individual dimension is evident in most of the identified categories. Women reported feelings of autonomy, freedom, self-confidence, emancipation, heightened self-esteem, and improvements in mental health and quality of life. They also experienced increased capability in generating income through the development of both technical and personal competencies.

In the collective or organizational dimension, instances of mutual support and respect among women were prevalent, strengthened by solidarity practices and even the formation of collective enterprises, as outlined in Daniels (2002) and Sahyoun *et al.*, (2019). This demonstrates a strong organizational aspect of empowerment, characterized by a deepened sense of belonging both individually and collectively among groups of women.

The structural or political dimension of empowerment manifests in women's increased voice and participation within their communities, influencing councils, being heard, and considered. The transformation in gender dynamics, as reported by women, such as increased participation of husbands in household tasks and changed interactions between men and women in communities, underscores this dimension. Women's roles as businesswomen also illustrate this aspect, reflecting co-responsibility for community development with social participation and a citizenship perspective.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is a clear imperative for additional research to deepen our understanding of female entrepreneurship within poverty contexts, the processes of empowerment, and the specific individual and community-level improvements at the base of the pyramid. This knowledge is crucial for social actors to better position and adapt entrepreneurship training for this audience, creating proposals through dialogic engagement.

The study concludes that outcomes vary from individual to individual, influenced by personal contexts and the complexity of interventions. "Financial" and "gender issues" emerged as the most frequently cited benefit categories, with "competence development" and "financial" showing the largest effect. The findings related to financial gains and skills development align closely with the goals of entrepreneurship training, designed to foster skills for income generation and poverty alleviation. However, gender issues, along with mental health, quality of life, and decision-making power, emerged as less anticipated yet significant findings.

Entrepreneurial education interventions have been found to effectively contribute to women's empowerment, impacting psychological, collective, and political dimensions. As a result, the situation and position of vulnerable groups have been notably improved.

Limitations of this research include its sole focus on empirical academic papers to capture the voices of women through direct data collection methods. Consequently, other types of publications might yield additional insights. Studies involving non-low-income women or those whose training did not focus on entrepreneurship and income generation were excluded. This may have potentially omitted diverse perspectives in female entrepreneurship.

Future research should aim for standardization in collecting the perceptions of low-income women regarding entrepreneurial education initiatives. Researchers are encouraged to provide detailed socioeconomic information about their target audience and to explore the theme of female entrepreneurship more deeply in poverty contexts. This approach will help identify factors that enhance interventions and their practical outcomes. Additionally, quantitative studies that test hypotheses about the relationship between training benefits and empowerment are also recommended.

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