

Female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing countries: a systematic literature review

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite the increase in female entrepreneurship literature, very few studies exist that systematize the extant literature, especially in emerging and developing countries. This article fills part of this gap; it maps, categorizes and groups the objectives, theoretical approaches and research methods on female entrepreneurship conducted in one or more of the 155 emerging and developing countries.

Design/methodology/approach – A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted, using Scopus and Web of Science, over a 10-year timeframe (2010–2020). Out of 465 papers, 77 were selected for content analysis.

Findings – Most articles focus on understanding women entrepreneurs' challenges, the factors affecting their entrepreneurial performance and encouraging entrepreneurship. Qualitative research was found to be the predominant approach, while mixed studies appeared less frequently.

Practical implications – This paper sheds light on female entrepreneurship characteristics, including business competence, performance and entrepreneurial orientation. Further, it can help female entrepreneurs to recognize the most relevant aspects regarding performance, the essential driving factors and entrepreneurial motivations, among others.

Originality/value – First, this paper groups the objectives and the theoretical and methodological approaches that guide female entrepreneurship research. Second, it identifies distinct gaps, grouped and explored using unpublished thematic categories. Finally, the authors propose an extensive future research agenda regarding female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing countries.

Keywords Women entrepreneurs, Female self-employment, Gender

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over time, the number of women entrepreneurs has grown worldwide (Feder and Nițu-Antonie, 2017; Isaga, 2019; Owalla and Al Ghafri, 2020; Patrick *et al.*, 2016; Zhang and Zhou, 2019). Presently, “women are more active than men in entrepreneurship” (Zhang and Zhou, 2019, p. 1). This increase in female entrepreneurship has drawn scholars' attention (Bianchi *et al.*, 2016; Ferreira *et al.*, 2017; Santos *et al.*, 2018; Wu *et al.*, 2019). Several authors have underlined women entrepreneurs' importance to their countries' socioeconomic development (Baranik *et al.*, 2018; Cabrera and Mauricio, 2017; Marques *et al.*, 2017; Moreira *et al.*, 2019; Owalla and Al Ghafri, 2020; Xie and Lv, 2016). Female entrepreneurship's relevance seems particularly true in emerging and developing economies (De Vita *et al.*, 2014; Marques *et al.*, 2017; Zhang and Zhou, 2019).

De Vita *et al.* (2014, p. 458) argued that “women entrepreneurs operating in developing countries seem to play a key role in the economy and the development process of those countries.” The relevance of female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing economies shows the need to understand the phenomenon better (Cardella *et al.*, 2020; Ghouse *et al.*, 2019; Marques *et al.*, 2017; Moreira *et al.*, 2019). However, several authors have highlighted how developed countries dominate the field (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2019a, b; Cabrera and Mauricio, 2017;



Isaga, 2019; Moreira *et al.*, 2019). For example, Hossain *et al.* (2020, p. 174) stressed how, in “developed countries, women’s entrepreneurship has received scholarly attention; however, in emerging nations, such attention has been limited.” Similarly, Isaga (2019, p. 102) emphasized how “research on a women-owned business is more extensive in developed countries than in developing countries.”

The absence of studies in emerging and developing economies is still apparent in systematic literature reviews (SLRs). Although SLRs exist regarding female entrepreneurship (Bastian *et al.*, 2018; Cabrera and Mauricio, 2017; Chreim *et al.*, 2018; Foss *et al.*, 2019; Henry *et al.*, 2016), only two have recently sought to understand female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing contexts (Panda, 2018; Rashid and Ratten, 2020). For instance, Panda (2018) focused solely on the constraints suffered by women entrepreneurs, while Rashid and Ratten (2020) limited their female entrepreneurship review only to SAARC countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

Further, no article has systematically analyzed the aims and main theoretical and methodological approaches of female entrepreneurship studies in emerging and developing countries. The present study considers 155 countries as emerging and developing, according to the International Monetary (Fund, 2020) classification. The following research questions (RQs) are addressed:

- RQ1. What are the primary research objectives regarding female entrepreneurs in the studies conducted in emerging and developing countries?
- RQ2. What are the main theoretical themes employed in the study of female entrepreneurship?
- RQ3. What are the main methodological approaches adopted?

This article has several implications (theoretical, practical and managerial) related to capacity building and policy. Considering the theoretical scope, this article identifies fundamental concepts and categorizations, as well as unexplored research gaps. In the practical and managerial context, this study has valuable contributions for scholars and entrepreneurs. For example, female entrepreneurs can easily identify the key challenges highlighted in the literature and the diverse factors that help overcome them. Regarding the implications for capacity building, this article proposes an extensive agenda for training programs, helping governments, public policymakers and private agents develop relevant courses and qualifications. Finally, this article has policy implications, suggesting initiatives to foster female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing countries. The article ends with a proposed broad research agenda for researchers in the field.

Method

This study employs a SLR (Kraus *et al.*, 2020), which allows the researcher to achieve several goals, including synthesizing the existing literature in a significant research area, such as female entrepreneurship (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Paul and Criado, 2020). A SLR is also suitable when the authors seek to show which “general or more specific theories, constructs, and methods are widely used and most researched” (Paul and Criado, 2020, p. 4).

Search strategy

The review followed three major steps (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). The first was planning; we created the research protocol after identifying the need for a review and elaborating the RQs (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Machado *et al.*, 2020; Paul and Criado, 2020; Tranfield

et al., 2003). Kraus *et al.* (2020, p. 1,033) emphasized the significance of defining the study’s protocol to “ensure a transparent and high-quality process.” Although some authors defend all available literature, including books, conference papers and grey literature, this study used only online journal-article databases [Scopus and Web of Science (WoS)]. Following Machado *et al.* (2020, p. 5), “Scopus and WoS were chosen because their coverage and selective approach produce a curated collection of documents.” Several authors advocate the use of both databases in the article-search strategy (Cardella *et al.*, 2020; Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Liñán and Fayolle, 2015; Machado *et al.*, 2020; Paul and Criado, 2020). For instance, Paul and Criado (2020, p. 3) argued that review articles should be “retrieved from well-established bibliographic databases such as WoS and/or Scopus.” Table 1 presents the research protocol, summarizing its fundamental elements.

Selection criteria

The second step was conducting the review (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). We searched for female entrepreneurship articles in this stage, using the search terms shown in Table 1. Following Panda (2018, p. 316), the terms “emerging” and “developing countries” were not included to avoid omission of any relevant article. The search occurred in early 2021 and included the title, abstract and keywords fields. This study incorporated articles in English published in peer-reviewed academic journals and available via open access. The search period was from 2010 to 2020. According to (Antony *et al.*, 2020, p. 5), “researchers should analyse recent papers to extract the developing and emerging trends in the field.”

