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Entrepreneurial Skills and Women's Empowerment: A Bibliometric and Content Analysis of Capability Formation in Entrepreneurship Research



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ABSTRACT

Research on women's entrepreneurship has grown rapidly, especially around empowerment, financial inclusion and development policy. Yet the literature still offers an uneven explanation of how entrepreneurial skills contribute to empowerment. This study examines how research on women's entrepreneurial empowerment has developed intellectually and thematically, with particular attention to the position of entrepreneurial skills. Using 447 peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (2000–2025), it combines bibliometric mapping with a theory-informed content analysis of 50 purposively diversified articles. Bibliometric results show a field anchored by broad entrepreneurship and empowerment themes; skill development is visible but remains weakly integrated with the central entrepreneurship–empowerment structure. Content analysis shows recurring links from training to capability formation and from entrepreneurial capabilities to enterprise outcomes, while links from capabilities to agency and from enterprise achievement to multidimensional empowerment are less consistently developed. The findings therefore refine the capability gap: capability-oriented research is present, but the conversion mechanisms linking resources, capabilities, agency and empowerment remain fragmented. The study develops a theory-informed framework that treats entrepreneurial skills as potential, context-dependent conversion factors rather than as a fixed causal mechanism.

KEYWORDS: *women entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, empowerment, capability approach, bibliometric analysis, content analysis*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely recognised as a driver of inclusive growth, poverty alleviation and socio-economic transformation, especially where formal employment is limited. Women's entrepreneurship has therefore attracted increasing academic and policy attention because it contributes to economic independence, social mobility, household bargaining power and economic decision-making. It may also support empowerment, community resilience and social inclusion (Audretsch & Belitski, 2021; Feng et al., 2023; Tasnim, 2021). Yet this potential is constrained by persistent barriers in finance, markets, institutions, digital infrastructure and networks (Auguste, 2022; Corrêa et al., 2024; Mbowa et al., 2023; Mensah & Derera, 2023; Robb & Coleman, 2010). Thus, the link between women's entrepreneurship and empowerment cannot be assumed to be simple or linear.

The literature has largely explained women's entrepreneurial empowerment through structural and institutional perspectives, particularly finance, microcredit, government programmes, training and business support (Tengeh & Nkem, 2017; Welsh et al., 2016). This emphasis is valuable because it locates women's constraints in economic systems, social norms and institutional arrangements rather than in individual weakness. However, it often assumes that resource access leads directly to empowerment, although support does not automatically produce agency, confidence, market participation, decision-making authority or enterprise sustainability (Abuhussein & Koburtay, 2021; Radović-Marković & Achakpa, 2018; Nziku & Henry, 2021; Yadav et al., 2022).

This points to a conceptual limitation. Research has paid extensive attention to resource access, institutional barriers and individual characteristics, but less attention to how women develop and mobilise entrepreneurial capacities under constraint. Entrepreneurial competence is still often interpreted narrowly as technical, managerial or administrative skill, whereas women entrepreneurs also require adaptive, relational and agency-based capacities to identify opportunities, navigate uncertainty, build networks, mobilise support and create value from limited resources (Crittenden et al., 2019; Tasnim, 2021; Marín et al., 2024; Niu et al., 2024; Welter, 2020). The present review therefore treats the extent of this limitation as an empirical question rather than assuming in advance that capability-oriented explanations are absent.

Knowledge production is also epistemically uneven. Reviews of gender and entrepreneurship research have identified methodological limitations in the field and the need for more context-sensitive approaches (Henry et al., 2016). Evidence from Ghana and Bangladesh shows that empowerment is shaped by local labour relations, ethnic inclusion, policy design and gendered institutions (Tasnim, 2021; Mensah & Derera, 2023), reinforcing the need for context-sensitive mapping.

This study therefore shifts the debate from a resource-based explanation to a capability-oriented perspective. Drawing on the capability approach (Sen, 1999), empowerment theory (Kabeer, 1999), social capital theory (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), and institutional theory (North, 1990), it conceptualises entrepreneurial competence as a socially embedded and institutionally mediated conversion factor. Entrepreneurial competence is understood not only as the technical capacity to run a business, but as the ability to identify opportunities, build networks, work within institutional constraints, make

strategic decisions and translate resources into empowering outcomes. A bibliometric review is appropriate because it can identify publication trends, knowledge clusters, thematic evolution, collaboration patterns and geographical distribution across the interdisciplinary field. The capability approach has already been applied to entrepreneurship (e.g., Gries & Naudé, 2011); the novelty here lies in systematically mapping and synthesising how entrepreneurial skills are positioned within women's entrepreneurial empowerment research.

