

Exploring Contributing Factors to Successful Women's Entrepreneurship in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

The study's primary objective was to explore those factors that contribute to the success of women's entrepreneurship in Nairobi County, Kenya. Empirical research was conducted among a sample of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County, Kenya. A qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured personal interviews. Interviews were conducted online and data analysis procedures followed Creswell and Poth's six steps of thematic analysis. The empirical and literature review revealed at least six factors that lead to success in women-owned businesses in Nairobi County. The factors include personal attributes, information management, support networks, human capital, effective time management and business-specific factors. Women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County succeed because of internal and external factors which should be upheld to support sustainability and foster the strategic gesture of current and future women entrepreneurs. The study responded to several research calls to explore the success of women entrepreneurs in Kenya. The findings offered some research-based recommendations for women entrepreneurs, decision-makers and policymakers in Kenya.

Keywords

Women, Women Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurship, Success, Success Factors

1. Introduction

Women entrepreneurs worldwide have contributed significantly to household income and employment creation (United Nations, 2019: p. 1; Bomani & Derera, 2020: p. 5). Recently, the number of female entrepreneurs and their contribution

to economic development has increased (Yacus, Esposito, & Yang, 2019; Olubiyi, Jubril, Sojinu, & Ngari, 2022: p. 169), while women's engagement in small businesses impacts economic growth in many African countries (Olubiyi et al., 2022: p. 169). For instance, a survey has revealed that Kenyan women operate in business initiatives that were previously male-controlled (Omwenga, Mukulu, & Kanuli, 2013: p. 312). It has also been reported that women entrepreneurs in Kenya are unique because they are breaking the glass-ceiling and demonstrate that they are capable of doing what men can do (Roseline, 2022). They have ventured industries such as: fashion, beauty, travel and tours and communication and internet (Rose-line, 2022).

Despite the substantial progress in women's entrepreneurship in Kenya, it is not without challenges. Njati, Kubaison and Makena (2014: p. 84) claim that women entrepreneurs face many challenges in trying to acquire loans, build networks and obtain information. The International Labour Organization (ILO) report (2008: p. 17) recorded earlier that knowledge and skills were inadequate in Kenya, and there was a lack of gender-sensitive policies and programmes. More recently, a lack of access to funding seems to be the biggest constraint facing female entrepreneurs, as only 7 per cent of women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Kenya estimated to have formal access to finance (Holmes & Maylie, 2024).

The present study sought to identify success factors in women's entrepreneurship in Nairobi County, Kenya. It thus contributes to the limited existing literature on factors that contribute to the success of women entrepreneurs in a developing African context. The present study also aimed to show that women entrepreneurs can experience success despite obstacles. Further, it potentially contributes to informing Nairobi County policymakers and financial institutions to close the inequality gap for women. Closing this gap is important, since favourable policies will allow women to utilise their unrealised and unused entrepreneurial potential by developing and employing their business capacities (Vadnjai & Vadnjai, 2013: p. 3730), which will potentially increase job creation and economic contribution.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: firstly, the research problem and research question are outlined, followed by a brief literature review of women entrepreneurs and the factors that contribute to their success; secondly, the research design and methods are outlined, followed by a discussion of key findings. Thirdly, strengths and limitations of the research are discussed, the conclusions drawn and the implications of the study are highlighted.

Research problem and question

Previous studies on the success of entrepreneurship in Kenya have mainly focused on male rather than female entrepreneurs. Examples include studies by Peter and Munyithya (2015), Marshall, Ockwell and Byrne (2017), Okello (2020) and Kamuri (2022). Accordingly, women's entrepreneurship, as an area of research, remains neglected (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2006: p. 25). While earlier studies were conducted on women entrepreneurs, the focus was mainly on their challenges and motivation. Examples of studies include those by Njagi and Onyango (2019),

Mwobobia (2016), Manwari, Ngare and Kipsang (2017), Vundi (2020), and Ndururi, Mukulu and Omwenga (2019). Other studies have also indicated how female talent is seriously unexploited and underexploited in entrepreneurship in both developing and developed nations (see, for instance, Ambepitiya, 2016: p. 162). This situation is changing as women entrepreneurs are seen as new partners in sustainable growth, stimulating the welfare and prosperity of emerging economies (Feng, Ahmad, & Zheng, 2023: p. 1).

Hassan and Mugambi (2013: p. 47) indicated earlier a dearth of research in exploring the development of women-owned enterprises in Nairobi County, Kenya. Studies outside Nairobi County include those of Nunda et al. (2016), Mwaniki (2018), Wambua (2023), and Muli (2016). However, no recent or substantial studies inquired into the factors contributing to the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County, Kenya.

The present study thus makes an important case, namely, the way society treats women entrepreneur's needs to change. Women in business will always face challenges, but it is important to recognise and reward those who succeed. The research thus contributed by proposing a possible framework or road map for female entrepreneurs and aspiring businesswomen, demonstrating that success is attainable despite obstacles.

Research question

The main question that guided the present inquiry was formulated as follows: What factors contribute to the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County, Kenya?

