

Research Article

Phenomenological Study of Women Entrepreneurs and Their Impact on Socioeconomic Growth in Malaysia

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ORCIDNoraini Ahmad: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1174-4748>**Abstract.**

This study analyzes women entrepreneurship and socioeconomic growth in Malaysia. In this research, four factors and obstacles facing entrepreneurial growth were identified. To answer these four objectives, the research was conducted using a focus group method. A selected group of 10 female entrepreneurs were interviewed online focus group discussions. A structured questionnaire was also distributed to the 10 participating entrepreneurs which was analyzed using the NVIVO software package. The research results were tabulated based on four themes and subthemes. In conclusion, this research has established a socioeconomic model of women's entrepreneurship in Malaysia. The causal relationship model configures variables as the main guide for stakeholders and entrepreneurial practitioners. This research is a phenomenological study of women's entrepreneurship and its influence on their socioeconomic growth in Malaysia. The study provides implications for stakeholders in overcoming women's entrepreneurship problems and obstacles to women's business growth. Further research on women's entrepreneurship in industrial and business sectors is recommended.

Keywords: women entrepreneurship, social economic growth

1. Introduction

Globally, entrepreneurship is found to play a significant role in the socio-development of countries, particularly in emerging and transitional economies. The SMEs are found to contribute up to 60% of the total employment and up to 40% of the national income (GDP) of emerging economies respectively. Among the SMEs, it was shown that microenterprises are considered to be the most dynamic business entities. They are often viewed as one of the main crucial forces behind economic growth and poverty reduction by providing more job opportunities to society. In the case of women's participation in business, women's entrepreneurial populations are found to be the fastest growing business population in the world but they remain as the understudied group of entrepreneurs although the firms owned by women are distributed across all

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sectors of industry. It was discovered that the top sectors for women entrepreneurs are health care (doctors and dentists), education services, social assistance (residential care facilities and child care providers), personal care services (beauty salons and dry cleaners), professional/technical/scientific services (accountants, public relations and human resources development consulting) and retail trade. These arguments on the sectoral domain of women entrepreneurship are supported by the European Commission Report (2013) that showed women entrepreneurs in sectors such as the manufacturing and ICT sectors are low compared to other sectors. The industries (primarily in retail, education, and other service industries) chosen by most women entrepreneurs are often perceived as being the less significant sectors to economic development and growth as compared to high-technology and manufacturing [1].

In Malaysia, it was noted that about 20% (130,000) of the total registered 650,000 entrepreneurs are women. Despite many women entrepreneurs being successful, their actual potential and contribution to the economic growth of the country were not properly and deeply addressed. There are many reasons for these problems of addressing the potential of women entrepreneurs on the economic growth of the country in general and especially on the economic growth of each state and district in which women entrepreneurship is taking place.

Women entrepreneurs in Malaysia were encountered with constraints including the structure of the society. For instance, the societal perceptions of the role of women in taking care of their families and children hinder the potential and capabilities of women entrepreneurs. The perceived traditional roles of women as homemakers and the lack of equal opportunities in doing business made available to women result in a market failure that prevents women from achieving their full potential as successful entrepreneurs. As such all these barriers should be addressed and studied.

The study should also look at the roles of Malaysian government and government agencies and other supports including financial assistance, providing marketing and promotion channels and business skill training, enhancing technology usage, and creating business networks.

Generally, there are also claims that women entrepreneurs are lacking in confidence and stamina, placing more importance on family matters and work-life balance between work and family. In a previous study on women's empowerment in Malaysia, it was discovered that women's empowerment is low compared to the economic growth of the country. In another study, it was found that barriers to the success of women entrepreneurs were the lack of knowledge, skill, attitude, restrictive legalities, regulations, and procedures, and lack of business support and initiatives from government

and network as well as personality and self-efficacy. Despite women are not equally treated as compared to men, it was reported that the percentage of more women entering businesses has contributed to considerable economic growth and productivity in the country.

