

# Entrepreneurial Coaching for the Development of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy in Women Entrepreneurs

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study explored entrepreneurial coaching to develop women entrepreneurs by enhancing their entrepreneurial self-efficacy. It sought to understand how entrepreneurial self-efficacy in women entrepreneurs can be developed through entrepreneurial coaching.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This study's methodology was a descriptive literature review.

**Findings:** The findings showed that entrepreneurial coaching is a development intervention that can be used to enhance the entrepreneurial self-efficacy beliefs of women entrepreneurs, thereby increasing their chances of engaging in successful business creation and operation.

**Research limitations/implications:** Entrepreneurial coaching for women entrepreneurs as a research field is still in its developmental stage, as such, there are limited sources of literature.

**Practical implications:** The study contributes to the overall discourse on entrepreneurial coaching as a supportive intervention in enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy for women entrepreneurs.

**Originality/value:** The combination of entrepreneurial coaching, entrepreneurial self-efficacy and the development of women entrepreneurs is still emerging.

**Paper type:** Conceptual paper

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial coaching, Women Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, Entrepreneurship Development.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Today's working world has an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurship. By fostering innovation, producing new jobs, and boosting productivity, entrepreneurs play a critical role in the development and expansion of the economy in South Africa. This highlights the significance of entrepreneurs for the country's labour markets and economy (Zizile & Tendai, 2018). Rudhumbu, Du Plessis and Maphosa (2020) note, that the concept of entrepreneurship extends beyond the act of starting a business to include the processes of opportunity identification and exploitation as well as an entrepreneur's personal growth (Suchitra & Pai, 2022). To continue achieving this personal growth, South African governments have over the years prioritized the growth of those deemed to have previously been disadvantaged, particularly women entrepreneurs (Ajuna, Ntale & Ngui, 2018). Since these women are considered latecomers to the "game" of entrepreneurship, it is assumed that they lack the necessary skills and abilities to establish and develop a business (Zizile & Tendai, 2018).

It takes a lot of effort to become and grow as a woman entrepreneur. Women entrepreneurs, for instance, have to put up with longer workdays, extreme time constraints, and a great deal of complexity and uncertainty compared to professional working-class women (Stephan, 2018; Hunt, Samman, Tapfuma & Mwaura, 2019). As

a result of obtaining less social support at work, they are more stressed out (Cardon & Patel, 2015; Kotte et al., 2020). Additionally, women entrepreneurs typically play numerous jobs at once, acting as both a shareholder and an internal employee of the company (for instance, as managing director), thereby, gaining a more significant stake in their business (St-Jean, 2011). Even though some of the demands of their jobs, such as having high levels of responsibility, are similar to those of executives (Berman, 2019), women entrepreneurs are more emotionally and financially entwined with their businesses (Kotte et al., 2020). Literature indicates that when operating their business, women entrepreneurs face many challenges, such as gender discrimination, a lack of training, a lack of capital, facing marginalisation in business, at home, and in their communities (Shmailan, 2016; Maziriri, Tafadzwa & Nzewi 2019; Mahasha, 2016; Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). As a result, due to cultural and societal perceptions, women entrepreneurs are discouraged from taking chances and obtaining knowledge, which prevents them from taking advantage of prospective business possibilities (Mahasha, 2016; Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). However, as a means of challenging social and cultural norms, many women use entrepreneurship to support their families (Nxopo, 2014).

The latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Women's Entrepreneurship Report revealed that women's start-up rates decreased by 15% from 2019 to 2020 and remained unchanged in 2021 (GEM, 2022). Women had significant decreases in 2020 than males in both their intentions to launch a business within the next three years and overall start-up rates, although not in upper-middle-income countries (GEM, 2022). Furthermore, the 2020 FinScope Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Survey of South Africa revealed that there are approximately 2.6 million entrepreneurs in South Africa, 46% of whom are women, who are responsible for 3.2 million SMMEs (Finmark Trust, 2020). For the year 2022, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) indicated that women entrepreneurs are 21,7 per cent and male entrepreneurs 28,0 per cent (STATSSA, 2022).

There is no doubt that women entrepreneurs engage in business activities in the above stats. However, given the high job demands of women entrepreneurs, there is a great understanding that women entrepreneurs may benefit greatly from external support when establishing and operating a business (Kutzhanova, Lyons & Lichtenstein, 2009). Entrepreneurial Coaching (EC), a recent addition to entrepreneurial development that promotes business development, is a strategy that can help as external support for women entrepreneurs (Behrendt & Greif, 2022).