In responding to this question, the study considered the responses of a sample of successful woman entrepreneurs, identified as those who have operated for five years or more in women-owned businesses and have a minimum of five, but not more than 200, full-time employees.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars view women entrepreneurship as one of the most important emerging phenomena of the 21st century, as women work vigorously to create economic well-being and often have to maintain their families at the same time (Ahmetaj, Kruja, & Hysa, 2023: p. 1). An earlier survey by Koech and Namusonge (2015: p. 1810) has shown, for instance, that the number of women entrepreneurs had increased gradually worldwide by the middle of the previous decade with an accompanying success rate of 75 per cent.

Women entrepreneurs and success

Women are typically more concerned with community life and well-being, while success is generally associated with individual achievement. Compared to men, women are more committed to forging and maintaining relationships (Mia, 2022). Women may also contribute superior talent to a company's workforce and offer better remuneration packages to employees (Mia, 2022). Some women may thus enter business for altruistic reasons (De Bruin & Dupuis, 1999), and several authors have argued that formal or informal relationships or network formation

by women may reduce transaction costs and add to their entrepreneurial satisfaction (Reavley & Lituchy, 2008: p. 278).

2.1. Factors Contributing to Success in Women-Owned Businesses

Research in the USA has found that concern for staffing and planning and a willingness to seek professional advice positively correlate to business success (Robert & Sanja, 2001; Reavley & Lituchy, 2008: p. 276). Similarly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivational aspects related to entrepreneurial activities contribute to business success (Simpson, Tuck, & Bellamy, 2004: p. 484), while the type of enterprise reflects the personality traits and behaviour of entrepreneurs, with their commitment and vision being central to the success of a business (Simpson et al., 2004: p. 484). Kuratko and Hodgetts (1992) advocated much earlier that entrepreneurial characteristics contributing most to small business success are technical and mental ability, human relations skills, high achievement drive and creativity. The external operative environment also significantly impacts the success of entrepreneurial businesses (Simpson et al., 2004: p. 484). A discussion of four main success factors related to women's entrepreneurial success as reported by relevant literature follows next. These factors are: personal support of women entrepreneurs, the development of human capital, access to and the use of social capital and networking, and governmental support.

Personal support

Family and partner support seem essential in successful women's entrepreneurial achievement (Cheung et al. 2010: p. 184). The woman in business needs help from family and society to succeed (Sarker & Palit, 2014: p. 240). As was shown by Vadjal and Vadjal (2013: p. 3732), more women than men depend on the support of their family, friends and significant others in their lives to make business decisions. Necessary support may come from family, friends and hired help who play a significant role and could provide the social support that allows women to combine work and family (Cheung et al., 2010: p. 191).

Support from a husband /or partner

Emotionally, entrepreneurship is one of the loneliest and most challenging journeys; the entrepreneur deals alone with all the stress, uncertainties, and important decisions (Lewis, 2023). Many people around the entrepreneur will not believe in their dreams while, at the same time, the entrepreneur will invest time in planning, raising capital for their business, and pitching their idea to others (Chastain, 2020). Entrepreneurs worry that their efforts will not be supported or that people will not believe in them (Chastain, 2020). Scholars argue that, during times of doubt, married women entrepreneurs may need the emotional support and encouragement of a husband. Husbands may be more likely to provide practical assistance to their wives, as well as ideas and advice, emotional or financial support (Wolf & Frese, 2018: p. 19).

The support of partners seems essential as it affects the achievement of the other party's goals (Ahmetaj et al., 2023: p. 4). Furthermore, many men want to be more participatory in family matters, such as child-rearing and providing support to

their entrepreneur wives (Walker & Brown, 2004: p. 581), while successful women seem to rely more on supportive husbands or partners and extended families (Cheung et al., 2010: p. 186). With the support of husbands, partners or other supportive family members, women can work longer hours during the day, getting to know their customers' preferences and seeking new business opportunities (Manfre & Francisco, 2023).

Several cultural factors can bar women from self-employment, including perceptions of the role of women, expected family responsibilities, lack of confidence and inaccessible financial assistance (Imbaya, 2012: p. 504). To Ismail et al. (2017: p. 1227), spousal and other support is thus vital as it encourages women to gain confidence and satisfaction as an entrepreneur, especially during the start-up period. Studies indicate that female entrepreneurs are happy with the level of support from their spouses and some rate it as a critical reason for the business success (Vadnjal & Vadnjal, 2015: p. 8). When husbands or partners are more educated and have at least some own entrepreneurial experience, the likelihood of their effective support and encouragement to women increases (Vadnjal & Vadnjal, 2013: p. 3137).

A New Zealand survey reported that spousal support was more important to women entrepreneurs than men, with a more significant proportion of women cofounding firms with their spouses, and none starting a venture without the support of their spouse (Nikina, Shelton, & LeLoarne, 2015: p. 42). In Singapore, partners support their spouses in business because they hope profits from the company will contribute to the family budget, decreasing their responsibilities as sole breadwinners (Vadnjal & Vadnjal, 2013: p. 3733). In India, women regarded spousal support as the key to the success of their businesses (Das, 1999; Vadnjal & Vadnjal, 2013: p. 3733), and a study in New York revealed that women entrepreneurs thrived when husbands helped their wives through encouragement and sometimes helped with childcare (Nicholson, 2008). Other studies have shown that husbands seem to contribute more to business planning, budgeting, buying and technical support, such as employing staff (Nikina, Shelton, & LeLoarne, 2015: p. 26), while women may also want their spouses involved in their businesses for consent and financial support (Rajani & Sarada, 2008: p. 109).