Women entrepreneurs are found to begin to set standards of behaviors that distinguish them from others and they create an identity of their rights. All these developments in women's entrepreneurship have created a new playing field as women entrepreneurs compete with their male counterparts for the same business opportunities [2]. Despite the development of women entrepreneurship across the world, it was noted that there were very limited studies undertaken in the past to assess the issues faced by women entrepreneurs in the context of the overall development of women entrepreneurship including Malaysia. Thus, this study is of great value in providing comprehensive strategies and policy measures required to strengthen women's entrepreneurship development [3].

Entrepreneurship literature highlighted numerous constraints and barriers to women's entrepreneurship which include amongst others gender-biased, lack of entrepreneurial and business skills, finance, and even the personality characteristics of women. These barriers require the stakeholders to provide financial and business infrastructure to support the growth of women entrepreneurs. While many theories and empirical analyses have approached the concept, the literature remains arguably underdeveloped due to the conceptual and empirical challenges faced by researchers. Given the background of the complexity of the environment of women's entrepreneurship, the objectives of the study were to identify and evaluate women's entrepreneurship development and its contribution to socioeconomic growth, including household income, employment, and societal well-being.

This study of women entrepreneurship in Malaysia was in a multitude of contexts, including the examination of the entrepreneurial psychological factors such as personality, barriers to women entrepreneurship success and growth, and identifying the support systems and initiatives of the government.

And other stakeholders, and evaluating the social and economic growth of the country such as GDP and employment. Based on this background, was intended to fill the current research and methodological gaps in entrepreneurship study. Thus, this study on women's entrepreneurship focused on the women's entrepreneurship environment, internal and external barriers, stakeholder support systems, and the contribution of women's entrepreneurship to the social well-being and socio-economic growth of Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Women Entrepreneurship

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report (2015 & 2016) recorded that in Malaysia, women are about as likely as men to become entrepreneurs, and just as likely to have started the business out of necessity [4]. In other words, women now see businesses as opportunities for the socio-economic growth that they seek. Thus in 2020, the entrepreneurial scene in Malaysia is continuing to grow rapidly, and women have been quick to claim their rightful spot—with one in five companies in the country now owned by women (Malaysia's Statistics Department 2020). The National Association of Women Entrepreneurs plays an important role in promoting, developing, and enhancing the efforts and activities of women entrepreneurs. In 2010, the Malaysian government spent around RM. 4.7 million to 946 women entrepreneurs to encourage and support women who own and operate businesses. SME bank introduces Women Entrepreneur Financing Programme which has a financing limit between RM 500,000 and RM. 2.5 million [5]. Along, the Women Leaders Entrepreneur Acceleration Program provides both financial assistance and coaching in strategic business methods to ensure growth and sustainability. It also acts as a liaison between members and the Government of Malaysia, State and Local Agencies and organizations, as well as external Agencies and Bodies. The participation of women entrepreneurs in various sectors including online business is rapidly growing especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that causes people to stay home during the moving control order (MCO). The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is disastrous with the high unemployment rate as more people are out of jobs and the closure of industries and other business sectors including transportation and service sectors such as the tourism industry. Despite the global economic and social issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a growing trend for the emergence of new businesses and emerging entrepreneurs including women entrepreneurs in the marketplace.

These pull and push motivational factors such as the government support and business infrastructure as well as meeting their family financial needs and women's high business drive clearly explain why women are venturing in business [6]. The rapid growth of self-employed and businesses especially among women are noticeable.

The participation of more women in businesses certainly will impact their living and income and the economic growth of their locality and the country at large Thus there

is a call for women's empowerment which are categorized as social, educational, economic, political, and psychological. In Malaysia, women's empowerment is recognized in women's entrepreneurship development and initiatives and their contribution to the social well-being and socio-economic growth of the country.

