

A STUDY ON THE SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABILITY OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS TOWARDS NATION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the pivotal role played by women entrepreneurs in fostering sustainable employability, thereby fuelling the economic growth of nations. As societies evolve, women's empowerment in entrepreneurial ventures is crucial not just for gender equality but also for overall economic development. The research scrutinizes various factors influencing the sustainable employability of women entrepreneurs, including education, access to resources, policy frameworks, and societal perceptions. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, qualitative interviews, and quantitative surveys, this study assesses the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and identifies successful strategies employed to overcome these obstacles. The findings highlight that sustainable employability of women entrepreneurs contributes significantly to the economic fabric of a nation by creating employment opportunities, stimulating innovation, and fostering social development. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of tailored support systems, mentorship programs, and policy initiatives in enhancing women's entrepreneurial activities. The research also explores case studies of successful women entrepreneurs, providing valuable insights into their journeys, challenges faced, and the impact of their ventures on the national economy. This study not only advances academic understanding but also offers practical implications for policymakers, business leaders, and aspiring women entrepreneurs. By addressing the challenges and promoting the sustainable employability of women entrepreneurs, nations can unlock their full economic potential, fostering inclusive growth and ensuring a brighter, more equitable future for all.

KEYWORDS: *Women Entrepreneurs, Sustainable Employability, Economic Development, Gender Equality, Empowerment, Policy Frameworks, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem.*

Introduction

Global economic progress heavily relies on entrepreneurship, which has historically been associated with men. However, new research highlights the important role that women play today that approximately 252 million women world wide are self-employed. This represents almost one-third of all business owners world-wide. Over the past 20 years, the proportion of female entrepreneurs has climbed by 114%. Compared to males who launched 60% of firms in 2021, women started 39.9% of them. Since in 1996, the proportion of women-owned start-up has been very stable, varying from 36.3% in 2007 to a peak of 46.4% in 1998. Women entrepreneurs are becoming more important in India's economy, and their efforts should not be underestimated. These female entrepreneurs play an important role in the Indian economy, producing jobs, driving development, and fostering wealth. According to recent statistics,

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women account for 14% of all entrepreneurs in India. In addition, women hold 10% of all formal businesses. The presence of women in the labour sector has provided jobs and helped millions of families escape poverty. Women prevail in new-age sectors where they make up a substantial share of the workforce due to their greater leadership abilities and higher levels of output. This work ethic and commendable business skills have also underlined the importance of women in today's workforce.

Introduction

Women Entrepreneurship and Employability: A Critical Review of Research (2017-2023)

The global economy is witnessing a surge in women entrepreneurship, with women increasingly establishing and managing their own businesses. This rise presents significant opportunities for economic growth, job creation, and innovation. However, women entrepreneurs often encounter unique challenges that hinder their employability and business success. This review examines research published between 2017 and 2023 to explore the relationship between women entrepreneurship and employability, highlighting key themes, findings, and gaps in knowledge.

Positive Impact on Employability

- **Job Creation:** Women entrepreneurs are powerful drivers of job creation, particularly in emerging economies and diverse sectors. Studies by Nabi et al. (2019) and Singh et al. (2022) reveal that women-owned businesses contribute significantly to employment opportunities, fostering economic growth and development.
- **Developing Entrepreneurial Skills:** Engaging in entrepreneurship equips women with valuable skills like leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving. These skills are highly sought after across various sectors, enhancing their employability and career prospects (Noman et al., 2017).
- **Expanding Access to Employment:** Women-owned businesses create employment opportunities not only for themselves but also for other women, promoting gender equality and economic empowerment. Research by Hassan et al. (2022) highlights the positive impact of women entrepreneurship on increasing access to employment for women, particularly in underprivileged communities.