Domestic workers

Apart from relying on supportive husbands and extended families, employing domestic workers is also prevalent in societies where domestic assistance is accessible (Cheung et al., 2010: p. 186). In most instances, women take the primary responsibility for household chores and employ domestic help where available (White & Arndt, 1991: p. 33). According to Imbaya (2012: p. 506), taking care of children and households traditionally fell into the ambit of the women's role. When women enter business, seeking help from others with this responsibility often becomes a necessity. Women entrepreneurs use resources such as relying more heavily on the family or employing someone for housework and childcare to compensate for their lack of time at home (Jørstad & Carter, 2016: p. 16079).

Women entrepreneurs need support—whether from her spouse, family or do-

mestic employee—which seems essential to overcome obstacles like a lack of resources, indecisiveness, a lack of confidence, and work-family imbalance. Such support can take many forms, including financial or operational assistance or emotional support. All these factors were reported to have a significant positive impact on women's entrepreneurial efforts.

Developing human capital

Human capital development pertains to an entrepreneur's own knowledge, skills and experience (Sequeira, Wang, & Peyrefitte, 2016: p. 50). Successful entrepreneurs learn continuously, thus embracing the idea of lifelong learning by gaining tacit knowledge, among others (Overall & Wise, 2016: p. 212). Moreover, the level of prior education significantly influences both male and female entrepreneurial capacity (White & Arndt, 1991: p. 30). Human capital development or education related to women entrepreneurs thus includes formal general and/or higher education, executive education, monetary literacy, learning from previous business experience, earlier entrepreneurial experience, and developing the ability to access networks. In broad terms, human capital development involves promoting human knowledge and social skills (Zhang, 2019: p. 8). It is thus worth noting that education is an essential path to success for most contemporary women leaders and entrepreneurs (Cheung et al., 2010: p. 188).

Achieving higher levels of human capital development allows individuals to identify potential business opportunities that others may have missed or dismissed (Sequeira et al., 2016: p. 50). According to Tian and Lin (2016: p. 4), human capital factors such as experience and previous employment seem essential in building networks to secure financing. Human capital development provides an essential competitive advantage for entrepreneurial organisations, and entrepreneurs who attain increased levels of formal and informal learning tend to perform better and more successfully compared to other entrepreneurs (Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Amos et al., 2018: p. 30).

Social capital and networking

Social capital refers to the ability of individuals to work collectively to achieve shared objectives in groups and organisations (Dastourian et al., 2017: p. 117). Such capital can be obtained through social relations, norms, values and interactions within a community or society (Zhang, 2003; Dastourian et al., 2017: p. 117) and may involve a set of material, foreign, economic, social and knowledge resources that can promote entrepreneurship objectives and overcome resource limitations (Schuster et al., 2010; Dastourian et al., 2017: p. 117). Mobilising social capital is a vital factor in developing strategies and creating an innovative culture, fostering innovation by inspiring trust, and reliance on values and leadership principles (Fabová & Janáková, 2015). Furthermore, social capital is essential to entrepreneurial success and has been significantly related to harnessing social capital resources (Overall & Wise, 2016: p. 213). For instance, the economic empowerment programme of Women and Girls Empowered (WAGE) employs a comprehensive strategy by providing specialised training, capacity building and networking opportunities to women entrepreneurs in over 15 countries, while work-

ing collaboratively with regional civil society organisations to advance women's rights (Stratta, 2022).

Studies show that female entrepreneurs benefit from resources, reputation and experience gained in the workplace or through personal networks, society and family (Hanson, 2009; Dastourian et al., 2017: p. 117). When businesses invest in social or professional networks, they often reap benefits, such as information, access to resources, knowledge and power (Overall & Wise, 2016: p. 213). Networking is thus critical to entrepreneurial success, because it enables entrepreneurs to gather information about potential markets, customers, suppliers and related business opportunities (Reavley, Lituchy, & McClelland, 2005: p. 62).

Government support

The approach of many governments to narrowing the gender gap in business plays a role in the success of women entrepreneurs. This entails introducing and implementing policies that support male and female entrepreneurs, including tax policies, financial tools, bankruptcy laws and one-stop resources to set up a business incubator (Anderson, 2018). In addition, accelerator programmes support working mothers, and a wide range of government and business approaches address the gender gap. Such initiatives can lead to the expansion and diversification of entrepreneurs (Anderson, 2018). For instance, Sequeira et al. (2016: p. 53) have shown that in Asian countries such as Japan and China, women's entrepreneurship is considered key to their countries' development. They, therefore, encourage the growth of women's entrepreneurship. Government intervention is thus counted among those crucial factors determining successful entrepreneurial activities by women (Verheul et al., 2006: p. 160).

To assist women entrepreneurs in Kenya, the government established the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) to benefit women over 18 years (Kenpro, 2019). This initiative aims to reduce the gender imbalance by providing women with financial support to raise their earnings and reduce the gap in estimated earned incomes between men and women. This initiative forms part of the Kenyan Government's Vision 2030 (Kenpro, 2019).