Search process

Using the search criteria, we found 465 papers (326 on Scopus and 139 on WoS). We then arranged the titles in an Excel© spreadsheet, excluding 75 repeated articles available in both databases, leading to 390 articles that advanced to the next stage. Finally, three authors performed analyses independently. In this vein, each author analyzed the title, abstract and keywords of all 390 articles. The aim was to allow autonomy, ultimately triangulating the individual analyses.

Research protocol	Details/description
Research databases	Scopus and Web of Science (WoS)
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journals
Language	English
Date range	2010–2020
Search fields	Title, abstract and keywords
Search terms	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Women entrepreneur”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Woman entrepreneur”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Women entrepreneurship”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Woman entrepreneurship”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“gender entrepreneur”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“gender entrepreneurship”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“female entrepreneurship”) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (“female entrepreneurship”)) AND PUBYEAR > 2009 AND (LIMIT-TO (FREETOREAD, “all”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”))
Inclusion criteria	The authors organized the results in a spreadsheet, excluding repeated records
Exclusion criteria	Article, open access, research carried out in emerging and developing economies
Data analysis and synthesis	Social entrepreneurship, research comparing men versus women
	Content-analysis approach; content analysis was thematic and inductive

Table 1.
Research protocol

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Theoretical-empirical open access articles whose empirical research took place in emerging and developing countries were considered for the next step. This study employed the International Monetary Fund's (2020) list, which considers 155 countries as emerging or developing. We disregarded research focusing on "social entrepreneurship" or comparing men versus women. Following Cabrera and Mauricio (2017), we removed social entrepreneurship studies to focus on enterprises whose aim is to generate economic wealth. Further, several authors have emphasized the relevance of research focusing only on women without comparing them to men (Foster and Brindley, 2018; Henry *et al.*, 2016). According to Foster and Brindley (2018, p. 183), "women are not a homogenous group" and scholars should move "away from a comparison with men and focus on the different intra-group experiences of women." According to Henry *et al.* (2016), who supported an epistemological shift in research on entrepreneurship, positive epistemologies that concentrate on the distinctions between men and women reproduce the "othering" of women. Such studies end up understanding women as individuals who need to be "corrected" to meet the norm.

Refinement process

In all, 390 articles advanced to the refinement stage. Independent analysis by the three authors resulted in a joint agreement on 240 papers (105 moving to the next stage and 135 not). In other words, of the 390 articles, the three researchers reached consensus for 240 of them, while for the remaining 150 articles, no consensus was reached among researchers regarding whether to proceed to the next stage. For these 150 articles for which unanimity was not reached, the three authors analyzed all 150 works together, leading to 73 articles proceeding to the next stage and 77 being disregarded. Thus, 178 papers advanced to the entire reading stage, 105 from consensus among the authors and 73 from subsequent joint deliberation. The reading stage involved the reading of articles considering quality criteria.

Quality rating

A significant portion of the articles did not contain significant information capable of answering the proposed research questions. For instance, we eliminated papers that did not contain theoretical references or could not identify the relevant literature or the method used in the investigation. We also excluded studies in which the aims were absent, inferential, or unclear. While reading the articles, we felt the need to incorporate an additional quality criterion, namely only papers published in journals in the upper strata of the selected databases [in Scopus, only articles from journals in the first and second quartiles; in WoS, only papers in journals with a journal impact factor over 50% in the business or management categories]. Figure 1 schematically depicts the SLR process.

Discussion

In this study, 77 articles were selected for in-depth SLR analysis, grouped into primary, secondary and tertiary categories. These categories were inductive and thematic in response to the three RQs. Further, the categories were not exclusive. For example, an article could be in two registers, formed by combining different primary, secondary and tertiary thematic categories. For instance, Kakabadse *et al.* (2018) proposed that the study's aims should reflect aspects associated with entrepreneurial challenges as well as decision-making. Thus, the authors allocated the paper into two different registries and categories. This was also the case with Roessingh and Nuijten's (2012) paper. Among this study's objectives, the authors aimed

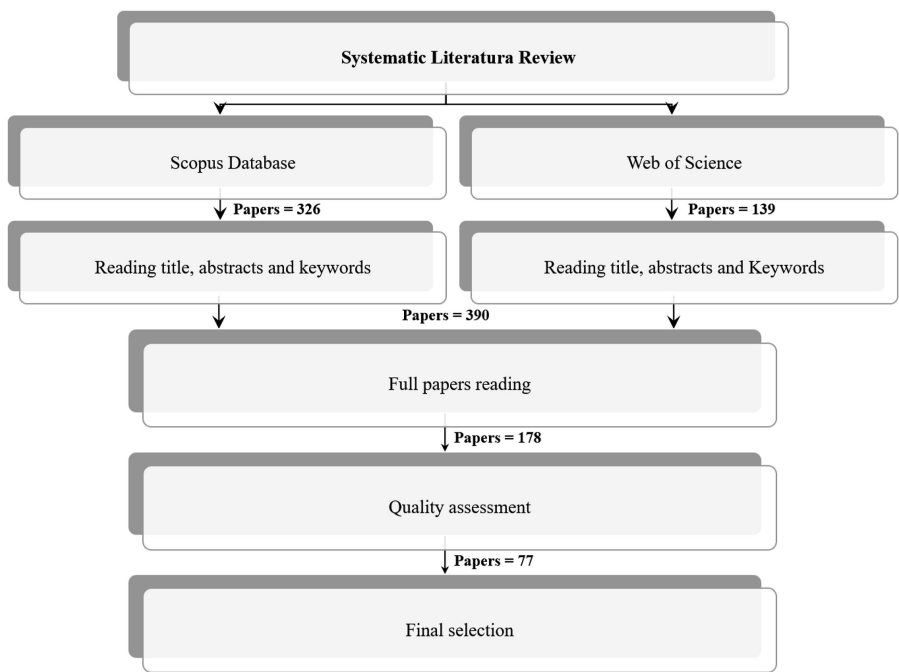


Figure 1.
Schematic depiction of
the SLR process

to reflect aspects related to challenges and entrepreneurial motivations, allowing the allocation of work into two distinct categories. Findings related to the RQs are detailed below.

RQ1: What are the primary research objectives regarding female entrepreneurs in the studies conducted in emerging and developing countries?

Figure 2 presents the treemap chart for research aims in relation to female entrepreneurs in emerging and developing countries. The 77 articles generated 121 records, subdivided into 13 primary categories: entrepreneurial characteristics; business skills; concepts; challenges; entrepreneurial performance; economic development; media speeches; fostering entrepreneurship; gender; entrepreneurial motivations; women's role; entrepreneurial success; and decision-making.