Entrepreneurial coaching is a comprehensive form of entrepreneurial support that contains advice, training and learning (Wu, 2016; Devine, Houssemand & Meyers 2013, Schermuly et al., 2021). There is no main universal definition of entrepreneurial coaching among previous scholars. Several empirical studies cite Audet and Coueret's (2012) definition of EC, which they define as individual coaching support given by a coach to entrepreneurs in early start-up stages to help them acquire and develop the skills and knowledge necessary to establish themselves as independent entrepreneurs (Ben Salem & Lakhali, 2018; Mansoori, Karlsson & Lundqvist, 2019; Saadaoui & Affess, 2015). According to its description and considering its effectiveness, entrepreneurial coaching appears to be a particularly suitable and promising way of helping women entrepreneurs (Jones, Woods & Guillaume, 2016; Kotte, 2019). Bozer & Jones, (2018) describe entrepreneurial coaching as a development strategy that uses a collaborative, reflective, and goal-focused interaction to help women entrepreneurs to achieve entrepreneurial goals. As per its description and given the evidence of its effectiveness, entrepreneurship is a suitable and favourable approach to supporting women entrepreneurs (Jones et al., 2016; Kotte, 2019; Crompton & Smyrnios, 2011). These definitions assert that entrepreneurial coaching is a multifaceted notion, emphasising the existence of a wide range of coaching practices, such as psychological coaching, business coaching, sports coaching, and entrepreneurial coaching (Ben Salem & Lakhali, 2018; Schermuly et al., 2021). The primary support intervention for women entrepreneurs in this study will be entrepreneurial coaching (EC). The study adopts a definition of EC as a supportive intervention that empowers women entrepreneurs in their personal and professional lives to foster growth on a skill level, improving performance and psychological development.

Women entrepreneurs are more adaptable to change and innovation within their businesses, which may be crucial for the expansion and longevity of the enterprise (Saadaoui & Affess, 2015; Vidal-Salazar, Ferrón-Vilchez & Córdón-Pozo, 2012; Wakkee, Elfring & Monaghan, 2010). To have a positive, significant, and long-lasting impact on women entrepreneurs and their businesses, entrepreneurial coaching puts planning and preparation into action, clarifies expectations and responsibilities, and offers support (Centre for Coaching, 2015; Crompton & Smyrnios, 2011). The literature also demonstrates that entrepreneurial coaching has a significant impact on critical components of women entrepreneurs' personal and professional lives, including self-efficacy, performance, growth, and skill development.

Women entrepreneurs are described as individuals or a group of individuals who start, plan, and run a business (Modiyani, 2022). Another definition of a woman entrepreneur is someone who controls and owns a business in which women hold at least 51% of the capital and at least 51% of the jobs created by the business (Arvind & Ranjith, 2023). Even though women entrepreneurs frequently face significant challenges in starting and managing their businesses, they play an important role in the development of the global economy (Brush et al., 2017; De Vita, Mari & Poggesi, 2014). In limited circumstances where women have fewer rights and resources

than men, these difficulties are made worse (Chamlou, Klapper & Muzi, 2008). Markets operating from positions of unfairness regarding legal rights, trade restrictions, or capital accessibility are referred to as constrained environments (Moulick, Pidduck & Busenitz, 2019). For instance, women entrepreneurs in developing nations may have more societal and legal constraints and have less access to resources than their male counterparts (Chamlou et al., 2008; Simarasl et al., 2022; Soleimani & Kiaee, 2020). In addition, women entrepreneurs still have concerns and difficulties in running their businesses because of family obligations, societal pressure, a lack of self-confidence, and low self-efficacy (Arvind & Ranjith, 2023).

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE), is founded on social cognitive theory, and it refers to individuals' beliefs concerning their skills and abilities in running a new venture (Boudreaux, Nikolaev & Klein, 2019; Forbes, 2005), and meta-analytic evidence links ESE positively to new venture performance (Miao, Qian & Ma, 2017). Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy is prominent among the numerous potential characteristics that could lead to women entrepreneurs' success and has emerged as a crucial component affecting the results of new ventures (Miao et al., 2017). Boudreaux, Nikolaev and Klein (2019), note that ESE, which is influenced by social cognitive theory, relates to people's perceptions of their capacities for managing a new business. Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy may be improved with entrepreneurial coaching intervention (Newman et al., 2019), ensuring enhancement of the performance of new ventures for excluded populations, such as women entrepreneurs operating in limited circumstances (McGee & Peterson, 2009). Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy (ESE) has emerged as a critical factor impacting new venture-related outcomes (Miao et al., 2017; Saadaoui & Affess, 2015; Ngetich, 2020).

