

## **PERCEIVED BARRIERS AND SUCCESS FACTORS OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS ENROLLED IN AN ENTREPRENEURIAL PROGRAMME**

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### **—Abstract —**

The promotion of entrepreneurship and small business development as possible solutions to job creation is a high priority for the government of South Africa as it plays a vital role in economic prosperity. Specifically, the focus is on empowering women to become entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurship training is important during all levels of education, including at the tertiary level, but also to people who may not be enrolled in a university. The purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of topics pertaining to fourteen female entrepreneurs enrolled in an adult entrepreneurship programme presented by a South African University. The research methodology included a self-administered questionnaire developed by the authors and compiled from an extensive literature review. Analysis was done to identify the success factors deemed important by the respondents as well as perceived barriers to business success. The study revealed inadequate funding and finance and the inability to clarify business goals as the main barriers restricting the success of the business. In addition, customer care, quality of products or services and business skills were considered most favourable success factors. The results provide valuable insight into areas of concern as well as recommendations for further research and development in the field of female entrepreneurial growth and policy development.

**Key Words:** *Female entrepreneurship, success factors, barriers, training and education programmes, South Africa.*

**JEL Classification:** **I29, J16, M13**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of entrepreneurship has become increasingly important as it plays a vital role in economic prosperity (West, 2012:1; Kaushik, 2013:6; Toma *et al.*, 2014:437; Khosla, 2015:17). Entrepreneurship is considered imperative for solving challenges associated with unemployment, poverty and low economic growth, through creating new ventures and jobs, as well as growing existing businesses (Botha *et al.*, 2007:163; Johnson *et al.*, 2015:154).

Globally, females are showing more interest in entrepreneurship as a suitable profession. This leads to more female-owned businesses being established, resulting in a rapidly growing female entrepreneurial population (Brush & Cooper, 2012:1; Kaushik, 2013:6). According to Alecchi and Radović-Marković (2013:4) the promotion of female entrepreneurial activity is closely related to economic growth as such entrepreneurs are considered an integral aspect in the development of business networks that provide capital, know-how and encouragement (Schindehutte *et al.*, 2003:95). Moreover, it is indisputable that the entrepreneurial undertakings which female entrepreneurs carry out in their communities are making a distinct difference in their local economies with regard to innovation, employment and wealth creation (McClelland *et al.*, 2005:85; Brush & Cooper, 2012:1). Having said this, South Africa is still lagging behind when it comes to female entrepreneurial development, which is the exact reason for this research. The purpose of this study is therefore to provide an analysis of perceived success factors and barriers faced by female entrepreneurs enrolled in an adult entrepreneurship programme presented at a South African university.

### 1.1 A global perspective on entrepreneurship

The fact that entrepreneurship is a crucial mechanism for economic growth and development is indisputable (Ball, 2005:1; Acs *et al.*, 2008:219; Brush & Cooper, 2012:2; Balaraman *et al.*, 2014:2). According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2015/16 edition (Kelley *et al.*, 2016:7) two-thirds of adults residing in a factor- and efficiency-driven economy, such as South Africa, believe that entrepreneurship is a viable career choice.

Entrepreneurial businesses influence the enhancement of their stakeholders significantly by aiming to create solutions to several social problems, as well as introducing innovations that enable individuals to improve their quality of life. The on-going development of entrepreneurship is considered a key factor in the