Scholars of female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing contexts mainly seek to understand the distinct challenges faced by women [44% ($n = 34$) of the 77 papers analyzed], generating 38 records associated with this category. Among the challenges analyzed, 15 articles sought to understand those challenges related to the development of women's enterprises (Cooke and Xiao, 2021; Ghouse *et al.*, 2017, 2019; Langevang *et al.*, 2018; Lock and Lawton Smith, 2016; Martiana *et al.*, 2018; Mathew, 2019; Mehtap *et al.*, 2019; Ngoasong and Kimbu, 2019; Solanki, 2019; Thapa Karki *et al.*, 2020; Vershinina *et al.*, 2020; Welsh *et al.*, 2016; Xiong *et al.*, 2018; Zainol *et al.*, 2017). However, few articles exist that seek to understand women's challenges in the initial stage of their businesses, a period considered the most difficult to navigate (Trusić *et al.*, 2017). Only two papers (Lock and Lawton Smith, 2016; Welsh *et al.*, 2017b) have investigated in-depth women's challenges in this stage. The articles also highlighted other entrepreneurial challenges. Five sought to understand the challenges associated with women obtaining resources, primarily financial ones (Alecchi, 2020; Kuschel

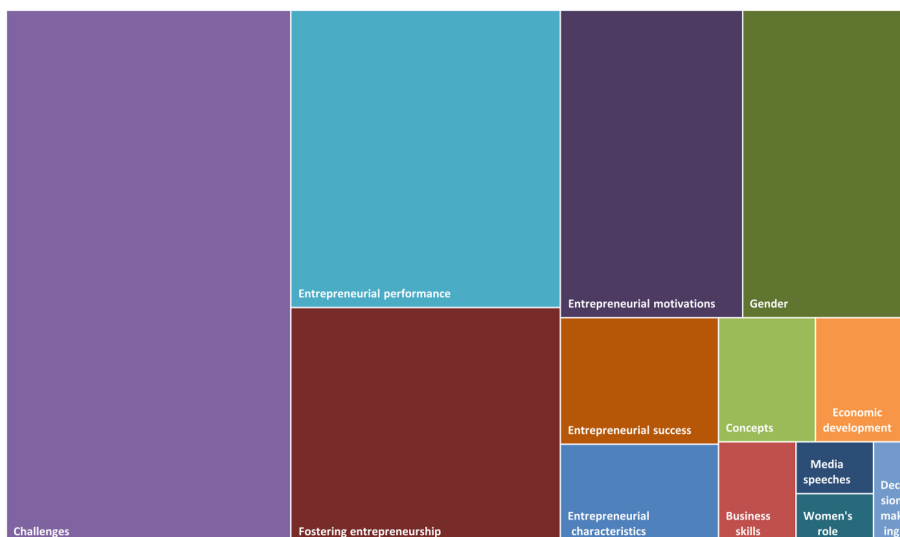


Figure 2.
Treemap chart
showing the primary
categories of the
analysis of female
entrepreneurs' aims in
emerging and
developing countries

et al., 2017; Lindvert *et al.*, 2017, 2019; Ukanwa *et al.*, 2018; Welsh *et al.*, 2017b). Furthermore, work–family conflicts (Fis *et al.*, 2019; Olu-Owolabi *et al.*, 2020; Welsh *et al.*, 2016; Xheneti *et al.*, 2019) and patriarchal restrictions (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2019a, b; Altan-Olcay, 2014, 2016) stand out among the challenges investigated.

The second group incorporates those seeking to investigate entrepreneurial performance [25% ($n = 19$)]. These authors emphasize business skills and human capital among the factors investigated (Kimosop *et al.*, 2016; Reza *et al.*, 2020; Sihotang *et al.*, 2020; Welsh *et al.*, 2017a; Zainol *et al.*, 2018), as well as the family's influence on entrepreneurial performance (Welsh *et al.*, 2017a, 2018; Xiong *et al.*, 2018). Social capital's influence on performance was the focus of attention in two other articles (Muniady *et al.*, 2015; Setini *et al.*, 2020). The third group encompasses fostering female entrepreneurship ($n = 15$). Among them, three major factors stand out: entrepreneurial training (Altan-Olcay, 2016; Azam Roomi and Harrison, 2010; Mbaruku and Mutalemwa, 2015; Minimol, 2020; Zainol *et al.*, 2017); the role of the state (Ennis, 2019; Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum, 2018; Mathew, 2019; Maziriri *et al.*, 2019); and the formalization of business (Thapa Karki *et al.*, 2020; Thapa Karki and Xheneti, 2018).

The fourth and fifth groups comprise papers seeking to investigate the motivations leading women to entrepreneurship ($n = 14$), followed by the gender discussion ($n = 13$). There is no consensus in the studies regarding female entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial motivations in emerging and developing countries. While some incorporate the dichotomous discussion of need versus opportunity (Batool and Ullah, 2017; Cavada *et al.*, 2017; Marques *et al.*, 2017), others examine the influence of distinct additional factors, such as income, independence, achievement, need for change, balance, obligations, dissatisfaction and the glass-ceiling (Ng and Fu, 2018; Ramadani *et al.*, 2013). Among gender studies, those seeking to investigate the different influences of patriarchal restrictions on female entrepreneurship stand out. For instance, Selamat and Endut (2020, p. 13) explored “how the patriarchal bargain is being consciously and constantly exploited by women entrepreneurs to earn ‘space’ for them to run and manage their entrepreneurship activities.”

The first five groups (challenges, entrepreneurial performance, fostering entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial motivations and reflections on gender) encompass the

objectives of 83% of the papers studied (101 of the 121). The remaining 20 records are subdivided into eight categories: entrepreneurial success ($n = 5$); entrepreneurial characteristics ($n = 4$); concepts ($n = 3$); business skills ($n = 2$); media speeches ($n = 1$); women's role ($n = 1$); and decision-making ($n = 1$). Success studies seek to understand the critical factors involved. Research on entrepreneurial characteristics explores aspects associated with, for example, demographic (Mehtap *et al.*, 2019) and family (Gundry *et al.*, 2014) attributes. Studies in the “concepts” group seek to understand the concept of female entrepreneurship, with some based on the understanding of women themselves. For instance, by drawing on 21 individual Lebanese women entrepreneurs' narratives, Tlaiss and Kauser (2019) determined their status as entrepreneurial leaders and established their entrepreneurial identities. The business skills category emphasizes elements such as human capital (Zainol *et al.*, 2018), as well as exploring the meaning of the term for women, i.e. “from the perspective of those who acquire and use them” (Goopu and Chakravarty, 2018, p. 293). The media speech category “critically analyze[s] media discourses on women owner-managers/entrepreneurs (OMEs) in the Kenyan and Omani newspapers” (Owalla and Al Ghafri, 2020, p. 529). The penultimate category, women's role, incorporates the work of Ghouse *et al.* (2019), who sought to investigate the “various problems experienced by cottage-based women entrepreneurs to launch and develop their ventures in Oman” (Ghouse *et al.*, 2019, p. 480). Finally, articles in the decision-making category propose “a conceptual model to understand female entrepreneurial leadership through an exploration of the perceptions and experiences of women entrepreneurs within their leadership roles” (Kakabadse *et al.*, 2018, p. 1). Table 2 presents the identified categories, along with the associated authors.