Methodologically, the study combines bibliometric mapping and theory-informed content analysis of Scopus and Web of Science publications. It identifies dominant themes, geographical patterns and theoretical gaps, and interprets how the literature explains entrepreneurial competence, empowerment processes, social capital and institutional conditions. The study contributes by developing an integrated view of entrepreneurial competence as a set of potential conversion factors through which resources may be translated into agency and empowerment. The bibliometric evidence is also used to identify dominant and peripheral areas for full-text analysis and to compare field-level patterns with article-level mechanisms.

Theoretical Background

Women's entrepreneurial empowerment emerges from the interaction of resources, capabilities, relations and institutions rather than from resource access alone. This study therefore integrates empowerment theory, social capital theory, institutional theory and the capability approach to examine how entrepreneurial skills may function as context-dependent conversion factors between structural conditions and empowerment outcomes.

Empowerment as a Multidimensional Process

Kabeer (1999) conceptualises empowerment as a multidimensional process involving resources, agency and achievements. In women's entrepreneurship, empowerment therefore includes not only income generation or business ownership, but also decision-making power, control over resources, social recognition and the capacity to challenge constraining gender norms.

Much entrepreneurship research nevertheless implies a linear movement from participation to empowerment. This overlooks the fact that women in

similar economic conditions may experience different empowerment outcomes depending on their capacity to mobilise resources, negotiate constraints and exercise agency. Empowerment must therefore be examined as a process, not only as an outcome indicator

Social Capital as a Relational Mechanism

Social capital theory explains how relational structures enable or constrain entrepreneurial activity. Social capital refers to resources embedded in networks, including structural ties, trust-based relations and shared meanings (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Relational and contextual conditions can shape how entrepreneurial activity is pursued in constrained settings (Baikovich et al., 2022; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019). Evidence from women-owned beauty parlours in Dhaka also shows how socially embedded entrepreneurship can support employment, inclusion and empowerment among marginalised women workers (Tasnim, 2021).

Institutions as Enabling and Constraining Structures

Institutional theory views entrepreneurial activity as embedded in formal and informal rules governing economic and social interaction (North, 1990). Formal institutions include laws, regulations and policy regimes; informal institutions include cultural norms, gender roles and social expectations. These rules affect women's access to resources, entrepreneurial legitimacy and capacity to scale and sustain ventures (Fayaz et al., 2022; Raman et al., 2022).

Women entrepreneurs often operate in institutional environments that are not fully responsive to their needs. They may face discriminatory lending practices, limited property rights, restrictive norms, unequal caregiving responsibilities and weak implementation of supportive policy (Abuhussein & Koburtay, 2021; Mensah & Derera, 2023). Gender-sensitive institutional reform can expand opportunity, but only when formal support addresses the social norms that shape women's everyday entrepreneurial choices.

Entrepreneurial Skills as Conversion Factors

Drawing on Sen's (1999) capability approach, this study reconceptualises entrepreneurial skills as conversion factors that shape how women transform available resources into valuable outcomes. Skills are not

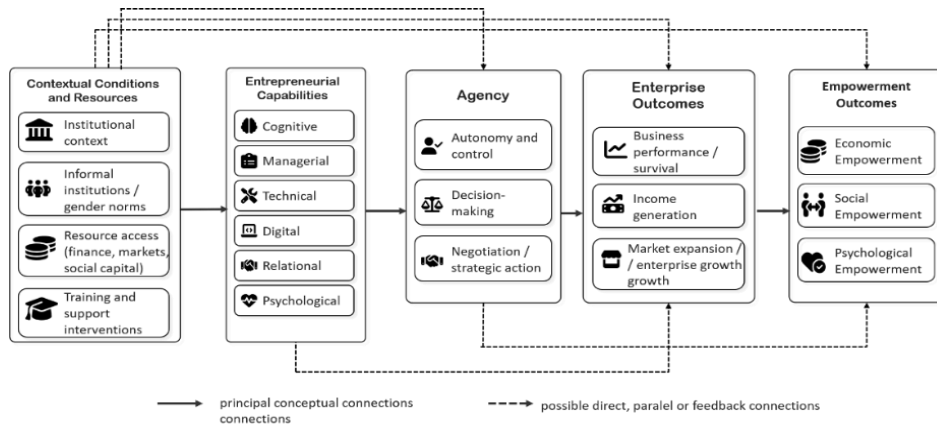
static inputs; they are situational capabilities that help women identify opportunities, negotiate constraints, build networks and sustain entrepreneurial activity.