enhancement of strategies developed, the central purpose of which is to permit economies to benefit from the potential which female entrepreneurs contribute to any given industry (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:11). McClelland *et al.*, (2005:85) indicated that on an international level, one in ten women is an entrepreneur and that one third of all businesses in developed countries were owned by female entrepreneurs. However, it is exceedingly important to support female entrepreneurs in order to encourage growth, in that although more women are engaging in entrepreneurial activity, this has not yet reached its full potential (Kamberidou, 2013:1). The stimulation and development of female entrepreneurship that leads to more female-owned enterprises are of particular importance in the context of transitioning countries (Aidis *et al.*, 2007:158). The increased female participation boasts a number of benefits in any particular economy, including the fact that female entrepreneurship reduces the gender inequality balance in the labour market, as such businesses tend to employ women more frequently. Female entrepreneurship can also act as a prominent anti-poverty instrument as it increases the income in a household and creates female role models for the younger generation. It also contributes to personal empowerment in patriarchal societies (Aidis *et al.*, 2007:158; Herrington & Kew, 2016:35). Globally, the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship is flourishing as countries continue to realise the importance of entrepreneurship for economic development and economic sustainability (Estrin & Mickiewicz, 2011:397; Kelley, *et al.*, 2015:6; Ahl *et al.*, 2016:370). The scale and growth of female entrepreneurship have attracted a prodigious amount of attention by academics, practitioners and policymakers due to the abovementioned reasons (Iakovleva *et al.*, 2013:315). The growth in female entrepreneurship Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rates has been substantial, recording a 7 percent increase since 2012, measured in the 61 economies participating in the GEM study (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:7). Despite this, South African women are still lagging behind when compared to other countries. Table 1 provides a representation of indicators with respect to these females in comparison to other African and BRICS countries (all factor and efficiency driven economies). All of the indicators in Table 1 are based solely on females.

**Table-1: Female entrepreneurial indicators comparison 2015**

	<b>Intention to start a business (%)</b>	<b>TEA Rates (%)</b>	<b>Established business ownership rate (%)</b>	<b>Business closure rate (%)</b>
<b>South Africa*</b>	10 (6)	7 (5)	3 (6)	4 (3)
<b>Ghana</b>	40 (3)	26 (1)	28 (1)	8 (5)
<b>Nigeria</b>	41(2)	7 (5)	19 (2)	6 (4)
<b>Botswana</b>	68 (1)	31 (2)	4 (5)	14 (6)
<b>India*</b>	9 (7)	5 (6)	2 (7)	2 (1)
<b>Russia*</b>	7 (8)	4 (7)	4 (5)	3 (2)
<b>China*</b>	19 (5)	15 (4)	10 (4)	2 (1)
<b>Brazil*</b>	21 (4)	18 (3)	14 (3)	3 (2)

\*BRICS Countries, Ranking in brackets

Source: (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:16, 18, 20, 22).

According to the GEM Report the intention to start a business can be defined as the members of the adult population (18 – 64 years), expressed as a percentage, who intend to start a new venture in the next three years (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:15). South Africa ranked 6<sup>th</sup> out of the eight countries in the comparison, with approximately a mere 10 percent of the adult population having entrepreneurial intentions. The TEA can be defined as the percentage of members of the adult population who are in the process of starting a new venture or have begun one in the past three years (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:17). In this category, South Africa is jointly ranked 5<sup>th</sup> with Nigeria. Generally, TEA rates for females are higher in factor-driven economies with overall low GDP per capita (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:17). The established business ownership rate can be defined as those businesses which have moved out of the early start-up stage into a more established form, typically older than three years (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:20). In this category, South Africa had the 6<sup>th</sup> poorest score in comparison with the other seven countries, with a mere 3 percent of female owned businesses moving into the established phase. This is very disturbing, and reasons need to be determined. If established business rates are higher than TEA rates, this affords an indication of business sustainability (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:21). The last category reports on business closure rates. Not all business closure relates to business failure (Kelley *et al.*, 2015:22). There are diverse reasons for closing down a business, such as lack of profit, lack of obtaining finance or by choice. Although South African female entrepreneurs record a low business closure rate (4%), they also have a very low established business rate (3%), TEA (7%), and intention rate (10%). This could indicate that

although the business closure rate is low, very few businesses actually become established or even started.

## 1.2. Female entrepreneurship in the South African context

In the South African context, the high unemployment rate, low economic growth, as well as low TEA rates are of concern (Von Broembsen *et al.*, 2005:36; Swanepoel *et al.*, 2010:58; Grant, 2013:86). According to Chimucheka (2014:403), these three aspects can be seen as major challenges and threats to the South African economy.