To explain how ESE is developing and affecting women entrepreneurs, two common arguments have been made. First, it is believed that early developmental phases in women, such as socialisation and personality formation during childhood, contribute to ESE (Mueller & Dato-On, 2008; Luthans & Ibrayeva, 2006). Even though there is no reasonable ground to question the credibility of these findings, they are less useful in influencing the success of women entrepreneurs because they are specific to family systems and historical experiences. Second, there is a growing body of research connecting entrepreneurial coaching elements to ESE, particularly in environments with fewer restrictions (Kazumi & Kawai, 2017).

There is a need for a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of entrepreneurial coaching as a means of fostering ESE among women entrepreneurs (Saadaoui & Affess, 2015; Hunt, Field & Woolnough, 2019; Pekkan, 2018). Despite efforts to promote gender equality and inclusivity in entrepreneurship, South African women entrepreneurs continue to face numerous challenges, including limited access to resources, societal stereotypes, and gender-based barriers (Shmailan, 2016; Maziriri et al., 2019; Mahasha, 2016; Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). While ESE has been identified as an important predictor of entrepreneurial success, the extent to which coaching interventions can empower women entrepreneurs and improve their self-efficacy in the South African context is unknown (Yusuff, Mohamad & Wahab, 2019; Simarasl et al., 2022).

The study's objective is:

*To review and synthesize existing literature on entrepreneurial coaching and its effects on entrepreneurial self-efficacy among women entrepreneurs.*

This research will help to inform support strategies and policies aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship in the country. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge in the areas of EC and ESE in women entrepreneurs. The study's findings will have important implications for policy, program design, and coaching techniques, assisting in the creation of a supportive environment in South Africa for the success of women entrepreneurs.

## II. METHODS

To identify any possibly observable patterns emphasising how entrepreneurial coaching increases women entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, this study aims to synthesize the literature (Kotte et al., 2020; Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2019; McGee et al., 2009; Modiyani, 2022; Kazumi & Kawai, 2017). As a result, a non-empirical investigation was conducted based on an extensive descriptive literature review. This is a methodical approach to finding, gathering, and analysing literature regarding a specific topic to better identify any trends that could be interpreted about the phenomenon (Kazumi & Kawai, 2017). The strength of this strategy is that the author may carefully select publications that communicate different points of view from a body of literature (Iwu, Sibanda & Makwara, 2022). To carefully find, evaluate, and analyze relevant studies on entrepreneurial coaching and entrepreneurial self-efficacy, particularly in the context of women's entrepreneurship, the author employed the descriptive literature review technique for this study. No publication has been excluded from this work based on the date of publication (Ebewo, Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo & Myburgh, 2023). Different works were accepted reasonably, particularly when they directly addressed the idea of entrepreneurial coaching, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, and women entrepreneurs. In addition to finding the

materials (publications) for this study, a variety of academic databases were searched, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and several respectable journals. There were 102 publications in the first collection. Based on the primary exclusion criteria, which was that they were not focused on the definition or conceptualisation of entrepreneurial coaching, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, or women's entrepreneurship, 21 publications were eliminated from this group.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Literature mentions that entrepreneurial coaching is a multifaceted notion that can perform a variety of support roles, including psychological, cognitive, emotional, and professional ones (Kotte et al., 2020; Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Huflejt-Kukasik & Jędrzekczyk, 2022). As a result, it can offer a comprehensive type of entrepreneurial support (Ben Salem & Lakhali, 2018; Ye et al., 2016). Furthermore, it has the opportunity to offer women entrepreneurs a means of ongoing learning, development and support, but for it to be used effectively, it is critical to look at the needs and preferences of women entrepreneurs (Hunt et al., 2019). The extent to which this type of development may help women entrepreneurs become more self-confident in their abilities as entrepreneurs and the significance of its prospective applicability (McGee et al., 2009).

The definitions of entrepreneurial coaching, used in this study intended to address two key areas specifically aimed at increasing ESE: first, improving performance at a skill level and entrepreneurial activity; and second, creating relationships that allow entrepreneurial coaching to develop the women entrepreneurs' psychological development (Hunt et al., 2019). Studies on coaching in entrepreneurial contexts have found that it can be very beneficial or the growth of women entrepreneurs, but little is known about how entrepreneurial self-efficacy impacts the performance of businesses once they have been established and operating (Audet & Couteret, 2012; McGee et al., 2009; Orser, Riding & Stanley, 2012; Tillmar, 2007). Because EC can be customized to the unique needs of a woman entrepreneur, it is the best form of individual development because it is task-specific and focuses on the ESE of the women entrepreneur (O'Connor & Lages, 2004).