In Malaysia, the development of entrepreneurial activities among women in the high-revenue sectors can consequently lead to the upward growth of entrepreneurship including women entering into the highly productive and high-revenue industries. It has been recognized that women entrepreneurship in Malaysia is now considered by the Malaysian government as one of the most important factors that contribute to the socio-economic development such as providing employment, well-being, and increasing the GDP of the country. The growth of women entrepreneurs is now much faster as entrepreneurs are found to be the key driving force of modern economies. In addition, the entrepreneurial spirit among women entrepreneurs may also manifest in the development of new markets, new products, new methods of production and management, the discovery of new inputs, and the establishment of new businesses, and even new businesses are now created. In countries like Malaysia, government agencies and financial institutions provide policies, legal and financial loans, and assistance in meeting the needs of women entrepreneurs [7]. However, it has been observed that there are more efforts to be made and high expectations from government agencies, non-government, and financial institutions in developing women's entrepreneurship [8].

In entrepreneurship research, the dominant paradigm of entrepreneurship research practices, such as the positivist research approach, has brought about a fundamental paradox: researchers often try to analyze a phenomenon that cannot properly be defined. As a result, most previous entrepreneurship research was found to be fragmentary and focused narrowly on aspects of entrepreneurship. Anderson et al. (2012) reviewed the current research domain in entrepreneurship. They agreed that the dominant paradigm of entrepreneurship research that practiced a positivist approach or methodology, has brought about a fundamental paradox: researchers often try to analyze a phenomenon that cannot properly be defined [9].

For instance, most research on entrepreneurship focuses on explanatory research that tries to assume and predict the relationship among conceptualized variables with the reasoned conclusion by a logical generalization of a known fact (deductive process). Nonetheless, there are very rich descriptive data on what people mean when they talk about 'enterprise'.

This research gap in entrepreneurship has led to the argument that an interpretative approach is an alternative method of looking at entrepreneurship as social constructionism that extends people's understanding of entrepreneurship. If the fragmentary positivistic approaches are imagined as pieces of a jigsaw, it can be seen how a social constructivist approach can provide an overview of how the pieces match, fit, and come together [10],[11], [12]. This qualitative approach Ica explains the "big picture" of knowledge and the phenomenon of entrepreneurship. For instance, a critical review of personality traits of entrepreneurs, for instance, the study of entrepreneurship in a multitude of contexts, including the examination of the determinants of occupational choice, the predictors of entrepreneurial success, the evaluation of the effects of entrepreneurship policies, and the design and assessment of different approaches to entrepreneurship education.

Given the amount of entrepreneurship research that generally focuses on an individual-centric approach or environmental-centric approach. This approach is limited in scope and the study tends to focus on the characteristics of the entrepreneurs, factors for entrepreneurship success and growth, gender gap and equality, the effect of the socio-cultural environment on micro, small, and medium enterprises, and SME performance. Thus, it was noticeable that neither individual-centric nor individual-centric is more correct than the others because the entrepreneurship phenomenon cannot be explained in the absence of the other. Thus, the literature remains arguably underdeveloped due to the conceptual and empirical challenges faced by researchers [13].

This contention on the narrow focus of entrepreneurship was supported by the observation of Talgat Afzal et al. (2009) [14]. They realized that the field of entrepreneurship is centrally concerned with understanding "how opportunities to bring into existence 'future' goods and services are discovered, created, and exploited, by whom and with what consequence." Entrepreneurship research to date, however, has focused on a relatively narrow portion of this rich domain. The attention should be directed toward explicating how business plans, marketing strategies, sponsorship, and personal traits enable entrepreneurs to access and mobilize pools of resources to start new businesses, move into new lines of business, or promote new products, ideas, or processes that create wealth. Likewise, entrepreneurship is about a context-dependent social process yet entrepreneurship researchers have largely neglected the broader social and cultural dynamics of the entrepreneurship field. For instance, the narrow definition of success highlights only economic motivations for entering into self-employment, which tends to fit the male model of self-employment. However, it does less well in reflecting women's

motivations for starting a business, which includes a desire for greater income as well as creating more opportunities for advancement than in the labor market, improving a family's livelihood position, self-fulfillment, and greater ability to balance work and family roles [15]. This is the methodological gap found in the study of entrepreneurship, including women's entrepreneurship.