Data collected through the GEM Surveys (Tables 1 & 2) have indicated that South Africa demonstrates low levels of entrepreneurial activity as well as reporting one of the lowest established business ownership rates in comparison to the other countries who participated in this survey (Herrington & Kew, 2016:4). The 2015 figures has indicated that despite an increasing number of South African citizens who perceive that there are ample opportunities to start their own business in their area and that they have the essential skills, knowledge and experience to do so, is not reflected in the levels of entrepreneurial intention (Herrington & Kew, 2016:4).

**Table-2: South Africa Male / Female TEA rates from 2005 - 2016**

Year	SA's TEA Rate (%)	Male TEA (%)	Female TEA (%)
2005	5.1	5.8	4.5
2006	5.1	5.8	4.5
2008	7.8	9.6	5.9
2009	5.9	7.1	4.7
2010	8.9	9.6	8.1
2011	9.1	11.3	6.9
2012	7.3	8.9	5.7
2013	10.6	12.3	9.0
2014	7.0	7.7	6.3
2015	9.2	11.6	7

\* 2014 Figures (No available data for 2007).

Source: Source: Herrington *et al.*, 2010:48; Herrington & Kew, 2013:24; Herrington *et al.*, 2015:24; Herrington & Kew, 2016:35.

While Table 2 indicates that South Africa's overall TEA rate has steadily increased from 2005, it is still low compared to the Sub-Saharan average of 26 percent (Singer *et al.*, 2015:31). It further indicates that female TEA is

consistently lower than male TEA rates. The fact that the number of female entrepreneurs that engage in early-stage entrepreneurship has decreased from eight females for every ten males in 2014 to just six females for every ten males in 2015, is worrisome. Another matter of concern for the South African economy is the decline in the motivation for female entrepreneurs to start opportunity driven entrepreneurial activities rather than necessity driven entrepreneurial activity (Herrington & Kew, 2016:5). Reasons for this and the general decline in female entrepreneurs could be linked to the barriers which they face during and after starting a new business.

### **1.3 Success factors of and perceived barriers to female entrepreneurs**

From the literature it is apparent that entrepreneurial activity is highly beneficial in any given economy; however, when it comes to gender, disparity exists in terms of the extent to which male and female entrepreneurs decide to engage in such activity (Brush & Cooper, 2012:2). Huarng *et al.* (2012:488) have indicated that the level of education, occupational and sectoral experience (based on the level of skills and expertise of the entrepreneur with regard to their business), business expertise and managerial skills act as success factors for engaging in entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, personal and relationship competencies, such as communication and relationship building skills as well as business and management competencies, for instance budgeting and managing finances, planning and undertaking business operations, entrepreneurial competencies (innovation, risk taking, creativity, idea generation) and human relations competencies (hiring, staff development, leadership) also contribute as success factors for female entrepreneurship (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013:134). Other success factors were linked to the uniqueness and/or quality of the product or service offered, the market and effective strategies and marketing practices (Zapalska *et al.*, 2015:373). Rahmatullah and Zama (2014:73) agreed with this but, as success factors, added hard work and perseverance, the variety of products offered and people and marketing skills. According to Lekhanya and Mason (2014:340) certain business environment factors (competition and competitive prices, limited access to finance and lack of skills) sources of funding and infrastructure (the location and accessibility of the business) are extremely important for the success of entrepreneurial activity.

In terms of the perceived barriers that prevent females from starting businesses or which contribute to failure, the following are listed: regulatory barriers, cultural

and social barriers, fear of failure and a lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, financial and economic barriers that include insufficient access to risk capital and financing (Martins, 2004:23). In addition, the type of education, start-up logistics, lack of personal and family support as well as time constraints, corruption, and a lack of appropriate role models, poverty, religion, peer group influence, and political instability are also regarded as possible barriers (Hatala, 2005:60; Avnimelech *et al.*, Akhter & Sumi, 2014:7).

