

THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN PROMOTING ECONOMIC GROWTH AMONG WOMEN IN THE O.R. TAMBO REGION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of entrepreneurship in promoting economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region of South Africa. Despite the region's rich economic potential, women in this area face significant barriers to economic participation and empowerment. This research explores the impact of entrepreneurship on women's economic growth, including obstacles to their entrepreneurship endeavours. A quantitative approach is used, utilising quantitative data from surveys, and questionnaire rating scales. The study finds that entrepreneurship does not improve women's economic growth, income, and job creation in the region in the O.R. Tambo region due to obstacles faced by the women entrepreneurs. The study recommends targeted interventions to support women entrepreneurs, including training programmes, mentorship initiatives, and access to capital. By promoting entrepreneurship among women in the O.R. Tambo region, this research aims to contribute to sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, and gender equality.

Keywords: New Businesses, Job Creation, Economic Stability, Women, Entrepreneurship

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has become a well-known topic among stakeholders globally (Meyer, 2024). National and international researchers and policymakers consider entrepreneurship a prominent link to increasing sustainable global economic development and growth. This is because entrepreneurship is vital in fostering job growth and maintaining economic stability, particularly within the business industry (Adaga et al., 2024; Decker & Haltiwanger, 2023; Odeyemi et al., 2024).

Young women in South Africa express frustration. South Africa has spent thirty years undermining the aspirations of capable young individuals in a society where 50 per cent are employed, and 66 per cent are unemployed (Mabandla, 2024). Inequality and poverty are interconnected in South Africa, with each adversely affecting the other. As Masha (2022) emphasises, the perception of fairness contradicts evidence indicating that South Africa ranks among the most inequitable and unequal societies globally.

There are signs that South Africa has failed to address the scourge of poverty, unemployment, and inequality that plagues it (Qithi & Mkhize, 2023). Currently, in South Africa, there is a huge statistical discrepancy among the youth, and unemployment is rife among young women, the poorest economic groups, and black Africans. This is the shocking yet sad reality of the current South African statistics. The hope of the youth who are supposed to be the future of this country is slowly diminishing (Ubisi, 2023).

As stated by Matyana and Thusi (2023), promoting entrepreneurship applies explicitly to developing countries such as South Africa, where poverty and high unemployment rates are extensive. Thus, as cited by Statistics South Africa (2024), there is substantial room for improvement in entrepreneurship development, which could directly contribute to enhanced economic growth and prosperity, especially for women who have been marginalised from the entrepreneurship field for a long time.

A study by Zikhali et al. (2023) reveals that female entrepreneurs are acknowledged as contributors to economic growth and development, yet they face various constraints that hinder their success, including societal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes and limit their opportunities. When women are not engaged in economic activities, social ills can arise (Tran & Hanaček, 2023), not to mention becoming vulnerable to domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and other forms of gender-based violence (Mellaret al., 2024).

Our study is grounded on the feminist economics theory which explores gender inequality and barriers women face in achieving economic empowerment (Qadri & Yan, 2023). The study aims to investigate the impact of entrepreneurship on promoting economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region. Additionally, the study seeks to explore the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in the region. The research also aims to provide recommendations for policymakers, organisations, and stakeholders to support and develop women's entrepreneurship in the region, ultimately contributing to the economic growth and development of the O.R. Tambo region. The next part deals with this study's literature review.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The O. R. Tambo region, a blend of urban and rural settings, presents unique challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs. This literature review synthesises recent scholarly works to identify key factors influencing women's entrepreneurship in this region. The review aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for developing targeted support mechanisms and policies to enhance the role of women entrepreneurs in the economic growth of the O.R. Tambo Region.

2.1 Economic contributions of women entrepreneurship

Ngumbela (2023) avers that women entrepreneurs play a vital role in local economic development by leveraging their entrepreneurial potential. To promote prosperity and welfare, enterprises operated by women have been identified as the latest growth drivers of economies in emerging nations (Egere et al., 2024). Research indicates that women's entrepreneurship is a critical driver of economic growth worldwide, contributing to job creation (Daraojimba et al., 2023; Gamede, 2023; Moloto & Muchie, 2023), poverty reduction, and improved living standards (Johnson & Adebajo, 2023).

According to Shrivastava (2023), entrepreneurs play a crucial role in economic development by creating new businesses and generating employment opportunities for individuals. Small businesses, which are often started and managed by entrepreneurs, are key drivers of job creation because they tend to be more labour-intensive and employ a higher proportion of local workers (Bobek et al., 2023). Unlike large corporations, which may outsource jobs to other regions or countries, small businesses hire locally, providing employment opportunities for people in their communities (Charles & Ochieng, 2023). This positively impacts the local economy as new jobs increase domestic tax revenue (Nugroho & Numata, 2022) and spending within the community (Nugroho & Numata, 2022). In addition to creating jobs, entrepreneurship encourages self-employment and promotes a culture of risk-taking, which can lead to job creation for individuals and others in the community (Ratten, 2023).

To allow logical analysis and conclusions to be made based on the relationships derived from the related variables, this study, for quantitative data, a deductive logic was used, whereby the researchers commenced with null hypotheses and then collected data to determine whether or not empirical evidence provided support

for the hypotheses (Bartley & Hashemi, 2024). Thus, statistical analysis was conducted under significant testing where the researchers posed a null hypothesis and attempted to reject that hypothesis (Borenstein, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis was developed.

H₀: Entrepreneurship does not promote economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region

2.2 Obstacles and social challenges among female entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs face numerous barriers, including limited access to financing, insufficient business skills, and socio-cultural constraints (Manasoe et al., 2023). These barriers are significant in the global context, as they contribute to economic growth, family well-being, empowerment, and meaningful integration into society (Friedson-Ridenour & Pierotti, 2019). Female entrepreneurs are considered "untapped sources of economic growth" (Vossenber, 2013, p.1) by promoting economic growth and alleviating poverty ((Mensah, 2023). However, contextual factors, including social, economic, structural, and cultural factors, both restrict and facilitate their entrepreneurial endeavours (Vracheva & Stoyneva, 2020).