Entrepreneurial skills are conceptualised as multidimensional capabilities spanning cognitive, managerial, technical, relational, digital and psychological domains. Their relationships with context, agency and empowerment are examined as possible direct, parallel or sequential pathways rather than as a fixed causal sequence.

Theory-Informed Analytical Framework

Drawing on Sen (1999), Kabeer (1999), Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), and North (1990), the framework positions institutional context and social capital as conditional enablers and entrepreneurial skills as potential conversion factors (Figure 1). Skills span cognitive, managerial, technical, relational, digital and psychological domains, while agency captures autonomy, decision-making, control and negotiation. Enterprise achievements and economic, social and psychological empowerment are kept analytically distinct. The arrows indicate plausible direct, parallel or sequential relationships rather than a fixed causal chain; agency is not assumed to be a necessary mediator. For coding, agency processes were distinguished from realised autonomy or control outcomes.

Figure 1: Theory-Informed Analytical Framework



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the theoretical synthesis

Methodology

This study combines bibliometric mapping with theory-informed content analysis. Bibliometric analysis identifies dominant and peripheral themes and patterns of knowledge production, while full-text content analysis examines article-level relationships among resources, institutional conditions, social capital, entrepreneurial capabilities, agency, enterprise outcomes and empowerment. The bibliometric results informed the areas examined qualitatively, but no single resources–capabilities–agency–empowerment sequence was imposed during coding.

Data Collection and Preparation

The dataset was drawn from Web of Science and Scopus because of their broad disciplinary and bibliometric coverage (Baas et al., 2020; Birkle et al., 2020). Searches combined entrepreneur*, women OR woman OR female, skill OR ability OR capacity OR capability OR competen*, and empower*. Scopus used TITLE-ABS-KEY(entrepreneur*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(women OR woman OR female) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(skill OR ability OR capacity OR capability OR competen*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(empower*); Web of Science used TS=(entrepreneur*) AND TS=(women OR woman OR female) AND TS=(skill OR ability OR capacity OR capability OR competen*) AND TS=(empower*). Because the Web of

Science Topic field also includes Keywords Plus, record-level screening assessed substantive relevance.

Only peer-reviewed English-language journal articles were eligible. Searches returned 294 Web of Science and 342 Scopus records; DOI and normalised-title deduplication yielded 456 unique records. Structural audit excluded eight book chapters and one institutional newsletter, producing the final 447-article bibliometric corpus (2000–2025). Three concatenated Scopus records were reconstructed without changing corpus size; the apparent 1997 starting year belonged to the excluded newsletter.

Eligibility and Screening

Articles were retained when women's entrepreneurship, women-owned enterprise or self-employment was substantive and the study examined empowerment, agency, entrepreneurial skills or capabilities, social capital or networks, or institutional conditions. Incidental women's-entrepreneurship mentions and ineligible document types, languages or subjects were excluded; uncertain title–abstract records proceeded to full text.