RQ2: What are the main theoretical themes employed in the study of female entrepreneurship?

Figure 3 presents the treemap chart for the classification of theoretical approaches. We classified into more than one category those articles addressing different theoretical perspectives. The 77 articles generated 212 records, grouped into 14 non-exhaustive thematic categories: capital; entrepreneurial characteristics; business competence; challenges; entrepreneurial performance; entrepreneurship; fostering entrepreneurship; gender; institutionalism; entrepreneurial motivations; entrepreneurial orientation; networks; business success; and others. These categories reflect an inductive categorization process and do not always express a developed theoretical research stream. For instance, several authors reflected on entrepreneurial challenges in the theoretical framework section, although the literature on challenges is not theoretical. In this sense, such themes cannot be exhaustive or exclusive.

Among the theoretical themes, the challenges of female entrepreneurship stand out. In all, 25 articles present entrepreneurs' challenges in their theoretical framework, producing 31 records related to this theme. Among the significant challenges highlighted are culture (Alecchi, 2020; Cooke and Xiao, 2021; Ghouse *et al.*, 2017; Mathew, 2019; Roomi, 2013; Shakeel *et al.*, 2020; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2019); access to finance (Alecchi, 2020; Brixiová *et al.*, 2020; Kuschel *et al.*, 2017; Mathew, 2019); and work–family balance (Fis *et al.*, 2019; Marques *et al.*, 2017; Welsh, 2017a; Xheneti *et al.*, 2019).

Entrepreneurial performance was the object of attention in 25 articles. For instance, Altan-Olcay (2014), Maziriri *et al.* (2019) and Welsh *et al.* (2018) associated the theme to a macro context, reflecting on the influence of entrepreneurial performance on general economic development. Others, however, sought to reflect on the repercussions of entrepreneurial performance on: informal businesses (Mehtap *et al.*, 2019; Olu-Owolabi *et al.*, 2020; Thapa Karki and Xheneti, 2018); micro-companies (Zainol *et al.*, 2017, 2018); and business development (González Sánchez, 2018; Kuschel *et al.*, 2017; Langevang, 2017; Ngoasong and

Category	Authors
Business skills Challenges	Goopthu and Chakravarty (2018), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2018) Al-Dajani <i>et al.</i> (2019a, b), Alecchi (2020), Altan-Olcay (2014, 2016), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Fis <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2019), Hernandez <i>et al.</i> (2012), Kakabadse <i>et al.</i> (2018), Kuschel <i>et al.</i> (2017), Langevang (2017), Langevang <i>et al.</i> (2018), Lindvert <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2019), Lock and Lawton Smith (2016), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Mathew (2019), Maziriri <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mehtap <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ng and Fu (2018), Ngoasong and Kimbu (2019), Olu-Owolabi <i>et al.</i> (2020), Ramadani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Roessingh and Nuijten (2012), Solanki (2019), Thapa Karki <i>et al.</i> (2020), Ukanwa <i>et al.</i> (2018), Vershinina <i>et al.</i> (2020), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2016, 2017b), Xheneti <i>et al.</i> (2019), Xiong <i>et al.</i> (2018), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Concepts	Goopthu and Chakravarty (2018), Onyusheva and Meyer (2020), Tlaiss and Kauser (2019)
Decision-making	Kakabadse <i>et al.</i> (2018) González Sánchez (2018), Osei and Zhuang (2020), Siringi (2011)
Economic development	
Entrepreneurial characteristics	Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum (2018), Mehtap <i>et al.</i> (2019), Onalan and Magda (2020)
Entrepreneurial motivations	Cavada <i>et al.</i> (2017), Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum (2018), Hernandez <i>et al.</i> (2012), Langevang (2017), Mandongwe and Jaravaza (2020), Marques <i>et al.</i> (2017), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Mehtap <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ng and Fu (2018), Ramadani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Roessingh and Nuijten (2012), Solanki (2019), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2016), Xheneti <i>et al.</i> (2019)
Entrepreneurial performance	Alene (2020), Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Brixiová <i>et al.</i> (2020), Ghani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Gusti Ayu Purnamawati <i>et al.</i> (2020), Kimosop <i>et al.</i> (2016), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Muniady <i>et al.</i> (2015), Rekarti <i>et al.</i> (2019), Reza <i>et al.</i> (2020), Roomi (2013), Setini <i>et al.</i> (2020), Shakeel <i>et al.</i> (2020), Sihotang <i>et al.</i> (2020), Vasan (2020), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2017a, 2018), Xiong <i>et al.</i> (2018), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Entrepreneurial success	Amrita <i>et al.</i> (2018), Baranik <i>et al.</i> (2018), Batool and Ullah (2017), Sen (2018), Shakeel <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Fostering entrepreneurship	Altan-Olcay (2016), Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Caputo <i>et al.</i> (2016), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Ennis (2019), Ghani <i>et al.</i> (2014), Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum (2018), Jabeen and Faisal (2018), Mathew (2019), Maziriri <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mbaruku and Mutalemwa (2015), Minimol (2020), Thapa Karki <i>et al.</i> (2020), Thapa Karki and Xheneti (2018), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Gender	Al-Dajani <i>et al.</i> (2019a, b), Altan-Olcay (2014), Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Baranik <i>et al.</i> (2018), Ennis (2019), Fis <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2017), Jaim (2021), Olu-Owolabi <i>et al.</i> (2020), Selamat and Endut (2020), Siringi (2011), Xheneti <i>et al.</i> (2019)
Media speeches	Owalla and Al Ghafri (2020)
Women's role	Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2019)

Table 2.
Thematic categories of
research objectives and
associated authors

Kimbu, 2019; Osei and Zhuang, 2020; Roomi, 2013). The third category presents theoretical reflections on female entrepreneurship ($n = 22$), including six papers focusing on entrepreneurs' reflections in micro, small and medium-sized companies (Alene, 2020; Amrita *et al.*, 2018; Gundry *et al.*, 2014; Marques *et al.*, 2017; Ramadani *et al.*, 2013; Siringi, 2011). Reflections on gender appear in fourth place. The most discussed sub-themes include the roles associated with each gender (Altan-Olcay, 2014; Hernandez *et al.*, 2012; Kuschel *et al.*, 2017; Selamat and Endut, 2020; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2019) and female empowerment (Gusti Ayu Purnamawati *et al.*, 2020; Martiana *et al.*, 2018; Thapa Karki and Xheneti, 2018).