Challenges to Employability

- **Limited Access to Finance:** Access to finance remains a major obstacle for women entrepreneurs, hindering their ability to launch, grow, and sustain their businesses. Studies by Ali and Khan (2020) and Noman et al. (2017) identify the lack of access to loans, venture capital, and other financial resources as a key challenge that limits women's employability potential.
- **Lack of Business Skills and Knowledge:** Afsar et al. (2019) and Chauhan et al. (2018) highlight the gap in business management skills and entrepreneurial knowledge among women entrepreneurs. This lack of knowledge hinders their ability to effectively manage their businesses, impacting their sustainability and growth potential.
- **Social and Cultural Barriers:** Gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and discriminatory practices create barriers for women entrepreneurs, limiting their access to resources, networks, and opportunities. Research by Bhattacharya et al. (2017) and Khan et al. (2022) emphasizes the need for social and cultural reforms to create a more supportive environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Balancing family and work responsibilities can be a significant challenge for women entrepreneurs, leading to stress, burnout, and decreased productivity. Studies by Ahmed et al. (2021) and Omolola et al. (2018) emphasize the need for flexible work arrangements and support systems to help women entrepreneurs achieve a better work-life balance.
- **Lack of Technology and Digital Skills:** Digital literacy and access to technology are crucial in the modern economy, yet many women entrepreneurs lack the necessary skills to fully participate. Olagunju et al. (2022) and Singh and Rani (2021) highlight the need to bridge the digital divide and equip women entrepreneurs with essential technology and digital skills to improve their employability and business competitiveness.

Supporting Women Entrepreneurship and Employability

- **Government Policies and Programs:** Government initiatives can play a crucial role in supporting women entrepreneurs and enhancing their employability. Akter et al. (2023) and Sharma et al. (2020) emphasize the effectiveness of programs providing access to finance, training, mentorship, and networking opportunities, empowering women entrepreneurs to succeed in their businesses.
- **Technology and Digital Tools:** Technology can be a powerful tool for supporting women entrepreneurs by facilitating access to markets, resources, financial services, and online collaboration. Awoyemi et al. (2021) and Oyedokun et al. (2019) highlight the potential of technology in creating a more level playing field for women entrepreneurs and enabling them to compete effectively in the digital economy.
- **Cultural and Societal Shifts:** Breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting a more supportive environment through education, awareness campaigns, and cultural change initiatives can significantly improve women entrepreneurs' employability. Khadka et al. (2021) and Singh et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of addressing social and cultural barriers to foster a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs.
- **Financial Inclusion and Digital Literacy:** Initiatives promoting financial inclusion and digital literacy empower women entrepreneurs to manage their finances, access financial services, and participate in the digital economy. Ogundele et al. (2023) and Pandey and Singh (2023).

Objectives

- To find out what factors influence the sustainable employability of women entrepreneurship.
- To find out how education helps in the employment of women entrepreneurs
- To search out how various resource are accessible to women entrepreneurs
- To search the various policy frameworks provided by the government for the women entrepreneurs.
- To understand the society's perception regarding women entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis

- Access to technology and digital literacy skills positively impact sustainable employability.
- Access to mentors and role models who are successful women entrepreneurs positively influences employability.

Literature Review

Positive Impact of Women Entrepreneurship on Employability

- **Job creation:** Studies by Nabi et al. (2019) and Singh et al. (2022) highlight the significant job creation potential of women entrepreneurs, particularly in diverse sectors and emerging economies.
- **Increased access to employment:** Women-owned businesses contribute to increased employment opportunities for women, promoting gender equality and economic empowerment (Hassan et al., 2022).
- **Development of entrepreneurial skills:** Engaging in entrepreneurship equips women with valuable skills like leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving, enhancing their employability across various sectors (Noman et al., 2017).

Challenges to Women Entrepreneurship and Employability

- **Access to finance:** Limited access to loans, venture capital, and other financial resources remains a major obstacle for women entrepreneurs, hindering their business growth and employability (Ali & Khan, 2020).
- **Lack of skills and knowledge:** Research by Afsar et al. (2019) and Chauhan et al. (2018) identifies a lack of business management skills and entrepreneurial knowledge as barriers for women entrepreneurs, limiting their ability to effectively manage and expand their businesses.

- **Social and cultural barriers:** Gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and discriminatory practices can restrict women's access to resources, networks, and opportunities, impacting their employability (Bhattacharya et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2022).
- **Work-life balance:** Balancing family and work responsibilities can be a significant challenge for women entrepreneurs, leading to stress, burnout, and decreased productivity (Ahmed et al., 2021; Omolola et al., 2018).
- **Lack of access to technology and digital skills:** Digital literacy and access to technology are crucial for success in the modern economy, yet many women entrepreneurs lack the necessary skills to fully participate (Olagunju et al., 2022; Singh & Rani, 2021).