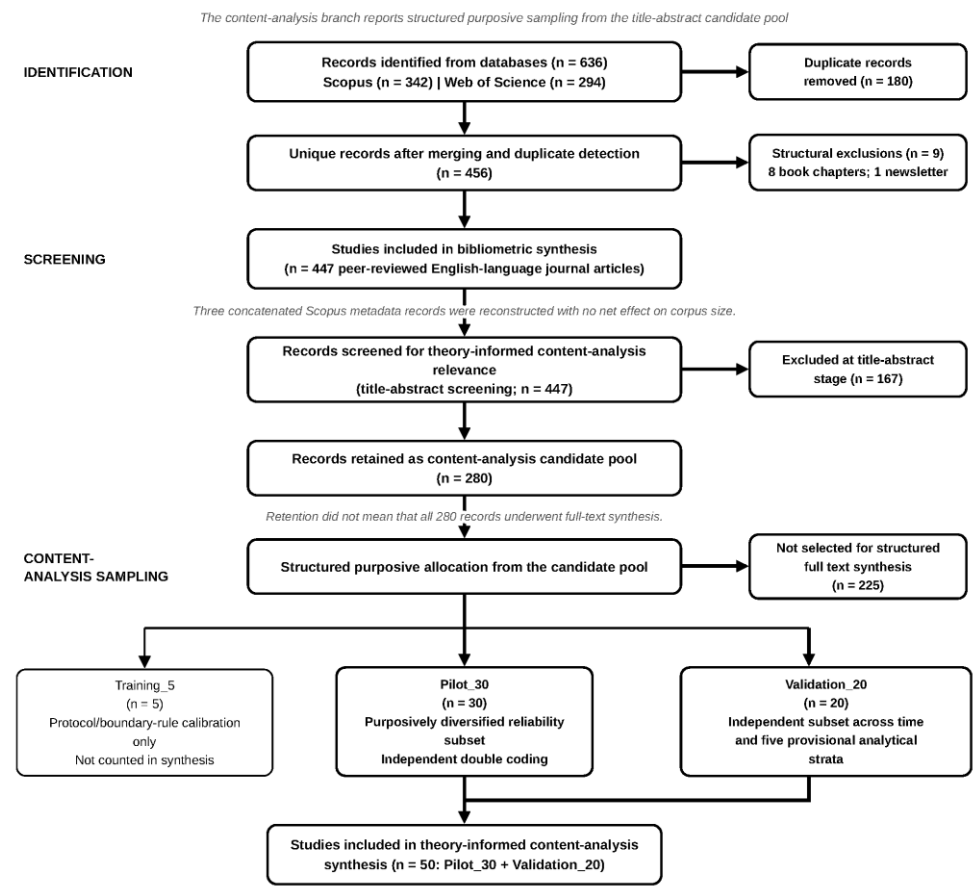
Four reviewers first assessed 30 records independently; initial agreement was 40.0% (Fleiss' $\kappa = 0.353$), prompting clarification of eligibility boundaries and blinded full-text adjudication of two unresolved cases. The remaining 426 records were independently screened by two reviewer pairs: Pair 1 agreed on 168/213 records (78.9%; $\kappa = 0.409$) and Pair 2 on 149/213 (70.0%; $\kappa = 0.443$). Original decisions were retained for reliability audit; disagreements were resolved against predefined criteria, with borderline cases adjudicated by the lead researcher. Final allocation and eligibility details are in Supplementary File S3.

After structural correction, 167 of 447 articles were excluded at title–abstract screening and 280 formed the content-analysis candidate pool. Five articles were used for codebook training (Training_5), 30 for formal intercoder reliability (Pilot_30), and a separate 20 for independent validation (Validation_20). Training_5 was calibration-only; Pilot_30 and Validation_20 formed the 50-article structured synthesis (Figure 2; Supplementary File S3).

Keyword variants were harmonised before conceptual-structure analysis. A thesaurus was applied to the co-word network, thematic map and thematic evolution; equivalent harmonisation was applied directly to the dataset for the

three-field plot. Conceptually distinct terms were retained. Synonym mappings and removed terms are documented in Supplementary Files S1–S2.

Figure 2: PRISMA 2020-Style Flow Diagram of Study Identification, Screening, and Selection for Bibliometric and Content Analysis



Source: Adapted from Page et al. (2021)

Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis used RStudio using R version 4.2.3 (2023-03-15) with bibliometrix and Biblioshiny to examine co-word structure, thematic centrality and density, thematic evolution, and author–keyword–country relationships. These outputs identified central and peripheral topics and provided field-level context for the full-text synthesis.

All analyses used author keywords (DE). Co-word analysis used up to 40 nodes, association normalisation, Louvain clustering and repulsion 0.3. The thematic map used up to 250 terms, minimum frequency 2, Louvain clustering and three labels per cluster; thematic evolution used up to 250 terms, minimum frequency 5 and Walktrap across 2000–2015, 2016–2020 and 2021–2025. The three-field plot displayed up to 10 authors, keywords and countries.