The WEF agency also offers a range of products and services to help empower women in society and improve their income. Tuinuke Loan, Local Purchase Order Financing (LPO Financing), Bid Bond Financing/Tender Security, Capacity Building, and Market Support and Linkages are examples (Kenpro, 2019). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020), women entrepreneurs can access training in various fields such as entrepreneurship, finance, literacy skills, marketing, production, and managerial skills to enable them to run their businesses appropriately. The training takes place through the UNDP's District Business Solutions Centres (DBSC).

Support from other institutions and the government is vital for the success of women entrepreneurs (Feng et al., 2023: p. 4). Women entrepreneurship development is thus part of ongoing national efforts to alleviate poverty in developing countries following the UN Millennium Development Goals (Nguyen et al., 2014; Sukmaningrum & Hendratmi, 2018: p. 105). The role of governments mainly

comprises assisting women entrepreneurs, dealing with policy initiatives, and strengthening entrepreneurship through various programmes and incentives, such as providing infrastructure and access to finance for women entrepreneurs (Sukmaningrum & Hendratmi, 2018: p. 107). In South Africa, for instance, assistance is offered to sustain women-owned SMMEs through government finance, teaching, donations, and advice-giving support services (Irene, 2016: p. 1).

The present study has employed these four factors—personal support, developing human capital, social capital and networking, and government support—as identified by relevant literature to further explore the success of women entrepreneurs. These factors also served as background in discussing the findings of the study. Further theoretical perspectives follow next, to provide a firm conceptual basis for the present study.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives

Three salient theories anchor the present study, namely relational theory, path-goal theory, and collaborative leadership theory. These well-known leadership theories were considered highly relevant in studying women's entrepreneurial success.

Relational theory accounts for practices of women engaging in entrepreneurship by relating to both subordinates and customers (Reavley et al., 2005: p. 62). Relational leadership theory links a leader's efficacy to their capacity to forge enduring bonds with members of their organisation. It also has to do with how employees collaborate to produce a positive impact in the workplace. Harnessing talent and strengthening the existing competencies of those involved in the business increases an organisation's productivity and chances of success. Stern (2008) reviewed studies of high-achieving women and concurred that such women tend to adopt a relational leadership style (Cheung et al., 2010: p. 184).

Collaborative theory, developed by Vygotsky in the early 1930s, emphasises that communication and social interaction promote productive learning (Egghe, 1991). Collaborative leadership fosters ownership of responsibility, where everyone takes ownership of their work and stops feeling that their work was forced upon them by others (Egghe, 1991). This happens through participating in decision-making and problem-solving processes.

Path goal theory was developed by House in the early 1970s (House, 1996). The path-goal theory of leadership asserts that a leader's demeanour, character attributes, and actions impact the output, drive, and contentment of their team. This directive approach necessitates that the leader provides clear instructions to followers, including deadlines, rules and regulations, regarding what to do and how to do it (Hoque & Islam, 2022: p. 229).

The theoretical exploration thus far relates directly to the position that business success revolves around leading and promoting in collaborative and participative ways. Such strategies relate strongly to effective communication, a team approach, sound organisational structures, good planning, collaboration, capacity building, and employee motivation. The leadership provided by successful business leaders may thus be more democratic, interactive, cooperative and relationship-focused

(Moore et al., 2011: p. 221). Such leadership enhances organisational goals by uniting people and making them feel respected and valued (Moore et al., 2011: p. 221). This is where leaders lead and motivate followers in ways beyond exchanges and rewards (Lowe, 2010: p. 125).

It thus seems that, apart from success factors reported in relevant literature, women entrepreneurs also need to take into account the important role of leadership as underpinned by several relevant leadership theories. How these issues were considered in the empirical part of the present study follows next.

3. Research Design and Methods

A qualitative survey design, employing in-depth personal interviews with twelve successful women entrepreneurs in businesses in Nairobi County, Kenya, was used in the present study. The verbalised, lived experiences of these participants were considered essential for exploring and understanding critical factors that may contribute to the success of women entrepreneurs within a defined context.

Data collection

In this study, the purposive sampling technique—also referred to as judgemental sampling—was applied. This made it possible for the researcher to locate participants who were able and willing to supply information related to experience or knowledge (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016: p. 2). Twelve participants from Nairobi County, who met the specific inclusion criteria, were included in the study. These participants included only women-owned business owners, women entrepreneurs between the ages of 25 and 65, women-owned Small, Micro, and Medium Enterprises (SMMEs) in Nairobi County, women-owned SMMEs that have been in operation for five years or longer, and women-owned businesses with minimum five full-time employees. The researcher used the Etikan et al. (2016: p. 2) approach to choose information-rich scenarios where the participants were available and eager to contribute in addition to their expertise and experience. According to Merriam (1998: p. 63), once interviews began, the researcher used the snow-balling sampling style to get additional participants by asking for information-rich referrals from the selected subjects. This style continued until saturation. Then, the researcher determined the sample size using saturation, as Oppong (2013: p. 2) argues. The sample size was determined by data saturation and not by statistical power analysis (Etikan et al., 2016: p. 4).