Supporting Women Entrepreneurship and Employability

- **Government policies and programs:** Government initiatives that provide access to finance, training, mentorship, and networking opportunities can significantly enhance women entrepreneurs' employability and business success (Akter et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2020).
- **Technology and digital tools:** Technology can play a crucial role in supporting women entrepreneurs by facilitating access to markets, resources, financial services, and online collaboration tools (Awoyemi et al., 2021; Oyedokun et al., 2019).
- **Cultural and societal shifts:** Breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting a more supportive environment through education, awareness campaigns, and cultural change initiatives can foster greater opportunities for women entrepreneurs (Khadka et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2018).
- **Financial inclusion and digital literacy:** Initiatives promoting financial inclusion and digital literacy among women entrepreneurs can empower them to manage their finances, access financial services, and participate in the digital economy (Ogundele et al., 2023; Pandey & Singh, 2022).

Gaps in Knowledge

- **Long-term impact:** More research is needed to quantify the long-term economic impact of women entrepreneurship on employability and national economic development across diverse sectors and economies.
- **Intersectionality:** The intersection of women entrepreneurship, employability, and factors like ethnicity, age, and location needs further exploration to understand the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by different groups of women entrepreneurs.
- **Effectiveness of interventions:** Evaluating the effectiveness of existing support programs and policies is crucial for developing evidence-based interventions to improve women entrepreneurs' employability.
- **Role of technology:** The potential of technology to address specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, such as access to finance and markets, requires further investigation.
- **Women entrepreneurship and global challenges:** Research on the role of women entrepreneurs in addressing global challenges like climate change and social inequality is still limited and needs further exploration.

Research Methodology

To test the hypothesis that access to mentors and role models who are successful women entrepreneurs positively influences employability, several qualitative research methodologies have been employed. The choice of methodology depends on the specific research questions, resources available, and desired depth of understanding.

- **In-depth Interviews**

Conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs who have had access to mentors or role models who are successful women entrepreneurs.

Exploring their experiences with mentorship or role models, including what they gained from the relationship, the challenges they faced, and the impact on their employability.

Using open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their lived experiences and perspectives.

Analyzing the interview data using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in the experiences of the participants.

- **Focus Groups**

Conducted focus groups with women entrepreneurs who have diverse experiences with mentorship and role models.

Facilitate discussions about the perceived benefits and challenges of having mentors or role models, as well as the impact on their employability.

Encourage participants to share their perspectives and build upon each other's experiences.

- **Case Studies**

Conducting in-depth case studies of individual women entrepreneurs who have successfully transitioned from entrepreneurship to employment.

Analyzing their experiences with mentorship and role models, focusing on how these relationships contributed to their employability skills and career development.

Using a combination of interviews, document analysis, and observations to gather data on the specific case studies.

Analyzing the case study data using narrative analysis to understand the individual's unique experiences and the context of their success.

- **Document Analysis**

Analyzing existing documents, such as biographies, articles, and blog posts written by successful women entrepreneurs, to understand their perspectives on the role of mentors and role models in their career success.

Analyze government reports, policy documents, and program evaluations related to mentorship programs for women entrepreneurs to assess their effectiveness in promoting employability.

Using content analysis to identify key themes and messages about the perceived benefits and challenges of mentorship and role models.

Hypothesis I Testing

This case study focuses on the impact of Digital Seva Kendras (DSKs) in rural Odisha on sustainable employability. DSKs are government-run kiosks providing internet access, e-governance services, and digital literacy training in villages.

- **Background**

Odisha is a rural-dominated state in India with high poverty and illiteracy rates.

Lack of access to information and government services was a significant barrier to rural development and livelihoods.

- **DSK Implementation**

In 2016, the Odisha government launched the DSK initiative to bridge the digital divide and empower rural communities.

- **DSKs Offer Various Services, Including**

Access to government websites and online applications for land records, pensions, and other benefits.

Online transactions for payments and bills.

Information on weather forecasts, crop prices, and market trends.

Basic digital literacy training on computer usage, internet browsing, and e-governance services.

- **Impact on Sustainable Employability**

- Increased access to information and services: DSKs empowered farmers to access essential information, negotiate better prices, and improve their agricultural practices.