#### **1.4. The importance of female entrepreneurship education**

Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly important (Arokiasamy, 2011:520; Isaacs *et al.*, 2007:626). Chimucheka (2014:412) states that more individuals will be encouraged and motivated to participate in entrepreneurship if they receive assistance in acquiring the necessary entrepreneurial skills, concepts and knowledge that will ultimately support them in generating profits and earning income. This will have a direct impact on the number of new business start-up activities which could significantly affect the prosperity of local and national economies (Nicolaidis, 2011:1043). However, it remains the continuous responsibility of governments to realise the importance of entrepreneurship education and to assist key stakeholders, such as higher education institutions (HEI's) in developing entrepreneurship education opportunities. This in turn could improve the entrepreneurial skills and knowledge base amongst individuals who desire to engage in entrepreneurial activity, because this is indispensable for economic prosperity as previously stated (Isaacs *et al.*, 2007:625).

There is a need to localise entrepreneurship education and training. By doing this, the local environment and context are researched and analysed, in order to develop customised programmes for local entrepreneurs that will more effectively contribute to the improvement of entrepreneurial skills. This can be done by developing new knowledge and methodologies for entrepreneurship education where these are included as an integral part: for example, the addition of such programmes and methodologies as part of the assistance offered by local incubators. The development of both internal and external environments for improved entrepreneurial training offered by institutions is thus of great importance. If this can be achieved, the impact regarding enterprise development and job creation will be much more successful in the larger context (Isaacs *et al.*, 2007:626; Iacobucci & Micozzi, 2012:686).

From the literature review provided, it was concluded that in both developed and developing countries (such as South Africa) the entrepreneurial activity of female entrepreneurs is making an exceptional difference in communities and the economy (McClelland *et al.*, 2005:85). It is also clear that many studies have been conducted in determining the importance of entrepreneurship, as well as in identifying the success factors and perceived barriers of female entrepreneurs. However, it was also found that very little research has been conducted into the importance of entrepreneurship education, specifically in the South African context and especially as regards particular entrepreneurial training and education programmes. Furthermore, it was clear that female entrepreneurship, specifically, should be stimulated and promoted to contribute to economic growth in a country (McClelland *et al.*, 2005:85; Aidis *et al.*, 2007:158).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research purpose and design**

The purpose of this study was to provide an analysis of female entrepreneurs' perceived success factors and barriers. The specific focus was placed on a group enrolled in an adult entrepreneurship programme presented by a South African University. The research design followed a qualitative research approach. A positivist approach was adopted for the study as the role adopted by the researchers accorded priority to data collection and interpretation (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998:32). This approach ensures that the researcher remains objective towards the study and independent from the actual research (Collins, 2010:38). A descriptive research design is followed for the empirical portion of the study.

### **2.2 Study area and sample**

The participants of the programme predominantly stemmed from areas within the southern part of the Gauteng Province in South Africa. The sample comprised fourteen females enrolled in an adult entrepreneurship programme presented by a South African University; they had to be involved in some form of entrepreneurial activity to be accepted for the programme. Although the sample was small, Fleishman (2012:1) does indicate that small samples may be used but cannot then be generalised to the greater population. In the case of this study, the purpose was not to generalise the results, but rather to gain a deeper insight from the females

enrolled in this specific training programme concerning their perception of success factors and barriers.

### 2.3 Research instrument and procedure method

As the study followed an empirical approach, a questionnaire was designed after an in-depth study of the literature on the various topics under discussion. General demographic and business information, such as ethnic group, language, age, the legal form of the business (whether it was a close corporation, for instance) and size was included. Other aspects addressed the motivation for enrolling in the programme as well as perceived barriers and success factors. Responses were measured using a 6 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A hard copy of the questionnaire was provided to each female entrepreneur at the first class they attended. This was done to ensure that the contents of the programme did not affect their responses. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was ensured as no names were disclosed.

### 2.4 Data analysis

Data from the completed questionnaires were coded and captured. The captured data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS), Version 22.0 and reported on in a descriptive manner.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results obtained from the study. Table 3 represents a brief outline of the respondents' demographics.