Personal interviews were conducted via Zoom Cloud meetings and video recorded with the researcher based in Gaborone and the twelve participants in Nairobi County, Kenya. A semi-structured interview schedule (Sandelowski, 2002) was used containing a set of prearranged questions based on the theoretical exploration of entrepreneurial success. Interview questions were checked for validity and trustworthiness by involving expert advice and two pilot interviews with women entrepreneurs (also see Connelly, 2008). Interview data were transcribed verbatim and participants' identity was protected by allocating pseudonyms.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to analyse the transcribed data generated by the interviews. The researcher read the text transcripts multiple times to form a general sense of the nature and meaning of the data. Transcripts were then coded by inspecting every line of transcriptions and assigning codes using Microsoft Word. A senior academic acted as co-coder, and the results were compared. Finally, some similar codes were compressed, and a codebook was created. Finally, assisted by an expert in qualitative analysis at the study university, transcripts were transferred to ATLAS.ti for further analysis towards themes and network diagrams.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the university where the present study was conducted and supervised. To obtain ethics clearance, the researcher applied to the University Research Ethics Committee. The necessary data collection interview tool and consent form were approved. An ethics clearance confirmation was consequently obtained before the set of interviews started.

Key findings

From the thematic data analysis processes as described, six salient factors emerged which were considered as key to the success of the participating women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County. These factors were personal attributes, information management, support network, human capital, effective time management, and business-specific factors.

The factors as identified resonated largely, but not completely, with the perspectives generated from relevant literature and theories explored. The identified factors are indicated in Figure 1 and discussed in the sections that follow.

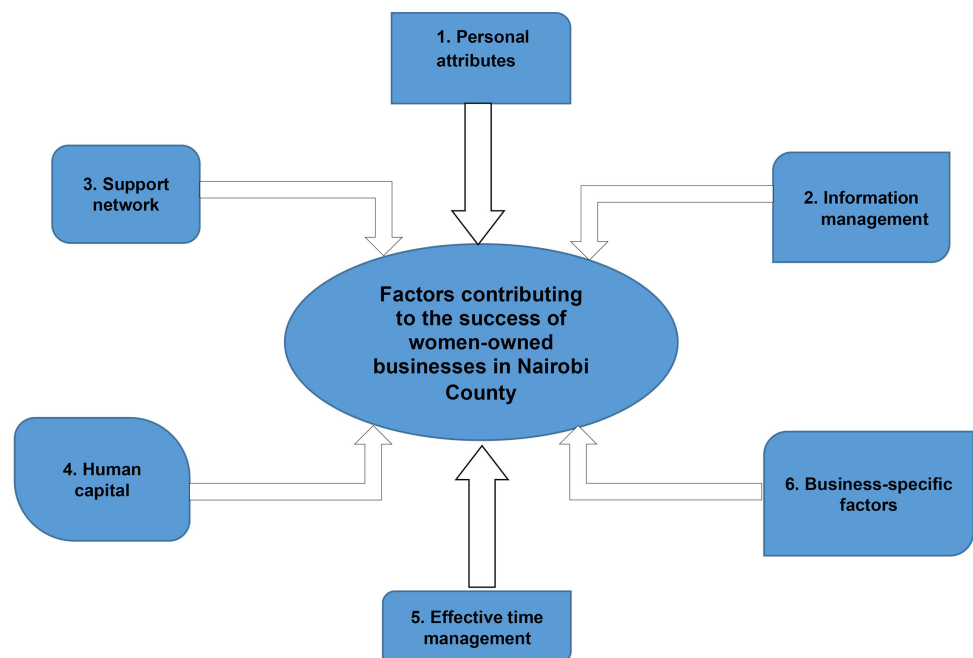


Figure 1. Factors contributing to the success of women-owned businesses in Nairobi County (Source: Derived from findings).

Factor 1: Personal attributes

From the study's findings, the personal attributes associated with women's success in Nairobi County were shown to include skills, knowledge, experience and specific personality traits. Skills such as multi-business skills and money management skills were emphasised, as illustrated by the following quotes.

Participant 02 said that to succeed in business, teamwork is required where various players play different roles. She put it like this:

"I learnt I cannot do business alone, it is impossible because many areas need different skills and abilities."

Participant 01 said, in particular, money management skills are essential, especially for future decision-making in the business. She had this to say:

"I think money management skills, being a former banker, I can plan, control, monitor, and keep records for the business, also have long experience in the financial sector. This helps us to know if we are making a profit or which area has more costs, and then we make a better decision for the future."

Regarding knowledge, the findings from interviews showed that business knowledge, engaging in continuous, lifelong learning, as well as participating in relevant training opportunities are seen as important for success.

For instance, Participant 02 indicated that she knows about business issues and can quickly identify and eliminate what is not working. She said:

"I think one can cut out anything that does not make money and identify what skill sets are needed to fill the job gaps."

Participant 05 spoke of lifelong learning, emphasising that no one knows everything and that we must learn from both successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurial players. She remarked:

"Also learning from others, especially those who are successful and unsuccessful. Those who are successful find out what they did or they do, and those who are unsuccessful, what it is they did not do, and this gets implemented in the business. So you learn from that because no one knows everything, so learning is lifelong."

Participants 09, 10 and 12 all spoke of the importance of acquiring new knowledge or refreshing knowledge. Participant 09 remarked, for instance, that her staff members are enrolled for refresher courses:

"They are taken for refresher courses often. Like when COVID-19 hit, all staff members were taken for training on how to handle learners during the pandemic."