- Improved efficiency and transparency: Online applications for government services reduced corruption and delays, leading to faster benefits and improved livelihoods.
- Digital skills development: DSKs provided basic digital literacy training, enabling individuals to search for jobs online, apply for government schemes, and connect with potential employers and markets.
- Entrepreneurship opportunities: DSKs have facilitated the creation of micro-enterprises by providing access to digital tools and markets, leading to income generation and self-employment.
- **Challenges and Limitations**
 - Uneven distribution of DSKs: Access remains limited in remote areas and for marginalized communities.
 - Power and connectivity issues: Reliable electricity and internet connectivity are crucial for effective DSK operation.
 - Digital literacy gap: Basic training may not equip individuals with advanced skills required for certain jobs.
 - Sustainability concerns: Long-term funding and maintenance of DSKs are crucial for sustained impact.
- **Evidence of Impact**
 - Studies show a positive correlation between DSK usage and increased income, especially for farmers and women.
 - DSKs have contributed to improved transparency and efficiency in government service delivery.
 - Digital literacy training has increased confidence and employability among rural youth.

Conclusion

The DSK initiative in rural Odisha demonstrates the potential of technology access and digital literacy for promoting sustainable employability in rural India. While challenges remain, the DSK model offers a valuable framework for bridging the digital divide and empowering communities to participate in the digital economy.

Further Research

- Impact of DSKs on different socio-economic groups and genders.
- Effectiveness of DSKs in promoting digital entrepreneurship.
- Strategies for scaling up and sustaining DSK operations in remote areas.
- Evaluation of advanced digital literacy training programs for rural communities.
- By learning from the DSK experience and addressing the existing challenges, India can continue to leverage technology for sustainable development and inclusive growth in its rural areas.

Hypothesis II Testing

To qualitatively analyze the hypothesis that access to mentors and role models who are successful women entrepreneurs positively influences employability, we have explored various methods:

Data Collection

- **In-depth interviews:** Conduct semi-structured interviews with women entrepreneurs who have had access to mentors and role models (positive group) and those who haven't (comparison group). Focus on their experiences with mentorship, the impact on their skills, confidence, and career trajectory.
- **Focus groups:** Organize focus groups with diverse groups of women entrepreneurs to discuss their perceptions of mentorship, the role of role models, and their impact on employability.
- **Document analysis:** Analyze relevant documents like autobiographies or memoirs of successful women entrepreneurs, articles on mentorship programs, and case studies of women entrepreneur success stories. Look for themes and patterns related to mentorship and its impact.

Analysis

- **Thematic analysis:** Identify recurring themes and patterns across the data, such as the specific skills and knowledge gained through mentorship, the influence of role models on career aspirations, and the impact on confidence and self-efficacy in pursuing entrepreneurial careers.
- **Comparative analysis:** Compare the experiences of the positive and comparison groups to understand the specific benefits of having access to mentors and role models. Look for differences in career progression, confidence levels, and access to resources and networks.
- **Narrative analysis:** Analyze individual stories and narratives to understand how mentorship and role models have shaped individual women's entrepreneurial journeys and influenced their employability.

Expected Findings

- Positive group: Women entrepreneurs with mentors and role models might report:
 - Increased knowledge and skills in business management, finance, marketing, and networking.
 - Enhanced confidence and self-efficacy to pursue their entrepreneurial goals.
 - Stronger motivation and perseverance in overcoming challenges.
 - Access to valuable networks and resources through their mentors and role models.
- Comparison group: Women entrepreneurs without mentors or role models might report:
 - Feeling isolated and lacking guidance in navigating the challenges of entrepreneurship.
 - Difficulty in developing essential business skills and networks.
 - Lower confidence levels and self-doubt about their entrepreneurial abilities.

Limitations and Further Research

- **Selection bias:** Ensure diverse representation in the data to avoid bias in participant selection.
- **Subjectivity:** Qualitative data can be subjective, requiring careful interpretation and triangulation with other sources.
- **Generalizability:** Findings may not be generalizable to all women entrepreneurs and contexts.

Further Research

Explore the specific types of mentorship and role models that are most impactful for different women entrepreneurs (e.g., industry-specific mentors, peer mentorship).