**Table-3: Demographic information of sample**

Item	Category	N	%
Age	Between 20 and 30 years	3	21.4
	Between 31 and 40 years	6	42.9
	Between 41 and 50 years	2	14.3
	Between 51 and 60 years	3	21.4
Race	African	5	35.7
	White	9	64.3
Highest level of education	Grade 12	3	21.4
	Certificate	1	7.1
	Diploma	6	42.9
	Degree	2	14.3

Postgraduate degree	2	14.3
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The majority of the group were between the ages of 31 and 40 years. This is consistent with other writings indicating that the average age of female entrepreneurs is in the vicinity of 40 years (Go4Funding, 2016:1; Abundant Entrepreneur, 2016:1). Some reasons for this could be that many women first establish their personal life (getting married and having children) before starting a business, that they are unhappy in their current employment or that they want to fulfil a lifelong dream or challenge. The racial profile of the sample comprised White and African females. The results also indicated that the respondents in the sample are well-educated with eleven of the fourteen females having attained a qualification higher than Grade 12 (secondary school) while of these, four had obtained a bachelor's degree or postgraduate degree. Goldman Sachs (2016:1) noted that training and education are likely to positively contribute to business growth of female entrepreneurs; hence receiving some form of higher education before starting a business could possibly increase their ability to see opportunities and steer through competitive and shifting business situations (Kelly, Singer & Herrington, 2016:30). Table 4 provides a brief representation of the business information of the members of the sample.

**Table-4: Business information of sample**

Item	Category	N	%
Sector of business	Agriculture	2	14.3
	Manufacturing	1	7.1
	Education	2	14.3
	Services	3	21.4
	Other	6	42.8
Size of Business	Micro	12	85.8
	Small	1	7.1
	Medium	1	7.1
Duration business has been owned	Less than 1 year	3	21.4
	Between 1 and 3 years	4	28.6
	More than 3 years	3	21.4
	Missing Responses	4	28.6

The sample is well represented regarding types of sectors. Businesses are situated in the manufacturing, agriculture, education and service sectors. Other sectors included logistics, fast food, hospitality and tourism. Most of the respondents had

started their business just recently so they were still considered as a micro business (between 0 and 10 employees). However, one business had already employed between 10 and 49 employees (small) and another had employed more than 50 employees (medium). Three businesses are considered established as they are older than 3 years, whereas most of the businesses were still in their nascent stages (0-3 years). Since it was clear that these businesses are still in the early to late start-up phase, it makes sense that these women would want additional entrepreneurial training to enhance their business skills. Table 5 reports on 8 mutually exclusive items that were based on the respondents' perceived success factors and is presented in a descriptive manner.

**Table-5: Respondents' perceived success factors**

Item	Mean*	Median	Std. Dev.
Customer care during and after sales is important	5.6	6	1.3363
The quality of my product or service is important	5.5	6	1.3445
Level of my skills and expertise relating to my business is important	5.5	6	1.3445
Level of staff skills and expertise relating to my business is important	5.4	6	1.3927
Having competitive prices within the market is important	5.3	6	1.3828
Having sufficient cash flow is important	5.2	6	1.3634
Having sufficient capital is important for a successful business	5.0	5	1.3821
The location of my business is important	4.7	5	1.6838

\*Minimum 1 and maximum 6

All the factors were considered important as they were all scored above average. Of the success factors presented to the female entrepreneurs, the locality of their business was considered least important. This could be due to the fact that technology has made 'doing business' much easier; hence, locality for certain types of businesses is no longer that important (Satell, 2013:1). Customer care, during and after sales, was deemed most important. This is a typical female trait as women generally consider responsibility in response to the circumstances of others, fairness, caring and the intention to preserve relationships as very important (Bird & Brush, 2002). The quality of the product or service and level of skills and expertise was also very highly rated. The respondents regard skills and expertise as an important factor and, as hinted above, this could have been a reason for them deciding to enrol in the entrepreneurial training programme. Educational programmes could play an important role in increasing the level of

skills and entrepreneurial involvement (Botha, 2006:28). Factors relating to financial issues were rated above average, but were not considered the most important. Table 6 reports on 26 mutually exclusive items that were based on the respondents' perceived barriers to success and is likewise presented in a descriptive manner.