3. Methods

In entrepreneurship research, a qualitative approach should be used to determine further the strategy and policy to assist in the business expansion of women entrepreneurs, as well as encouraging more participation of women in entrepreneurship. In terms of family issues, future studies can consider the perception and attitude of spouses in taking equal childcare and household responsibilities. Research on women's entrepreneurship reveals the idea of women as being secondary to men and of women's businesses being less significant to men or as a complement. In so doing, it is imperative to define women's entrepreneurship clearly and, subsequently, the scope of women entrepreneurs (for instance own and operate, rather than merely funding the ventures) so that accurate findings can be derived. Based on the above argument and consideration, in-depth research in understanding the extent or role of women entrepreneurship and their contribution to the social change and economic growth of each particular country is still lacking. Thus, it pushes for further extension of research focusing on how women entrepreneurs as a focus group participate in economic activities and it impacts to the social and economic growth of the community and the country.

Based on the above literature review of entrepreneurship and women entrepreneurship about its contribution to the socio-economic growth of women entrepreneurs and the socio-economic development of a particular country, issues and suggestions for the development plan of women entrepreneurship and the underlying and supporting theories, the theoretical framework in the study of women entrepreneurship is drawn. Figure 1 shows how the study of women's entrepreneurship is systematically theorized and methodologically conceptualized.

Based on the theoretical framework (Figure 1.1), Table 1 below indicates the thematic framework of the construction of constructs, variables, and dimensions of the study on women entrepreneurship.

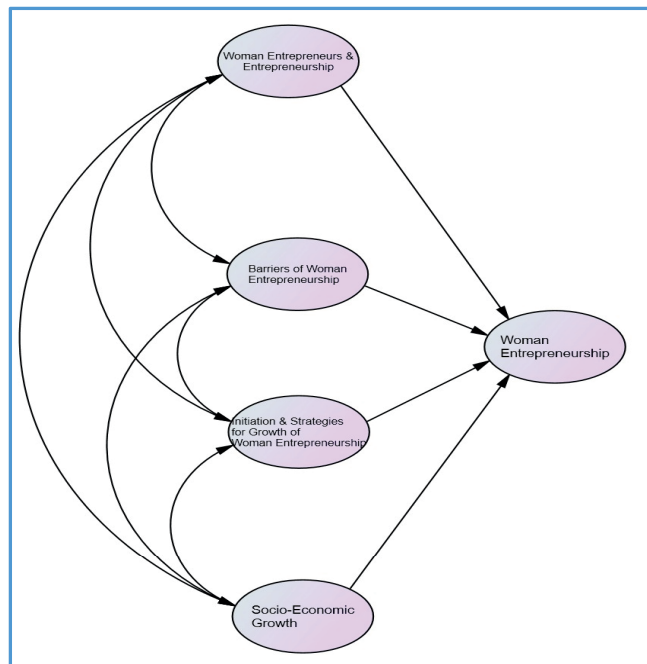


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework.

TABLE 1: Thematic Framework.

Construct	Variables	Dimensions
Women Entrepreneurs & Entrepreneurship	Personality Traits	Values, spirituality, self-efficacy, Locus of Control, mindset. Intention
Barriers to Women Entrepreneurs	Internal & External Resources	Human Capital: Skills, competencies, capabilities, capacity, knowledge, Experience, networking
Initiations and support for the growth of women's entrepreneurship	Role of Stakeholder	Marketing, business network, financing, training, mentoring, coaching,
Socio-economic growth (SDG)	Entrepreneurship Outcomes	Family income, social well-being, employment, equity.