Concerning experience, the study revealed that knowing what to do, consistency, self-belief, acting fast, having control, and delegating duties contributed to women entrepreneurs' success.

Participant 02 emphasised how she learnt about delegation as her business expanded so that she could focus on what she must do herself. She verbalised this as follows:

"But as the business expanded, I also learnt about delegation; therefore, today, I usually identify things I can delegate and things that I must do myself."

Findings also revealed that women entrepreneurs may succeed in business be-

cause they work hard, are spiritual, have patience, show commitment, are persistent and focused, have a vision, and act differently from men.

Factor 2: Information management

Findings also revealed that information management, which involves processes such as business evaluation, sharing or mining of information, monitoring, and keeping proper records, contributed to the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County.

Participant 01 confidently said how she conducts business evaluation, which helps identify if the business is profitable and then takes necessary steps as appropriate. She indicated:

“I can...monitor and keep records. It helps us to know if we are making a profit or which area has more costs, and then we make a better decision for the future.”

Participant 03 alluded to how her business has benefited from her mentor, who is in the same business line, because she shares essential information with her. She emphasised:

“The other mentor is a lady in the same line of business as me who is a go-getter and always willing to share information on where to get reliable suppliers, willing to discuss the business challenges.”

Factor 3: Support network

The survey also detected that social support from friends, family, and domestic workers enabled the Nairobi County women entrepreneurs to succeed in their businesses. Women enjoy support from friends. For instance, Participant 05 alluded to family and friends contributing enormously to her business success because she received help from them. She had this to say:

“The support from people around you, my family has been there for me, encouraging and motivating me to continue even when the going gets difficult.”

Participant 01 said passionately that she had received significant support from her family, especially her husband:

“The family support has been overwhelming, let me put my husband there, he has supported me a lot in the farm, shop, home anyway, everywhere.”

Participant 05 also praised her husband for the support he has given her as follows:

“Moral support from my role models, my husband.”

Participant 11 said she relied on her children to help with business activities, depending on what was needed. To quote:

“...My children help with different duties depending on what needs to be done.”

Participant 08 spoke of how she had to hire a child minder who takes care of the children when she is out pursuing business activities. She put it as follows:

I have a house helper at home to tend to the kids when I am out.

Business support networks involving government support, networking, business consultations, mentorship, assistance and guidelines, and role models were found as significant factors leading to the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County. Concerning assistance from the government, the participants had

the following to say:

“I have the women’s certificate from the Government. I think the women’s certificate will eventually help because I hear that women, the disabled, and the youth get priorities from the government services.” (Participant 08).

Participant 03 spoke of how she has numerous role models who have mentored her on business efficiency and financial management. She revealed:

“Role models? I have a few. Most are people we do business with, even bankers, who mentor us on how to do business efficiently and on financial management.”

Factor 4: Human capital

The findings have also shown that women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County succeeded due to effective Human Resources (HR) processes, job design, capacity building, remuneration, staff retention, employee engagement, managerial relationships, and effective communication. For instance, Participant 04 had this to say:

“I have put a lot of hard work trying to source finance, merchandise, good workers, and tried to keep proper records.”

Participant 09 spoke as follows about how staff diversity has been vital in her business success:

“The staff composition is diversified; we have young and old teachers qualified to handle children aged 3 - 15...and professional staff members.”

Participant 04 also referred to how her employees are motivated by monetary reward. She stated:

“My employees are also taken care of to motivate them; for example, they are paid on time every month and receive a bonus at the end of the year depending on the sales.”

Participant 10 spoke of how her employees are a good team that owns the organisation’s vision and has role clarity in the company. This aligns with relational leadership theory that argues that employees collaborate to produce a positive impact in the workplace (Reavley et al., 2005: p. 62). She mentioned:

“I also have a good team of workers who have owned the company vision and values, and we all work as a team with everyone knowing their roles.”

Participant 12 emphasised the importance of capacity building, which equips business stakeholders with business knowledge and a different business perspective. She noted:

“So capacity building where you attend different courses or join these other forums where you can renew your mind and look at things as a business owner.”

Participant 10 explained how crucial it is to plan for the business and share the plan with the team of workers. It leads to positive results. She said:

“And when there is a plan, you share it with your team and appoint team leaders, it will lead somewhere positive.”

Factor 5: Effective time management

The empirical findings revealed that effective time management led to the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County. Under effective time manage-

ment, it was found that having a balance between work and family, prioritising, having dedicated time for business and family, and proper planning of family activities, including meals, played an important role in the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County. The following quotes illustrate these sentiments.

Participant 07 spoke highly of managing her time well because her business activities start early and end early. She said:

“Okay, I manage quite well because my business starts at 6 am, and we close early by 3 pm.”

Participant 05 indicated that her business has survived because she has a good relationship with her workers so that the business continues to run when she attends to family affairs. She also emphasised that because employees own the business vision, it makes them responsible and accountable. She revealed:

“I have survived by having an excellent relationship with the workers so that when I want to be with the family, the workers remain in charge. For the business to do well, you have to make the workers own the vision so that they do the right thing even in your absence...you cannot do everything on your own.”