Content Analysis

Content analysis examined how the 280 candidate articles represented resources, institutions, social capital, capabilities, agency, enterprise outcomes and empowerment. Codebook v2.1 (Supplementary File S4) was fixed after two coders independently applied the provisional scheme to five training articles, clarifying boundaries between training and capability, enterprise performance and empowerment, and recommendations and empirical evidence. Pilot_30 and Validation_20 were selected for temporal and conceptual diversity rather than statistical representativeness.

Purposeful diversification prioritised relevant variation and trustworthiness rather than statistical representativeness (Elo et al., 2014; Suri, 2011). Two coders independently coded Pilot_30 across 19 binary codes; this subset represented 10.7% of the candidate pool, within the 10–25% range described for multiply coded qualitative data (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Reliability was computed from the original independent decisions: across 570 paired judgements, agreement was 85.1%, with median Cohen's $\kappa = 0.648$ (range 0.333–0.918). Seven codes below $\kappa = 0.60$ generated 46 focused boundary-review flags against Codebook v2.1; original reliability statistics were retained. Code-level results appear in Supplementary File S5.

A third researcher independently reviewed a non-overlapping 20-article validation set, blinded to Pilot_30 coding and lead adjudication, and completed full-text eligibility verification and structured evidence extraction. Validation_20 assessed interpretive robustness rather than a second κ statistic; its documentation is provided in Supplementary File S6.

Article-level mechanisms were extracted separately. An edge was retained only for an explicit directional relationship supported by a tested path, mediation or moderation, before–after change or clear qualitative mechanism; co-occurrence alone was insufficient, and non-significant paths

were recorded as unsupported. Related edges were grouped into theory-informed categories. Because articles could contribute to multiple categories, frequencies indicate recurrence within the 50-article purposive synthesis, not prevalence in the 280-record pool or 447-article corpus (Supplementary File S7).

Results

Descriptive Overview

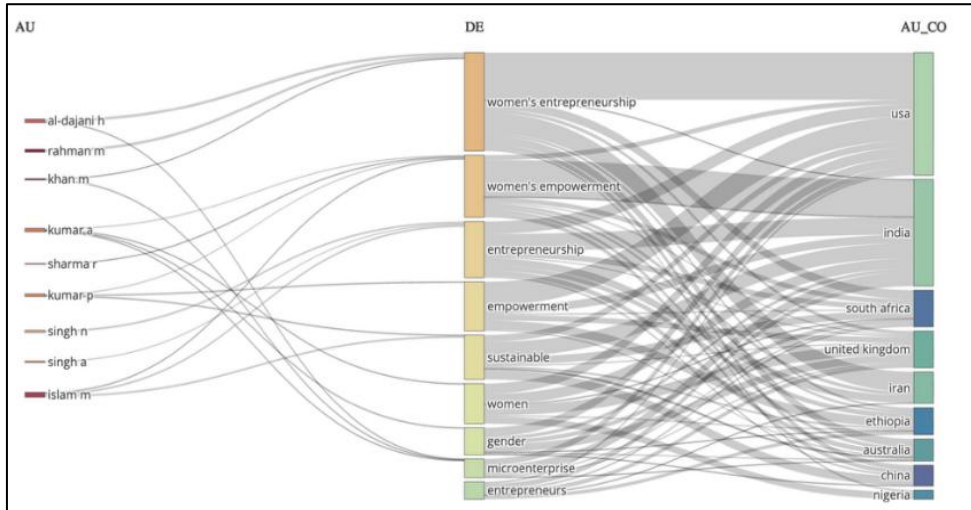
The final corpus comprised 447 English-language journal articles published in 2000–2025, with growth accelerating after 2019. Keyword analyses were dominated by women’s entrepreneurship, women’s empowerment, entrepreneurship, empowerment, women and gender; finance-, development- and skill-related terms were distributed around these broader themes.

Co-word Network: Thematic Clusters and Conceptual Dominance

Figure 3 shows three interconnected areas centred on women’s entrepreneurship, women’s empowerment, and broader entrepreneurship/empowerment concepts. The women’s entrepreneurship cluster connects with education, skill development, gender equality, economic development, finance, and developing-country contexts; the women’s empowerment cluster links microfinance or microcredit, microenterprise, social capital, decision-making, entrepreneurial skills, and rural women.