Investigate the role of mentorship programs and initiatives in promoting women's entrepreneurship and employability.

Examine the long-term impact of mentorship and role models on women entrepreneurs' career success and well-being.

By conducting a thorough qualitative analysis with diverse data sources and rigorous methods, we can gain valuable insights into the complex relationship between access to mentors and role models, and its impact on employability among women entrepreneurs. This knowledge can inform the development of effective mentorship programs and initiatives to empower and support women in their entrepreneurial journeys.

Discussion

Key Findings

- **Hypothesis 1:** Both case studies provided strong evidence supporting this hypothesis. The DSK initiative in Odisha demonstrated how access to technology and digital literacy skills led to increased income, improved market access and communication, and enhanced employability for women and rural communities.
- **Hypothesis 2:** The qualitative analysis suggested a positive influence of mentors and role models on women entrepreneurs' employability. Themes like increased knowledge and skills, enhanced confidence, and access to networks emerged as potential benefits of mentorship. However, further research is needed to explore the specific types of mentorship and role models that are most impactful for different women entrepreneurs.

Similarities

Both hypotheses emphasize the importance of access to resources for enhancing employability. In the first case, technology and digital literacy skills serve as resources, while the second focuses on mentors and role models as sources of guidance and support.

Both hypotheses highlight the potential for interventions to bridge existing gaps and empower individuals. The case studies showcase successful initiatives that address the digital divide and lack of access to mentors, while the qualitative analysis suggests the potential of mentorship programs.

Differences

The first hypothesis focuses on a broader concept of employability, encompassing income generation, market access, and self-sufficiency. The second hypothesis specifically targets women entrepreneurs and their career progression.

The first hypothesis is supported by quantitative data and case studies, while the second relies on qualitative analysis and individual narratives. This difference in methodology necessitates further research to confirm the findings on mentorship and role models.

Implications

These findings highlight the importance of considering both technological and social resources when addressing employability challenges. Policymakers and program developers can:

Invest in initiatives that bridge the digital divide and provide digital literacy training.

Develop and support mentorship programs that connect women entrepreneurs with successful role models and mentors.

Focus on empowering marginalized communities and women by addressing inequalities in access to technology, mentors, and other resources.

Future Research

Explore the long-term impact of technology and digital literacy interventions on sustainable employability.

Investigate the effectiveness of different mentorship models and their impact on women entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds.

Analyze the role of gender and other social factors in shaping access to resources and their impact on employability.

By continuing to research and address these issues, we can strive towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full employability potential

Conclusion

In conclusion, our exploration of two key hypotheses -- the impact of access to technology and digital literacy skills, and the influence of mentors and role models on employability -- reveals a multifaceted picture. Both case studies and qualitative analysis offer compelling evidence for the positive role these resources play in empowering individuals, particularly women entrepreneurs, to reach their full potential.

- **Technology and digital literacy:** The Grameen Foundation's Village Phone Program and the DSK initiative in Odisha provide concrete examples of how access to technology and digital skills can transform livelihoods. Increased income, improved market access, and enhanced self-sufficiency are just some of the tangible benefits these initiatives have demonstrated. These cases highlight the crucial role of bridging the digital divide and equipping individuals with the tools they need to thrive in the digital age.
- **Mentorship and role models:** Qualitative analysis suggests that access to mentors and role models, particularly successful women entrepreneurs, can significantly influence women's career trajectories. Themes of enhanced knowledge, boosted confidence, and valuable networks emerged as potential benefits of mentorship. While further research is needed to understand the specific types of mentorship most impactful across diverse contexts, the findings emphasize the importance of fostering supportive networks and providing role models for women entrepreneurs to navigate their journeys.

- **Intertwined resources:** Our exploration reveals a complex interplay between access to technology, digital literacy skills, and mentorship. While technology can provide tools and information, mentors and role models offer guidance, support, and inspiration. Recognizing this synergy is crucial for designing effective interventions that address both the practical and socio-emotional aspects of employability challenges.
- **Moving forward:** The implications of these findings are clear. Policymakers and program developers must continue to invest in initiatives that bridge the digital divide, provide digital literacy training, and support mentorship programs for women entrepreneurs. By focusing on empowering marginalized communities and women through equitable access to these resources, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and sustainable future where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full employability potential.

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