Earlier research, Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy process is the most suitable theoretical framework for the entrepreneurial coach to use when removing obstacles to entrepreneurial intention, activity, and growth. It without a doubt contributes to the development and expansion of new businesses (St-Jean & Audet, 2012), and both start-up and established business owners typically lack the resources and support (such as networks and advice) necessary to create and grow a successful enterprise (Shinnar et al., 2018). Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy, as mentioned before, is the term used to describe people's beliefs in their abilities to start and operate an enterprise (Boudreaux et al., 2019; Forbes, 2005). Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy is unique to the entrepreneurship area as opposed to general self-efficacy, which represents people's generalized ideas about their capacities (Boudreaux et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has been a central topic in entrepreneurship research because of its impact on critical outcomes, such as entrepreneurial intentions (Laguna, 2013; Piperopoulos & Dimov, 2015; Tsai, Chang & Peng, 2016), entry into entrepreneurship (Cassar & Friedman, 2009; Wennberg et al., 2013), and venture performance (Hmieleski & Baron, 2008; Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Prajapati & Biswas, 2011).

As a result, it is recommended that emerging and new business owners prioritise getting EC to give them the support they need (Alstrup, 2000; Hunt et al., 2019). Below is how EC can be used to enhance the ESE of women entrepreneurs.

**Tailored coaching programs:** Create entrepreneurial coaching plans that are particularly suited to the needs and challenges that women entrepreneurs encounter (Quak, Barenboim & Guimaraes, 2022). Both the development of confidence and business-related abilities should be covered in these programs. This can assist women entrepreneurs in overcoming self-doubt and fostering a positive perspective on difficulties (Kazumi & Kawai, 2017).

**Coaching and role models:** Connecting women entrepreneurs with successful women mentors and role models is a key component of development (Theaker, 2023). This can offer motivation, guidance, and a feeling of empowerment can be again through coaching and modeling (Dow, 2014; Whitlock, Hampton & Campbell 2023). Numerous studies have found that coaching can encourage collaborative learning environments where women entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurs can exchange best practices and gain knowledge from one another's experiences (Joo, Yu & Atwater 2018; Helms, Arfken & Bellar 2016; Dow, 2014; McDonald & Westphal, 2013; Dworkin, Maurer & Schipari, 2012).

**Access to resources and skills:** Ensure simple access to tools like capital, market analysis, and technology, women entrepreneurs' success and confidence may be hindered by the lack of resources and skills (Grimm & Paffhausen, 2015). Providing courses on investing and financial literacy, for example, women business owners'

confidence in managing their company's finances can be increased by providing them with financial education (Quak, et al., 2022; Kotte et al., 2020).

**Entrepreneurial mindset:** Women entrepreneurs must be conscious of their own physical and emotional reactions in diverse circumstances to recognise them and comprehend how they affect entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Pekkan, 2018; Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018). To enhance entrepreneurial intent and behaviour, entrepreneurial coaching can assist women entrepreneurs in thinking critically about their behaviour and how that influences their entrepreneurial self-efficacy and success as an entrepreneur (Mauer, Neerguard & Linstad, 2017; Hunt et al., 2019).

The results of this study demonstrated the reviewed and synthesized existing literature EC and its effects on ESE among women entrepreneurs. As a result, it appears that EC is a type of development intervention that can be used to improve women entrepreneurs' ESE of their ability to start and run successful businesses. It is in this regard that the study provides valuable insights to inform support strategies and policies aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship in South Africa.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study indicated in the beginning that the concept of EC as a support system continues to be unclear in its definition. Additionally, it was found that EC serves a support function for women entrepreneurs as evidenced by the benefits obtained from the intervention (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018). These benefits mostly consist of the acquisition of new abilities, and views, improved communication, learning, higher self-awareness, and ESE (Nieman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2019). The literature demonstrates that women entrepreneurs, particularly those with ESE, can boost the performance of their enterprises (Luthans & Ibraveva, 2006; McGee & Peterson, 2019; Pekkan, 2018). Moreover, the study demonstrated that using EC as a system of support for women entrepreneurs can increase their ESE (Yusuff, et al., 2019). The key results are that, despite the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs, the South African governments have over the years prioritized the growth of those deemed to have previously been disadvantaged, particularly women entrepreneurs and that customised EC provided opportunities for women entrepreneurs to advance their knowledge and technical skills (Rudhumbu, et al., 2020; Iwu et al., 2022). Considering the importance of entrepreneurship coaching as a learning technique and support function once more about the difficulties and opportunities facing women entrepreneurs (Rudhumbu, et al., 2020; Iwu et al., 2022). Overall, this study affirmed that EC can be used to develop the ESE of women entrepreneurs.

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