**Table-6: Respondents' perceived barriers to success**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean*</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Inability to clarify business goals	4.4	5.0	1.8649
Inadequate funding and finance	4.4	4.0	1.3986
Lack of/inadequate market research	4.3	4.5	1.4373
Lack of market experience	4.3	5.0	1.6375
Unwillingness to take risks	4.2	5.0	1.8051
Poor planning practices	4.2	5.0	2.0069
Lack of family support	4.1	4.0	1.9793
Inability to adapt to changes in the environment	4.1	4.5	1.9158
Corrupt business environment	4.1	5.0	2.0702
Unsupportive business environment	4.1	4.5	1.9556
Shortage of resources to run my business	4.1	4.0	1.3848
Shortage of resources needed to start my business	4.0	4.0	1.4142
Lack of leadership skills	4.0	4.0	1.8397
Lack of adequate entrepreneurship training	4.0	4.5	1.7541
Lack of adequate manpower	3.9	4.0	1.4392
Ineffective communication skills	3.9	4.0	1.9793
Lack of self-confidence	3.9	5.0	2.1788
Not enough entrepreneurial opportunities	3.9	4.0	1.7033
Aversion to risk	3.9	4.0	1.7478
Lack of risk management capability	3.8	4.0	1.9682
Not having a worthy business idea	3.8	5.0	2.2043
Fear of failure	3.8	3.5	1.8884
Too many competitors in the market	3.7	4.0	1.8576
Poor interpersonal relationships	3.6	4.0	2.1381
Too many rules and regulations to enter the market	3.6	4.0	1.9057
Unwillingness to leave my job	3.0	2.0	1.8811

\*Minimum 1 and maximum 6

From the results it may be noticed that the females scored 'unwillingness to leave my job' lowest (mean 3). Most of the respondents had already started their business so this could be a possible reason for the low score. The barriers which scored the highest means were 'inadequate funding and finance' and 'inability to

clarify business goals' (mean 4.4). Lack of finance or difficulty obtaining finance has been listed as a barrier to growth in many studies (Valla, 2001:3; Kelley *et al.*, 2015:22). Acquiring better financial skills could also assist with this issue (Meyer, *et al.* 2016:129). This barrier could also link up with the fact that females are generally more risk averse so that even if finance is readily available, they might consider other finance options (Carter *et al.*, 2006:1). The inability to clarify business goals might also be linked to the fact that many women lack self-confidence and thus they may deem themselves as unable to clarify business goals (Botha, *et al.*, 2007). Respondents also rated lack of market research and market experience highly (mean 4.3). This could also be due to most of their businesses being in their early start-up stage since market research and experience improves as the business and owner experience grows (Majocchi, *et al.* 2005:720).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to determine the perceived barriers and success factors as identified by females enrolled in an adult entrepreneurship programme presented by a South African University. South Africa demonstrates a very high unemployment rate, low economic growth and a worrying TEA rate in comparison with other African and BRICS economies (Von Broembsen *et al.*, 2005:36; Swanepoel *et al.*, 2010:58; Grant, 2013:86; Kelly *et al.*, 2016:4). Consequently, it was deemed that research into female entrepreneurship is necessary. Identifying potential factors contributing to these low TEA and established business ownership rates could aid in developing possible solutions to improve the status quo. The development of female entrepreneurial activity might act as an effective tool to assist in overcoming some of these challenges (Aidis *et al.*, 2007:158; Herrington & Kew, 2016:35). However, before the South African government and private sector can attempt to address these issues, it is important to determine which areas are of greatest concern, such as the success factors and perceived barriers restricting new and established business development. It is of the utmost importance that these matters are viewed as real challenges and threats for the South African economy, and that they be addressed accordingly (Chimucheka, 2014:403). The study concluded that customer care during and after sales was considered the most important success factor. In addition, respondents listed funding and goal setting as some of the barriers faced while managing a business. The results of this study are being used to assist the specific group of females enrolled in the programme with regard to the barriers they listed as most

daunting. The survey was conducted prior to the start of the programme and many of the barriers listed in the questionnaire, such as how to set goals and obtain finance, are addressed in the programme's outcomes. Therefore, the same questionnaire will be presented to the female entrepreneurs after completing the programme to determine whether they perceive the barriers as less of a challenge than before its commencement. Additional future research could repeat similar studies on other groups of females enrolled in entrepreneurial programmes and also increase the sample size in order to make the study more generalisable.

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