The first four themes (challenges, entrepreneurial performance, entrepreneurship and gender) generated 49% of the total records ($n = 103$). Almost half of the studies on female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing contexts use these four themes to understand the empirical context. The remaining 51% encompass 10 different themes: business

Figure 3.
Treemap chart for the
classification of the
theoretical approaches
regarding female
entrepreneurs in
emerging and
developing countries



competence ($n = 19$); fostering entrepreneurship ($n = 15$); capital ($n = 14$); entrepreneurial motivations ($n = 14$); entrepreneurial characteristics ($n = 12$); institutionalism ($n = 8$); networks ($n = 5$); business success ($n = 5$); entrepreneurial orientation ($n = 3$); and others ($n = 14$). Studies addressing business competence reflect on different areas, including marketing (Kimosop *et al.*, 2016; Sihotang *et al.*, 2020; Welsh *et al.*, 2017a), entrepreneurial creativity (Batool and Ullah, 2017; Langevang, 2017) and innovation (Brixiová *et al.*, 2020; Osei and Zhuang, 2020), among others.

Studies emphasizing fostering entrepreneurship in the theoretical framework mainly address the relevance of several initiatives to promote entrepreneurship (Alecchi, 2020; Cooke and Xiao, 2021; Mbaruku and Mutalemwa, 2015; Ramadani *et al.*, 2013; Zainol *et al.*, 2017) and influence public policies (Ghani *et al.*, 2014; Hernandez *et al.*, 2012). Studies on capital emphasize various aspects, including financial (Rekarti *et al.*, 2019) spiritual (Rekarti *et al.*, 2019), human (Rekarti *et al.*, 2019; Reza *et al.*, 2020; Zainol *et al.*, 2017, 2018) and social (Baranik *et al.*, 2018; Lindvert *et al.*, 2017; Muniady *et al.*, 2015; Osei and Zhuang, 2020; Roomi, 2013; Setini *et al.*, 2020). Research addressing entrepreneurial motivations discusses push and pull factors (Batool and Ullah, 2017; Cavada *et al.*, 2017) and the influence of family on business creation (Caputo *et al.*, 2016; Welsh *et al.*, 2018), among several diffuse factors.

Articles emphasizing entrepreneurial characteristics focus on factors such as business leadership (Cooke and Xiao, 2021; Kakabadse *et al.*, 2018; Tlaiss and Kausar, 2019). Scholars have also explored other characteristics, including psychological and cognitive traits (Batool and Ullah, 2017) and entrepreneurial profile (Marques *et al.*, 2017). Institutionalism comes next, with six articles (Alecchi, 2020; Langevang *et al.*, 2018; Lock and Lawton Smith, 2016; Thapa Karki *et al.*, 2020; Vershinina *et al.*, 2020; Xiong *et al.*, 2018). The networks category comprises five articles, including those related to social embeddedness (Alecchi, 2020; Kuschel *et al.*, 2017; Ngoasong and Kimbu, 2019; Vershinina *et al.*, 2020; Welsh *et al.*, 2017b). Although business success may fall within another category, e.g. performance, five papers specifically discussing factors associated with the success of women's businesses stood out (Amrita *et al.*, 2018; Baranik *et al.*, 2018; Batool and Ullah, 2017; Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum, 2018; Sen, 2018); we therefore assigned it as another theme. Three articles

focused on entrepreneurial orientation (Gundry *et al.*, 2014; Gusti Ayu Purnamawati *et al.*, 2020; Mandongwe and Jaravaza, 2020). Finally, the “others” category incorporates theoretical themes in isolation, including feminist theory (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2019) and ecological modernization theory (Maziriri *et al.*, 2019), among others. Table 3 details these groupings.

RQ3: What are the main methodological approaches adopted?

Figure 4 shows the treemap chart for methodological approaches. Each article generated a record formed by combining two fundamental categories: the methodological strategy (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed); and the method used.

Among the methodological strategies, qualitative is the most used [49% of articles ($n = 38$), compared to 36% ($n = 28$) and 10% ($n = 8$) for quantitative and mixed approaches, respectively]. Among the qualitative studies, some features stand out. First, in 14 papers, it was not possible to identify the method used. Several aspects may have contributed to this non-identification, including the methodological design itself. Following Yin (2018), we subdivided the methodological section into strategy and method to classify articles. However, such a subdivision may not have been an object of interest for the articles’ authors. For instance, some seem to understand qualitative study as a method. Although this does not symbolize a limitation of the studies, it suggests the need for greater clarity regarding the methodological procedures used. The case study stands out among the qualitative studies, with authors clearly emphasizing this method ($n = 7$). Four of these papers used more than one instrument for data collection. The other qualitative methods most used are: document analysis ($n = 5$); interpretive approach ($n = 2$); grounded theory ($n = 2$); speech analysis ($n = 1$); observer study ($n = 1$); ethnography ($n = 1$); longitudinal ($n = 1$); feminist research ($n = 1$); historical research ($n = 1$); narrative research ($n = 1$); and sensemaking ($n = 1$).

Among the 28 quantitative studies, the researchers used four fundamental methods: survey; panel analysis; fuzzy analytical hierarchical process; and path analysis. The survey was the most used as the primary research method [86% ($n = 24$)]. Two other studies used panel analysis, both using data secondary to the analysis. Fuzzy analytical hierarchical process and path analysis were represented by one article each. Finally, regarding the principal instrument for collecting evidence, 25 papers used a questionnaire.

Finally, only eight studies used mixed strategies, triangulating quantitative and qualitative methods for data analysis. Some aspects here stand out. First, although the quantitative method is apparent in all articles, the qualitative method is not present in four of them. Second, among the studies detailing the qualitative method used, three use the case study, and one adopts action research. Third, while the questionnaire is the most used quantitative instrument, researchers most often used the semi-structured, in-depth, or structured interview. Fourth, among the eight mixed studies, three initially carried out the qualitative stage and then conducted a survey (Martiana *et al.*, 2018; Ng and Fu, 2018; Sihotang *et al.*, 2020). Table 4 details the strategy (qualitative, quantitative and mixed), the corresponding method and associated authors.

Conclusions

Theoretical implications

This article has several critical theoretical implications. One derives from the categorizations used, through which we can identify concepts fundamental to the study context and potential theoretical gaps. For instance, “female entrepreneurship” is ranked third among the most appropriate theoretical themes in the theoretical framework (RQ2), with 22 records. However, only six sought to reflect on entrepreneurship in micro, small and medium-sized companies (enterprise profiles usually found in emerging and developing contexts).