3.1. Focus Group Discussion

The present study was conducted in one selected district in Clang Valley, Selangor. A group of successful women entrepreneurs (business owners) in food and restaurant, retailers, and traders are identified as a case study to evaluate what and how their businesses are improving their social well-being and improve their economic (financial) condition that meets their needs.

In this study, a thematic analysis is used. The use of thematic analysis in qualitative research aims at improving the generalizability of the study. Since qualitative research

has emerged as one of the main methods of conducting research there should have to be exhaustion so that the results of a qualitative research are valid and generalizable.

The present study utilized the details of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and group interviews among selected woman entrepreneurs. There were 15 respondents involved in the exploration of a thematic theme. NVIVO application was utilized in an exploration of the Thematic Theme. An exploratory approach to configured prepositions was conducted to observe the relationship within the trend. Group discussions were conducted on the multiple group level and the following are characteristics of qualitative data gathered

3.2. NVIVO Applications

In this research, the NVIVO Application package is used to analyze qualitative data obtained from interviews with the women entrepreneurs. NVIVO is a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International.

NVIVO helps qualitative researchers to organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media, and web content, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required. NVIVO is used predominantly by academicians and commercial researchers, government, and health across a diverse range of entrepreneurship studies.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the focus group discussion with the key persons, the present study distributed an online survey form to determine their characteristics. The sample distribution according to 4 age groups showed that a large majority of women entrepreneurs belonged to the age group of 41-55 years old 42.9%, a smaller sized 28.6% belonged to the group of 26-40 years old and above 55 years old and very least number for the group of under 25 years old. As per marital status, 64.3% are married 28.6 % are single and only 7.1% are divorced. The collected data also shows that 42.9% are bachelor's degree holders, 28.6% are postgraduate, 21.4% with Diploma, and 7.1% without an O level.

4.1. Women Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship

In this section, the results of the focus group discussion on Theme 1 were described. These include the Scope of the study scope of business, entrepreneurial skills acquired, Personality traits, self-efficacy, Locus of Control and Spirituality, and availability of resources and capabilities.

The data shows that most women entrepreneurs are aware of their business scope, due to the current pandemic situation forcing them to be more creative in sustaining their business. Their main challenges are to transform their business into digital form, which requires new skills in technology, training, and financial support, and at the same time, it will enlarge the scope of their business. The scope of the business plays an important role as the process of the achievement of women's entrepreneurship success.

Women are typically extremely adaptable and quick to pick up new skills on social media platforms. Certain entrepreneurs offer complimentary classes to teach others how to create social media tools for their businesses. The majority of respondents indicated that they would rather use Instagram/Facebook tools. It is, however, dependent on the customer segment (age/generation), the product, and the service. Certain industries, such as construction, are notoriously difficult to digitize, as they require physical meetings and supply chain processes.

Personality traits in this study refer to the characteristics of the woman entrepreneur on enduring behavioral and emotional patterns which contributed to the development of a business organization, supported with self-efficacy, locus control, and spirituality are needed for achievement and self-capacity on a motivational level. Key person number 04 identified how personality traits, self-efficacy, locus of control, and spirituality dominate the achievement of success.

4.2. Availability of Resources and Capabilities

The main challenge is not only about the availability of limited resources but also the access to the resources, however with networking among women entrepreneur organizations and support from the government help them with the allocation of resources and training to improve their abilities in managing and maximizing the use of the availability resource.

4.3. Stakeholders Support Programmers'

The ministry responsible for entrepreneur development should play a leadership role and take it seriously. There are numerous avenues for assisting and empowering female entrepreneurs, including the ministry, youth agency, and SME corporations. Women entrepreneurs typically find it easy to obtain financial assistance during their start-up phase, but find it more difficult to expand or obtain additional capital. According to real-world experience at MATRADE, many women entrepreneurs are excellent paymasters. Therefore, all of this should be driven efficiently and in perfect synchronization. While related to educational entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Higher Education encourages all students to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors as a means of earning a living and the policies currently being developed to support educational entrepreneurship.