Participant 12 emphasised the importance of separating work and social time, as each has its objective, and the two cannot mix. In her words:

“...and also differentiate the two things: the social life that you have and the business because most of the time you want to hang on girlfriends and tell them about the business world and the family fun. So it does not work.”

Participant 12 discussed the necessity of setting priorities as a guide for what should be accomplished on a given day. She noted:

“...And prioritising so that by the end of the day, I know that this is what needs to be done on this specific day.”

Factor 6: Business-specific factors

Business-specific factors such as effective organisational structure, a conducive business environment, leadership style, team approach, use of technology, collaboration, funding, securing finance, positive customer relationships, longer business contracts, and a good customer base were found to contribute to women's success in Nairobi County.

Participant 10 said one factor that contributed to her success was setting goals for the business:

“...and aggressive in setting goals for my business.”

Participant 10 spoke emotionally of the importance of having a business plan that acts as the business's GPS or road map today. She mentioned:

“...first and foremost, it has to do with good planning; when you plan, it acts as a map to guide one - GPS for the business, and if one follows it faithfully, it will lead to a correct destination.”

Participant 12 alluded to how the branches of her business have a structure for accountability and responsibility. To quote:

“We have structures for each branch, and all personnel know their responsibilities.” (Participant 12)

Participant 01 said part of her business success has come from her business locality with high population density hence many customers. She put it as follows:

“I think the business environment also has played a part in my success, Kasarani is a highly populated area meaning we have many customers as long as the products and services are available when and how they want them buyers are there.”

Participant 07 associated her success with a good leadership style where she has efficient supervisors who lead the teams and is left with strategy and networking roles. This agrees with pathgoal-theory where directive approach necessitates that the leader provides clear instructions to followers, including deadlines, rules and regulations, regarding what to do and how to do it (Hoque & Islam, 2022: p. 229).

She had this to say:

“I have good supervisors at all the centres, so my biggest duty is to call and check if all is going on well and as planned. Then, I leave the supervisors to do what I trained them to do and am left to pursue the strategy and networking part.”

Participant 08 pointed to teamwork as a contributing factor to the success of her business. She argued that it comes with various skills:

“My team of experts comes with different skills which we put together, and we are sure to do an excellent job.”

Participant 03 spoke of how technology has made things easier in business today, and that one does not need to travel far for an order since sending an email is sufficient. To quote:

“Generally, technology has made things a bit easier not, like Zamani (in the past), where one could go to see a customer in Eldoret, but right now an email is enough to order, and the courier delivers, and payment is made via M-pesa (Mobile money).”

Participant 03 alluded to how quick payments of business money through M-pesa have contributed to her business success. She voiced:

“...And the payment is done via Mpesa (Mobile money).”

Participant 10 emphasised how smartphones and the internet have played a significant role in her business success, making communication between stakeholders through WhatsApp very fast and convenient. This is a line with collaborative leadership theory that emphasises that communication and social interaction promote productive learning (Egghe, 1991). To illustrate:

“For transport, we have formed groups on WhatsApp for all parents, and we use it as our communication platform, making communication easy and fast. Parents are free to raise concerns in that group, and we deal with them there and then. No wasting time, thank God for smartphones and the internet.”

Participant 11 felt that her business success came from her funding the business. She noted:

“The other factor is having capital; when starting the business, I had my savings.”

Participant 09 said her business loan came from a cooperative bank. She stated:

“I got a loan from the Cooperative Bank of Kenya.”

Participant 01 talked passionately of how they are focused, spend sleepless nights to meet the customers' expectations, and follow their plan as a strategy to succeed. She said:

"We spend sleepless nights working to meet the customers' expectations, being focused and having the direction where the business is going, the planning aspect."

4. Discussion of Key Findings

The present study identified several factors that contributed to the success of women's entrepreneurship in Nairobi County. It became clear that numerous skills and personal commitment are key to being or to becoming successful in entrepreneurship. This finding is supported by literature which highlights that managerial, creative and innovative skills, as well as strong personal commitment are needed to be a successful entrepreneur (Platania, Morando, & Vullo 2017: p. 90).

In particular, money management skills were found to be crucial in contributing to the success of entrepreneurship, aligned with findings of Abimbola and Kolawole (2017: p. 2), who suggest that financial management is one of several functional areas of leadership that is central to the success of business. As observed in the present study, continuous lifelong learning further contributes to business success. Successful entrepreneurs have to learn continuously, thus embracing the idea of lifelong learning by gaining tacit knowledge, among others (Overall & Wise, 2016: p. 212).

For successful women entrepreneurs, having a vision and goals leads to a successful business. This finding resonates strongly with research by Salamzadeh et al. (2014: p. 171) and Dornelas and Fischer (2007), found that being visionary is a typical entrepreneurial personality trait, where entrepreneurs have a clear vision of how that business will work in every detail as well as the results it will produce.

In the current study, information management was found to contribute to the success of women entrepreneurs. This concurs with Overall & Wise (2016: p. 209), who contend that prosperous businesspersons appear proactive with regard to education and gaining experience through their social networks, such as their close relationships with founders, investors and mentors to learn from both their successes and failures. The finding also aligns with Cheung et al. (2010: p. 188), who suggest that mentors provide crucial information on what is essential to successful women and avails them of networking opportunities.