Category	Authors
Business competence	Batool and Ullah (2017), Brixiová <i>et al.</i> (2020), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2019), Gooptu and Chakravarty (2018), Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Kimosop <i>et al.</i> (2016), Langevang (2017), Minimol (2020), Osei and Zhuang (2020), Sihotang <i>et al.</i> (2020), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2017a), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2018)
Business success	Amrita <i>et al.</i> (2018), Baranik <i>et al.</i> (2018), Batool and Ullah (2017), Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum (2018), Sen (2018)
Capital	Baranik <i>et al.</i> (2018), Lindvert <i>et al.</i> (2017), Muniady <i>et al.</i> (2015), Osei and Zhuang (2020), Rekarti <i>et al.</i> (2019), Reza <i>et al.</i> (2020), Roomi (2013), Setini <i>et al.</i> (2020), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2018)
Challenges	Al-Dajani <i>et al.</i> (2019a, b), Alecchi (2020), Alene (2020), Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Brixiová <i>et al.</i> (2020), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Fis <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2017), Jaim (2021), Kuschel <i>et al.</i> (2017), Lindvert <i>et al.</i> (2017), Marques <i>et al.</i> (2017), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Mathew (2019), Roomi (2013), Selamat and Endut (2020), Sen (2018), Shakeel <i>et al.</i> (2020), Solanki (2019), Tlaiss and Kauser (2019), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2016, 2017b, 2018), Xheneti <i>et al.</i> (2019), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Entrepreneurial characteristics	Batool and Ullah (2017), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2017), Kakabadse <i>et al.</i> (2018), Marques <i>et al.</i> (2017), Ramadanani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Reza <i>et al.</i> (2020), Shakeel <i>et al.</i> (2020), Tlaiss and Kauser (2019), Vasan (2020)
Entrepreneurial motivations	Alene (2020), Batool and Ullah (2017), Cavada <i>et al.</i> (2017), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2019), Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum (2018), Marques <i>et al.</i> (2017), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Ng and Fu (2018), Solanki (2019), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Entrepreneurial orientation	Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Gusti Ayu Purnamawati <i>et al.</i> (2020), Mandongwe and Jaravaza (2020)
Entrepreneurial performance	Alene (2020), Altan-Olcay (2014), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Ennis (2019), González Sánchez (2018), Kimosop <i>et al.</i> (2016), Kuschel <i>et al.</i> (2017), Langevang (2017), Maziriri <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mehtap <i>et al.</i> (2019), Muniady <i>et al.</i> (2015), Ngoasong and Kimbu (2019), Olu-Owolabi <i>et al.</i> (2020), Osei and Zhuang (2020), Reza <i>et al.</i> (2020), Roomi (2013), Sen (2018), Shakeel <i>et al.</i> (2020), Sihotang <i>et al.</i> (2020), Thapa Karki and Xheneti (2018), Vasan (2020), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2017a, 2018), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2018)
Entrepreneurship	Al-Dajani <i>et al.</i> (2019a, b), Alene (2020), Altan-Olcay (2016), Amrita <i>et al.</i> (2018), Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Ghani <i>et al.</i> (2013, 2014), Gooptu and Chakravarty (2018), Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Hernandez <i>et al.</i> (2012), Jaim (2021), Kakabadse <i>et al.</i> (2018), Marques <i>et al.</i> (2017), Maziriri <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mehtap <i>et al.</i> (2019), Onalan and Magda (2020), Onyusheva and Meyer (2020), Ramadanani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Roessingh and Nuijten (2012), Roomi (2013), Selamat and Endut (2020), Siringi (2011)
Fostering entrepreneurship	Alecchi (2020), Alene (2020), Altan-Olcay (2016), Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Caputo <i>et al.</i> (2016), Cooke and Xiao (2021), Ghani <i>et al.</i> (2014), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2017), Hendratmi and Sukmaningrum (2018), Hernandez <i>et al.</i> (2012), Jabeen and Faisal (2018), Mbaruku and Mutalemwa (2015), Ramadanani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Gender	Alecchi (2020), Altan-Olcay (2014), Brixiová <i>et al.</i> (2020), Gooptu and Chakravarty (2018), Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Gusti Ayu Purnamawati <i>et al.</i> (2020), Hernandez <i>et al.</i> (2012), Kuschel <i>et al.</i> (2017), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Mathew (2019), Onyusheva and Meyer (2020), Owalla and Al Ghafri (2020), Selamat and Endut (2020), Thapa Karki and Xheneti (2018), Tlaiss and Kauser (2019), Vershinina <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Institutionalism	Alecchi (2020), Langevang <i>et al.</i> (2018), Lock and Lawton Smith (2016), Thapa Karki <i>et al.</i> (2020), Vershinina <i>et al.</i> (2020), Xiong <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Networks	Alecchi (2020), Kuschel <i>et al.</i> (2017), Ngoasong and Kimbu (2019), Vershinina <i>et al.</i> (2020), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2017b)
Others	Altan-Olcay (2014), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2019), Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Gusti Ayu Purnamawati <i>et al.</i> (2020), Lindvert <i>et al.</i> (2019), Mandongwe and Jaravaza (2020), Maziriri <i>et al.</i> (2019), Osei and Zhuang (2020), Siringi (2011), Thapa Karki <i>et al.</i> (2020), Tlaiss and Kauser (2019), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017)

Table 3.
Thematic categories of
the main theoretical
themes and associated
authors

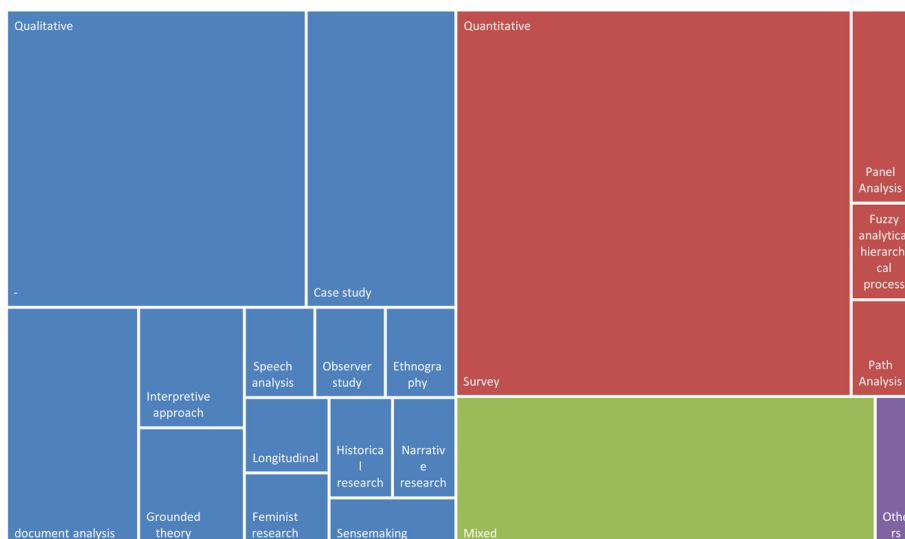


Figure 4. Treemap chart for from the classification of the main methodological approaches to female entrepreneurs in emerging and developing countries

Practical and managerial implications

This article also has relevant practical implications, both for scholars and entrepreneurs. For example, female entrepreneurs can understand the significant challenges related to similar enterprises' trajectories and the most relevant aspects for performance, the essential driving factors and entrepreneurial motivations, among other critical elements.