Entrepreneurial skills and skill development are visible but less central than the dominant entrepreneurship and empowerment nodes. Rather than a finance-dominant structure, the network shows structural, relational, development and capability-related themes distributed around the field’s core concepts, motivating article-level examination of how these elements are connected.

Figure 4: Three-Field Plot of Authors, Keywords, and Contributing Countries in Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment Research



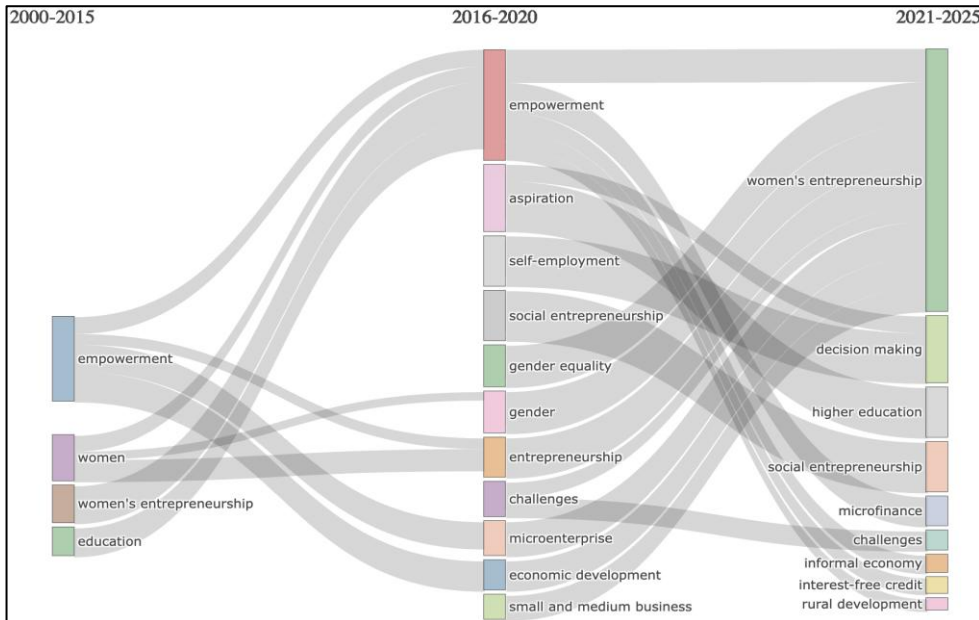
Source: Bibliometrix result

Thematic Evolution and Research Priorities

Figure 5 shows gradual thematic diversification. In 2000–2015, the field centred on empowerment, women, women's entrepreneurship and education; in 2016–2020 it expanded toward self-employment, social entrepreneurship, gender equality, microenterprise and economic development. By 2021–2025, women's entrepreneurship became the main integrative theme, alongside decision-making, higher education, microfinance, the informal economy and rural development.

Decision-making increases the visibility of agency and higher education suggests capability formation, but explicit entrepreneurial-skills and capability-development terms remain outside the dominant recent streams.

Figure 5: Thematic Evolution of Research on Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment (2000–2025)