The participating women entrepreneurs often referred to the value and strengths of family, friends and hired support to their business success. This factor was also pointed out earlier by Vадnjal and Vадnjal (2013: p. 3732), who argued that women depend more than men on the support of their family, friends and other important people in their lives to make business decisions. Research by Abbas et al. (2016: p. 122) similarly argues that many women entrepreneurs manage their businesses with support from family and friends, both at the start-up and expan-

sion stages. Cheung et al. (2010: p. 191) also confirmed earlier that needed support should come from family, friends and well-wishers, who play a significant role enabling women to combine work and family.

It became evident from the empirical findings that participants strongly associate business success with human capital, especially in having motivated employees who co-own the vision of the organisation. This finding corresponds with Rosada, Ganesan and Kuppusamy (2010: p. 3), who have argued that transformational leaders should use authority and power to inspire and motivate their staff to trust and follow them. Such leaders instill a sense of belonging in their followers. The same study also found that capacity building contributed to better performance hence business success—also supported by Yusuf and Metiboba (2012: p. 2) — who said that in human capital theory, education or training increases worker productivity by imparting important information and skills, increasing future and lifetime earnings.

Further, the present study's findings revealed that women entrepreneurs succeed due to effective time management where they can achieve work-life balance. Relevant literature supports this finding by highlighting that women should continue to balance their work-life and domestic duties (Kamberidou, 2020: p. 3). According to Gorgievski et al. (2011: p. 209), a good balance between work and private life can be defined as a positive mutual influence between work and personal life, allowing time for oneself, family, and friends. Women have reportedly successfully balanced work and family, especially around the ability to control the timing of work hours (Gimenez-Nadal et al., 2015; Kirkwood, 2016: p. 599).

As could be derived from the findings, successful women entrepreneurs are exercising good planning for their businesses that acts as a guiding map. Foucrier and Wiek (2019) also found that entrepreneurs map out business concepts at the planning phase and ultimately develop comprehensive business plans directed by the defined triple-bottom-line technique. During the start-up phase, entrepreneurs actualise the knowledge base set over the planning phase focusing on executing the business plan (Foucrier & Wiek, 2019: p. 7).

Adopting effective leadership styles was well indicated by the participating women entrepreneurs, and contributed to their business success. This finding concurs with those of Rauch & Frese (2007), Lam et al. (2015) and Kibanja et al. (2016: p. 16), who all argue that effective business leadership requires active players, good communicators, excellent negotiators and network builders.

The present study's findings revealed that funding for the participating women's businesses came from personal savings, money from friends and relatives, and bank loans. This resonates strongly with earlier findings by Constantinidis, Cornet and Asandei (2006: p. 134), who highlighted that most women finance their businesses with personal savings, credit cards or loans from family and friends rather than obtaining a commercial bank loan.

Lastly, meeting customer expectations was found to be a contributing success factor in the participating women's businesses. Gorgievski et al. (2011: p. 209)

concurred earlier that satisfied stakeholders can refer to happy and engaged employees and satisfied customers. In addition, businesses with superior customer service gain a good reputation and more business through referrals and repeat customers.

5. Study Strengths and Limitations

5.1. Strengths

By using a qualitative approach, the study provided rich information about factors that contributed to the success of women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County, Kenya. Such factors may also become a guideline for future women entrepreneurs, not only in Kenya, but also in other developing economic contexts through publication.

5.2. Limitations

The study focused specifically on women entrepreneurs in Nairobi County in Kenya, thus similar studies conducted in other counties in Kenya or outside Kenya may lead to different results. However, the factors that were identified resonate strongly with findings elsewhere, meaning that some generic value exists.

The use of non-probability purposive sampling techniques, which strictly followed inclusion criteria could have resulted in the underrepresentation of research population.

The use of Zoom Cloud interviews suffered from internet interruptions during some of the interview sessions, which caused the researcher and participants frustration and anxiety. Such interruptions might have affected the flow of interview, and thus resulted in some questions rendering less complete answers.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of the present study was to identify factors that contribute to successful women entrepreneurship in Nairobi County, Kenya. The participants of the study were twelve women entrepreneurs based in Nairobi County. The study's findings identified six success factors: personal attributes, information management, support networks, human capital, effective time management and business-specific factors. These identified success factors can be considered as guidelines for business success for current or future women in entrepreneurial business activities. These guidelines may ultimately lead to the development of frameworks for the purpose of empowering women in entrepreneurial business activities

7. Recommendations

The present study offers recommendations that may assist sustainability and foster the strategic gesture of current and future women entrepreneurs. These recommendations are as follows: 1) Women entrepreneurs must develop entrepreneurial competencies that enhance business success; 2) Women entrepreneurs should enhance their own human capital development by adopting the culture of

lifelong learning, developing a vision for their businesses and provide strategic leadership; 3) Women entrepreneurs should develop sound business management practices, involve themselves in research related to their businesses, and exert an effort to enhance social capital through networking and mentorship to seek financial assistance from women groups, relevant organisations or banks; and 4) Women entrepreneurs should explore and utilise governmental support, urging financial policymakers to re-evaluate their policies and alter their lending models as far as women entrepreneurs are concerned.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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