Implications for capacity building

This article also has implications for capacity building. Because many articles aim to understand women entrepreneurs' challenges, creating education and training programs is essential. Such courses should explore these challenges and how entrepreneurs can potentially overcome them. For instance, only two articles sought to understand female entrepreneurs' challenges in the fragile early-stage business-development period (Lock and Lawton Smith, 2016; Welsh *et al.*, 2017b). Training programs should also emphasize:

- (1) What affects entrepreneurs' performance and the critical elements of business development, including entrepreneurial educational training and sources of support for entrepreneurship, expressed via the role of the state and public and non-governmental business support agencies.
- (2) Courses that touch upon theoretical groups, including entrepreneurial challenges and motivations. Although usually approached in the literature in isolation, both groups are relevant for business training when combined. For instance, it would be worthwhile developing courses addressing challenges usually common to entrepreneurs when starting their ventures, mainly driven by need or opportunity. By developing such courses, entrepreneurs can learn about specific strategies to overcome challenges in both scenarios.
- (3) Although intangible, another essential aspect to consider in such programs is the cultural and social norms that also affect entrepreneurship. Countries such as the US have a culture that encourages entrepreneurship (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor,

Table 4.

Thematic categories of
main methodological
approaches and
associated authors

Methodological strategy	Method	Authors
Qualitative	–	Altan-Olcay (2016), Cavada <i>et al.</i> (2017), Ennis (2019), Gooptu and Chakravarty (2018), Kakabadse <i>et al.</i> (2018), Langevang (2017), Lindvert <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2019), Minimol (2020), Olu-Owolabi <i>et al.</i> (2020), Sen (2018), Siringi (2011), Thapa Karki and Xheneti (2018), Ukanwa <i>et al.</i> (2018), Vershinina <i>et al.</i> (2020), Xiong <i>et al.</i> (2018)
	Case study	Altan-Olcay (2014), Caputo <i>et al.</i> (2016), Langevang <i>et al.</i> (2018), Lock and Lawton Smith (2016), Mehtap <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ngoasong and Kimbu (2019), Rekarti <i>et al.</i> (2019)
	Document analysis	Alecchi (2020), Mathew (2019), Mbaruku and Mutalemwa (2015), Ramadani <i>et al.</i> (2013), Solanki (2019)
	Ethnography	Roessingh and Nuijten (2012)
	Feminist research	Jaim (2021)
	Grounded theory	Kuschel <i>et al.</i> (2017), Maziriri <i>et al.</i> (2019)
	Historical research	Onyusheva and Meyer (2020)
	Interpretive approach	Tlaiss and Kauser (2019), Xheneti <i>et al.</i> (2019)
	Longitudinal	Al-Dajani <i>et al.</i> (2019a, b)
	Narrative research	Selamat and Endut (2020)
	Observer study	Solanki (2019)
	Sensemaking	Thapa Karki <i>et al.</i> (2020)
	Speech analysis	Owalla and Al Ghafri (2020)
	Fuzzy analytical	Amrita <i>et al.</i> (2018)
	hierarchical process	
	Panel analysis	Ghani <i>et al.</i> (2014), González Sánchez (2018)
Quantitative	Path analysis	Hendratni and Sukmaningrum (2018)
	Survey	Alene (2020), Baranik <i>et al.</i> (2018), Batool and Ullah (2017), Brixiová <i>et al.</i> (2020), Gundry <i>et al.</i> (2014), Gusti Ayu Purnamawati <i>et al.</i> (2020), Jabeen and Faisal (2018), Kimosop <i>et al.</i> (2016), Mandongwe and Jaravaza (2020), Marques <i>et al.</i> (2017), Minimol (2020), Muniady <i>et al.</i> (2015), Onalan and Magda (2020), Osei and Zhuang (2020), Reza <i>et al.</i> (2020), Setini <i>et al.</i> (2020), Shakeel <i>et al.</i> (2020), Siringi (2011), Vasan (2020), Welsh <i>et al.</i> (2016, 2017a, b, 2018), Zainol <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2018)
		Azam Roomi and Harrison (2010), Fis <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ghouse <i>et al.</i> (2017, 2019), Martiana <i>et al.</i> (2018), Ng and Fu (2018), Roomi (2013), Sihotang <i>et al.</i> (2020)
Thematic categories of main methodological approaches and associated authors	Mixed	–

2021). However, other countries’ cultures do not promote the risks associated with the creation and operation of businesses, or are masculine in nature.

Although usually applied to potential or actual entrepreneurs, educators at various levels should explore notions of entrepreneurship. Women may have greater difficulty accessing higher education (the level at which such training is usually more common). This study suggests the relevance of teaching entrepreneurship from the infant stage, fostering gradual knowledge in disciplines such as entrepreneurship and finance. Education must also consider the various socioeconomic and regional characteristics, especially in territorially large countries, e.g. Brazil, China and Russia.

Policy implications

Finally, given that “female entrepreneurship continues to be a challenge” (Miranda *et al.*, 2017, p. 66) and women face more challenges than men in setting up businesses (Miranda *et al.*,

2017; Zhang and Zhou, 2019), this article presents policy implications. Public policymakers need to create specific laws that reduce bureaucracy for women's businesses. Such laws can encourage women to develop their businesses and support their initial development. Critical supports include reducing the tax burden and providing access to financial resources. Policymakers can also create women's microcredit, facilitated by laws encouraging the legalization of their enterprises. By legalizing their businesses, women can access the formal market, such as public tenders or sales.

Limitations

This paper is not exempt from limitations. First, the inductive process of categorization adopted may be susceptible to interpretative errors. Second, the methodological classification adopted here between strategy and method represents a criterion that the analyzed articles' authors may not have used. In other words, the authors of these articles may not have considered the division between strategy and method, which is why such authors may not have explored this distinction. Third, this paper analyzed only open-access articles.

Proposed research agenda

Initially, future SLRs could incorporate non-open-access papers, incorporating the quality criteria used here. Moreover, reviews considering COVID-19 and its effects on women entrepreneurship in emerging and developing contexts would also be welcome. In addition, this article advances an extensive research agenda, based on the RQs, detailed in the following sub-sections.

Research objectives. Analyzing the results highlights the relevance of novel study aims. For instance, further studies related to understanding the entrepreneurial challenges associated with the early stage of women's businesses and overcoming them are required. However, only two papers sought to understand these aspects. Moreover, novel studies could aim to understand the challenges related to accessing several types of capital (beyond financial). While there are various studies on the challenges related to financial access, few studies to date have aimed to understand how women access other types of capital (e.g. social and human) considered fundamental to entrepreneurship.

This paper has categorized the articles' aims, inductively grouping them into thematic categories. However, unexplored research opportunities arise in seeking to integrate or associate such categorizations. For example, "challenges" and "entrepreneurial performance" represent the two largest thematic categories (38 and 20 records, respectively). Although "challenges" was the largest categorical group, only four articles sought to understand the specific challenges associated with entrepreneurial performance. The same applies to the association between challenges and entrepreneurial fostering. The literature emphasizes the relevance of fostering female entrepreneurship; however, only six studies sought to understand better the challenges related to entrepreneurial fostering or the role of fostering in overcoming unique challenges.