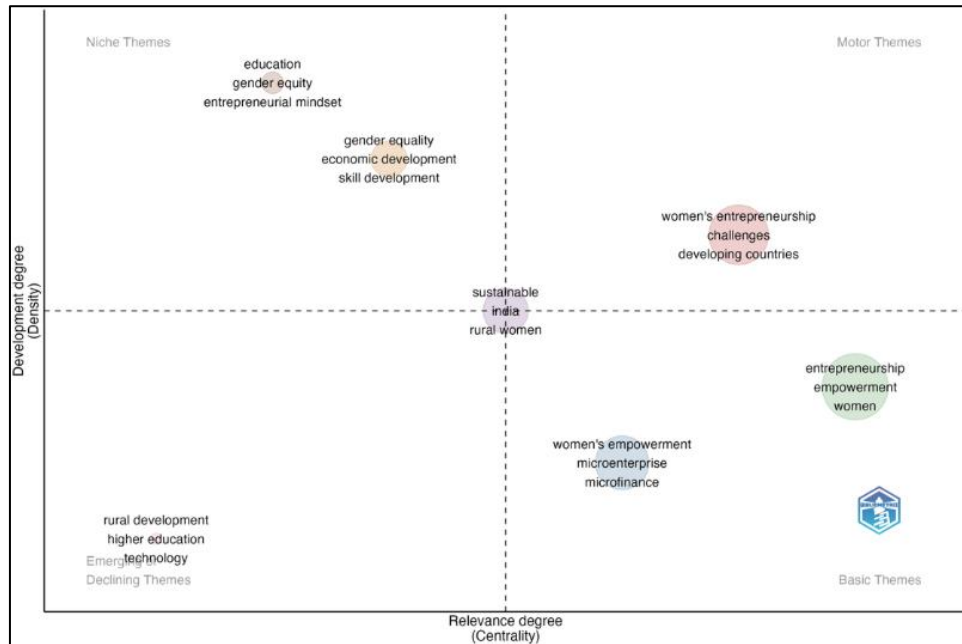
Source: Bibliometrix result

Thematic Map: Centrality and Development of Major Themes

Figure 6 reinforces this uneven development. Women's entrepreneurship, challenges and developing countries are motor themes; entrepreneurship, empowerment and women are basic themes, alongside a separate women's empowerment–microenterprise–microfinance cluster.

Education, gender equity and entrepreneurial mindset, together with gender equality, economic development and skill development, occupy niche positions, while rural development, higher education and technology are emerging or declining. Thus, capability-oriented themes are present but remain weakly connected to the field's core entrepreneurship–empowerment structure.

Figure 6: Thematic Map: Centrality and Development of Major Research Themes



Source: Bibliometrix result

Content Analysis

The structured synthesis comprised 50 non-overlapping articles (Pilot_30 and Validation_20) and yielded 69 explicit directional edges. Thirty-eight articles contained at least one supported edge; 12 were valid zero-edge cases. For continuity with the analytical framework, evidence is reported across four non-mutually exclusive theory-informed domains. Counts indicate recurrence within this purposively diversified sample, not prevalence in the 280-article candidate pool or 447-article corpus.

Domain 1: Financial and Structural Approaches to Women's Empowerment

Financial and structural approaches connect resources with multiple stages rather than a single pathway: conditions or resources were linked to agency in six articles (3 Pilot_30; 3 Validation_20), capabilities in five (3; 2), enterprise outcomes in five (2; 3), and empowerment in five (3; 2). These studies identify structural constraints that limit women's entrepreneurship in

low-resource environments. The coded evidence, however, does not support a single linear route from resource access to empowerment. In India, self-help-group participation and microcredit were associated with improved financial and entrepreneurial knowledge, greater control and decision-making, and stronger economic empowerment (Zaei et al., 2018). In Uganda, small-scale cooperatives expanded market relationships, strengthened business and financial capabilities, increased decision-making power and income control, and supported economic emancipation (Theeuwens et al., 2021).

These findings retain the importance of capital and institutional support but reject an automatic resource-to-empowerment progression. Empowering effects depend on how women mobilise resources within socio-institutional contexts; structural and relational resources may support capability formation, agency, enterprise achievement or empowerment through direct and parallel routes.

Domain 2: Development and Sustainability Perspectives

Development and sustainability studies broaden empowerment beyond income toward poverty reduction, inclusion, mobility, resilience and gender-inclusive growth. Yet explicit mechanisms linking entrepreneurial activity to wider development outcomes were scarce. [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

Only one enterprise-outcome-to-development-outcome edge appeared in Pilot_30 and none in Validation_20. The gap is therefore not the absence of development goals, but weak article-level articulation of how capability formation, agency and enterprise achievements extend into wider social or community change.

Domain 3: Capability and Skill Development

Capability and skill development produced the clearest capability-oriented pattern: capabilities linked to enterprise outcomes in 11 articles (7 Pilot_30; 4 Validation_20), training to capability formation in nine (6; 3), and training directly to enterprise outcomes in five (3; 2).

Representative studies show that capability formation extends beyond a single type of skill. Farmer Business School participation improved women vegetable growers' cognitive, managerial and technical business capabilities (Naval et al., 2021). Agency-based empowerment training in Kenya substantially increased sales and business commitment among female energy entrepreneurs (Shankar et al., 2015), while strategic management, planning,

opportunity recognition, adaptability and risk management were linked to enterprise resilience among rural women entrepreneurs in Iran (Rezaei-Moghaddam et al., 2023).