Key-Person number 09 and number 10 determined the details of stakeholder support programs, especially on the identification of government support for the achievement of women's entrepreneurship success.

4.4. Economic Condition of Woman Entrepreneurs

All women entrepreneurs agree that, with their intrinsic motivation, determinants, and a strong support system from a range of alternative groups, they can dominate or, at the very least, contribute to Malaysia's economic growth in the future. Exposure and encouragement will go a long way toward assisting women entrepreneurs in growing successfully and attaining the international standard.

5. Conclusion

The results from the focus group session were deliberated analyzed and pointed out It was based on four thematic frameworks that each of the themes is deliberately discussed. The theoretical contribution highlights how the research methodology used can overcome the weaknesses and drawbacks of entrepreneurship research. The practical implications pointed to the need for stakeholders involved in promoting women's entrepreneurship to remove barriers to women's entrepreneurship growth. Future research provides suggestions to cover a wider spectrum of women entrepreneurs in men-dominated high-growth sectors and their competitiveness. The concluding

mark pointed to the overall significance of this research on women’s entrepreneurship and socio-economic growth in Malaysia.

5.1. Establishment of Woman Entrepreneurship Socio-Economic Model

Based on a qualitative journey that covered focus group discussions with the key persons, face-to-face interviews, and qualitative data analysis using NVIVO, the present study established a fundamental model of woman entrepreneurship socio-economic model. A causal effect relationship results in the preposition interaction (Figure 2).

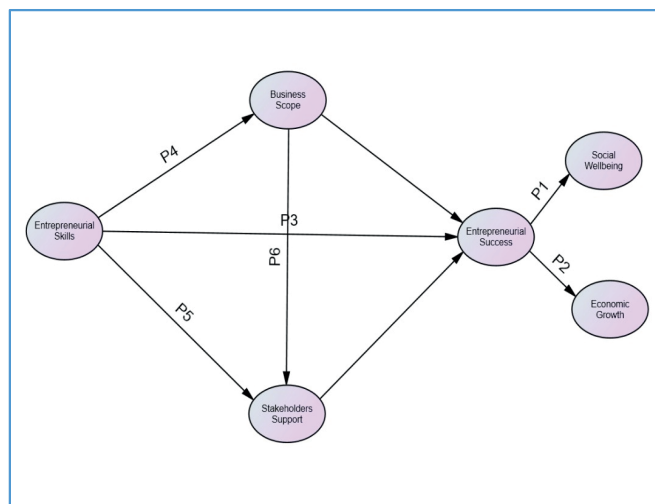


Figure 2: Woman Entrepreneurship Socio-Economic Model.

TABLE 2: List of Propositions on the Woman Entrepreneurship Socio-Economic Model.

No.	Statement	Preposition
1	<i>Women entrepreneurship success in Malaysia is measured by social well-being.</i>	P01
2	<i>Women entrepreneurship success in Malaysia is measured by economic growth</i>	P02
3	<i>Entrepreneurship skills have a direct effect on the achievement of women’s entrepreneurship success.</i>	P03
4	<i>Business scope is a process of the relationship between woman’s entrepreneurship skills and their success.</i>	P04
5	<i>Stakeholder support is a process of the relationship between women’s entrepreneurship skills and their success.</i>	P05
6	<i>The business scope has a direct impact on the stakeholder’s support.</i>	P06

The model focused on the contribution of woman entrepreneur’s success which is measured by social well-being and economic growth. There are **6 proposition**

statements as results of the hypothetical model of **woman entrepreneurship socio-economic model** (Table 2).

Entrepreneur skills are determined as predictors of a woman entrepreneur's success as mediated through business scope and stakeholder support. There are 2 processes and conditions that they have to go through called business scope and stakeholder support.

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