Significant opportunities for further studies lie in the association between entrepreneurial performance and fostering entrepreneurship. Only one paper sought to investigate the influence of fostering, expressed in the role of entrepreneurial training, on entrepreneurial performance. Novel studies could associate several incentives for female entrepreneurship, simultaneously investigating the relationship with women entrepreneurs' performance. Another still little explored opportunity is the association between performance and entrepreneurial motivations. Only Martiana *et al.* (2018) sought to reflect on the relationship between women entrepreneurs' performance and their motivation for creating their companies. Scholars should therefore examine whether the reason for female entrepreneurs starting their enterprise has a direct relationship with performance.

Further, studies on entrepreneurial motivations go beyond the usually dichotomous dimension (between need and opportunity), highlighting the need for more studies on other factors possibly associated with women starting businesses. Although [Ng and Fu \(2018\)](#) and [Ramadani et al. \(2013\)](#) drew attention to other dimensions, including income, independence, achievement, need for change and the glass-ceiling, novel studies can expand these factors or group them into categories that are more representative of female entrepreneurial reality in emerging and developing countries.

Macro-level studies also represent an opportunity for further studies. Although female entrepreneurship is critical to economic development ([Cardella et al., 2020](#)), no study sought to investigate the influence of female entrepreneurship on emerging and developing countries' economies. The final aspect deserving further investigation is the influence of family on female entrepreneurship. While some studies consider family a challenge that the entrepreneur must overcome ([Welsh et al., 2016](#); [Xiong et al., 2018](#)), others consider family members as a factor that affects entrepreneurial performance. Because women still need to deal with work–family conflicts, better understanding of the family's role in female enterprises remains a relevant research area, which should address questions such as: under what conditions family exerts a positive or negative influence; how family members contribute to the creation and development of businesses; and what influence family has on entrepreneurial motivation.

Theoretical approaches. The theoretical framework of a representative part of the studies encompasses reflections on women entrepreneurs' challenges. Novel studies, including a SLR, could group such challenges into multilevel categories, facilitating scholars and entrepreneurs to identify those most relevant. For instance, some challenges may be internal or related to the entrepreneur's agency, e.g. human capital and work–family balance, while others may be external, with no possibility of control by the entrepreneur, e.g. culture, pandemics, or economic vulnerability ([Cooke and Xiao, 2021](#); [Ghouse et al., 2017](#); [Zainol et al., 2017](#)).

While scholars emphasize various thematic associations, they explore others less, highlighting the importance of further investigation. For example, several authors emphasize the importance of networks for entrepreneurial performance ([Moreira et al., 2019](#); [Roos, 2019](#)). However, only two articles sought to associate both themes in understanding the female entrepreneurial phenomenon in the investigated context ([Kuschel et al., 2017](#); [Ngoasong and Kimbu, 2019](#)). Recent studies have also drawn attention to the relevance of entrepreneurial orientation ([Jiang et al., 2018](#); [Luu and Ngo, 2019](#)); however, regarding female entrepreneurship in emerging and developing contexts, few employ this construct. Novel studies should investigate the influence of the specific attributes of entrepreneurial orientation (innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking) on female entrepreneurship.

The lack of research associating the different dimensions of capital (human, social and entrepreneurial) with factors that encourage entrepreneurship is noteworthy. Of the 77 articles, only [Zainol et al. \(2017\)](#) associated the literature on human capital and fostering entrepreneurship in the theoretical framework, emphasizing development programs and public policies. Novel studies should investigate whether and how the various types of capital are essential for fostering female entrepreneurship. The same is true for the association between capital and business success; which was addressed only by [Baranik et al. \(2018\)](#). Novel studies can advance such associations, investigating, through quantitative research, the causal association between capital and female entrepreneurial success. Here, it is noteworthy that the conception of success can vary among women. Therefore, novel studies should aim to better understand this concept, going beyond the essentially economic and rational dimensions usually applied to male enterprises.

Another theoretical gap is the lack of studies seeking to understand the empirical phenomenon, considering the theoretical association between female entrepreneurship, on

the one hand and success or capital or entrepreneurial orientation, on the other. For instance, only Roomi (2013) links female entrepreneurship and capital and only Gundry *et al.* (2014) link female entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation. For instance, novel studies could investigate whether and how entrepreneurial attributes affect female entrepreneurs, or even which types of capital influence (and how) female enterprises' creation and trajectory in emerging and developing contexts. Here, several questions remain unanswered, including which entrepreneurial attributes are most relevant to women entrepreneurs (innovativeness, proactivity or risk-taking), how each attribute impacts entrepreneurial motivations and companies' creation and development in their distinct stages, and which attributes are more relevant for each entrepreneurial stage.

Another opportunity relates to studies linking gender and entrepreneurial motivation, or gender and entrepreneurial orientation. Only one article incorporated both themes in their theoretical framework (Martiana *et al.*, 2018). Novel studies can explore whether a relationship exists between gender and the motivation to enter entrepreneurship, whether entrepreneurial attributes (innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking) differ by gender, whether male entrepreneurs would be riskier than women, or vice versa, and whether women can be more innovative or proactive than men.

Methodological approaches. Regarding the method, some qualitative studies still provide little detail on the procedures used in the field, limiting the possibility of replicating such studies. This observation is not related to opportunities specifically, but rather to the search for higher quality studies. In this regard, data triangulation, a test associated with construct validity in case studies, is also relevant. However, of the 38 qualitative studies, only 37% ($n = 14$) used more than one data-collection instrument source to enable triangulation.

Regarding methodological opportunities, because some articles aim to understand the notion of female entrepreneurial success, scholars should undertake more phenomenological studies. However, no article used phenomenology as a research method. Regarding the concept of success, studies could explore several configurations or patterns of factors that lead to female entrepreneurship success using the configurational approach of qualitative comparative analysis (Rihoux, 2006; Schneider and Wagemann, 2010). Scholars could thus identify which multiple independent variables are associated with female entrepreneurs' performance in emerging and developing contexts.

Non-traditional methods are still encouraged regarding qualitative studies, such as speech analysis, observer study, ethnography, feminist research, historical research, narrative research and sensemaking. For instance, the low incidence of one method is noteworthy (feminist research). This method is based on the premise that methodological and other relationships embed power relationships that, although they may affect research results, scholars usually ignore (Yin, 2015); it is an appropriate method for studying power relations or the challenges related to patriarchal restrictions. Regarding quantitative studies, unusual methods, such as panel analysis (Owalla and Al Ghafri, 2020), fuzzy analytical hierarchical process and path analysis, could produce novel interpretations of the phenomena. Finally, scholars must undertake more mixed studies (only eight works employed such a strategy). Novel studies could combine quantitative and qualitative methods, triangulating findings from complementary methods.

Final remarks

As detailed above, this paper has several implications (theoretical, practical, managerial, capacity building and policy). Notably, this article has identified and grouped several thematic categories of objectives, theoretical approaches and methods employed. Thus, it identifies several theoretical-empirical research gaps, resulting in an extensive agenda for future research.

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