These pathways support treating entrepreneurial skills as potential conversion factors rather than a fixed sequence. Their strongest recurrent link was to enterprise achievement, not directly to multidimensional empowerment; business survival, performance, income and market expansion were therefore kept distinct from empowerment outcomes.

Domain 4: Psychological and Relational Dimensions

Psychological and relational evidence highlights confidence, control, persistence and network embeddedness. Social capital linked with agency or autonomy across both samples and with economic empowerment, showing that networks and collective arrangements can shape access, capability formation and women's room for action. Click or tap here to enter text..

Women's empowerment is therefore not only socio-economic or structural, but also psychological and relational. Wu's (2022) study of Vietnamese marriage immigrant women in Taiwan illustrates this broader process: entrepreneurial activities were shaped by family expectations, institutionalised learning, customer networks and resilience, while running a business strengthened self-identity, social integration and family position. Such evidence shows that enterprise participation can be connected with psychological and social empowerment, but these links are context-specific rather than automatic.

Fragmentation nevertheless remained clear. The link between capability and agency appeared in only two articles, both from Pilot_30, and not once in Validation_20. The link between agency and enterprise achievement showed the reverse pattern: two articles in Validation_20, none in Pilot_30. And the link between enterprise achievement and empowerment surfaced in two Pilot_30 articles but was absent from Validation_20. Accordingly, the content analysis does not support a strict universal sequence in which resources lead to capabilities, capabilities to agency, and agency to empowerment. Capability-oriented research is substantive, especially for enterprise achievement, but explanations of how capabilities become agency and how agency or enterprise achievements translate into multidimensional empowerment remain fragmented.

Discussion

Across bibliometric and content analyses, the field has broadened beyond resource access toward capability, relational embeddedness and context, but integration remains incomplete: finance, development, gender and skill-related concerns still orbit broader entrepreneurship and empowerment themes.

This emphasis is understandable because finance, microfinance, training and institutional support are central issues for women entrepreneurs in resource-constrained economies (e.g., Robb & Coleman, 2010; Tengeh & Nkem, 2017; Welsh et al., 2016). However, access does not automatically produce agency, decision-making power or long-term entrepreneurial sustainability (Abuhussein & Koburtay, 2021; Radović-Marković & Achakpa, 2018; Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment depends on how women mobilise resources, negotiate constraints and exercise agency in specific contexts (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999; Welter, 2020). Entrepreneurial skills matter as cognitive, relational, digital, adaptive and psychological capabilities, but the synthesis shows that their connection with agency and multidimensional empowerment remains incomplete.

The results further suggest that social capital and institutional conditions are relevant but not consistently integrated with capability-based explanations. Networks, trust and community support appear in the literature, but their links to entrepreneurial skills and agency are not always explicit (Baikovich et al., 2022; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2019; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Likewise, the three-field plot shows that core themes circulate across diverse national contexts, cautioning against assuming a single universal empowerment pathway or assigning themes too rigidly to particular regions.

The framework addresses this fragmentation by integrating institutional, social capital, empowerment and capability perspectives without imposing a fixed causal model. Entrepreneurial skills are treated as potential conversion factors, while agency, enterprise outcomes and empowerment remain distinct. For policy and practice, support should complement credit and training with mentoring, networks, digital literacy, adaptive learning, leadership and confidence-building.

Conclusion

This review combined bibliometric mapping of 447 Scopus and Web of Science articles with theory-informed content analysis of 50 purposively diversified articles. Resource access remains important, but capability-oriented explanations are also present; the more specific gap is the fragmented conversion of resources and capabilities into agency and multidimensional empowerment.

The framework therefore treats entrepreneurial skills, relational, adaptive, digital, cognitive, managerial, technical and psychological, as context-dependent conversion factors while keeping agency, enterprise achievements and empowerment distinct. It implies complementing finance, training and institutional support with capability-building strategies and testing when enterprise achievements translate into broader empowerment across contexts. The review is limited to English-language journal articles in Scopus and Web of Science; multilingual and grey-literature reviews should extend this evidence base.

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