Female entrepreneurs often face greater obstacles than men, such as conflicts between work and family and resource access difficulties. As South Africa enters its fourth decade of democracy, it faces numerous challenges that jeopardise the stability of the social structure and its management of economic growth and development (Masha, 2024).

South Africa's extreme patriarchal expectations have led to female entrepreneurs often lagging behind their male counterparts in the field of entrepreneurship (Snellman & Solal, 2023). Female entrepreneurs face more obstacles due to stereotypes, social norms, and cultural factors, leading to discrimination and heightened scrutiny when they apply for funding. Research indicates that women entrepreneurs often struggle to secure loans and investments due to systemic biases within financial institutions. For instance, women are frequently perceived as less creditworthy than their male counterparts, leading to higher rejection rates for loan applications (Christodoulou, 2024). This financial discrimination is compounded by a lack of collateral, which is often a requirement for securing loans, particularly in developing countries (Khan, 2024) and in underdeveloped economies like the Eastern Cape Province. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs tend to rely more on personal savings and informal funding sources, which limits their ability to scale their businesses effectively (Otieno, 2023).

While existing research on entrepreneurship and economic development has identified key factors that empower women economically, this region faces unique challenges and opportunities. Derera and Mensah (2023) highlight the scarcity of research on women entrepreneurs in South Africa, pointing to a gap in understanding the unique challenges and needs of women entrepreneurs across different industries. There is a paucity of studies that have specifically investigated the role of entrepreneurship in promoting economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region, highlighting the need for targeted research and interventions to address regional disparities and promote inclusive economic growth. Thus, a knowledge gap regarding the specific context of the O.R. Tambo region necessitates this study.

The O. R. Tambo region, a blend of urban and rural settings, presents unique challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs. This literature review synthesises recent scholarly works to identify key factors influencing women's entrepreneurship in this region. The review aims to provide a comprehensive foundation for developing targeted support mechanisms and policies to enhance the role of women entrepreneurs in the economic growth of the O.R. Tambo Region. Therefore,

H₀: Women entrepreneurs in the O.R. Tambo region do not face socio-economic obstacles.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a quantitative research method, utilising positivism, a key empirical paradigm (Aguzzoli et al., 2024). The study used a purposive sampling technique, selecting respondents based on their ability to provide information about the investigated phenomenon, since they were engaged in entrepreneurship. The sample size was determined based on the study's deductive nature, requiring large samples for generalisation (Strydom, 2024). 50 female entrepreneurs were sampled.

Data were collected through closed-ended questionnaires, allowing researchers to act as objective observers (Maredza et al., 2024). The questionnaires proved to be a quicker (Nieuwenhuis, 2025), and cost-effective method of data collection, utilising email (Struwig & Stead, 2022) and self-administered questionnaires (Anakpo & Mishi, 2024). Data were analysed using SPSS and displayed graphically through bar charts, graphs, and tables.

Ethical considerations were taken into account, with an ethics clearance certificate obtained from Walter Sisulu University before data collection (Sefotho, 2024). All respondents were made to sign an informed consent form, assured of their confidentiality (Mishi, 2024), and informed of their right to terminate their participation without penalty (Hammersley, 2021).

4. RESULTS

This study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth among female entrepreneurs in the O.R. Tambo region. The research aims to test the null hypothesis that entrepreneurship does promote economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region. Section A of the questionnaire was based on the study's demographics whereby 50 female entrepreneurs were sampled. Section B tested if entrepreneurship contributes to economic growth and Section C was to test if there were any obstacles to female entrepreneurship. Results from Section A reveal that 46% of female entrepreneurs are involved in formal business while 56% are in informal businesses.

A chi-squared test was performed to determine if there was a significant association between the responses to the questions in section B of the survey. The chi-square statistic was 62.45. This value represents the test statistic calculated from the observed and expected frequencies. The P-value is 2.96×10^{-6} . This (p-value) indicates the probability of observing the data assuming the null hypothesis is true. A very small p-value suggests strong evidence against the null hypothesis. The degree of freedom is 20. This value is calculated based on the number of categories minus one for each variable. The expected frequencies for each category are provided, showing the values that would be expected if there were no associations between the variables. A decision was reached in terms of the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no significant association between the variables.

Since the p-value (2.96×10^{-6}) is significantly lower than the significance threshold (usually 0.05), the null hypothesis "Entrepreneurship promotes economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region" is rejected. This indicates a significant association between the responses to the questions in Section B. The alternative hypothesis (H1, "Entrepreneurship does not promote economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region") is accepted.

Based on the results of the Chi-Square test, we can draw the following conclusion:

Chi-Square Statistic: 156.87

P-Value: 1.7×10^{-11}

Degrees of Freedom: 56

The p-value is extremely small (1.7×10^{-11}), which is much lower than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the probability of observing the given responses by chance (under the null hypothesis) is extremely low. As a result, we reject the null hypothesis. Thus, we accept the alternative hypothesis that women entrepreneurs in the O.R. Tambo region face socio-economic obstacle

This provides strong evidence to suggest that women entrepreneurs in the O.R. Tambo region face socio-economic obstacles. As seen in Figure 1 below, the Chi-Square statistic further reinforces this conclusion, as it indicates a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies of responses across the various survey questions, supporting the idea that socio-economic challenges affect women entrepreneurs in the region. Therefore, the data support the hypothesis that "Women entrepreneurs in the O.R. Tambo region face socio-economic obstacles."

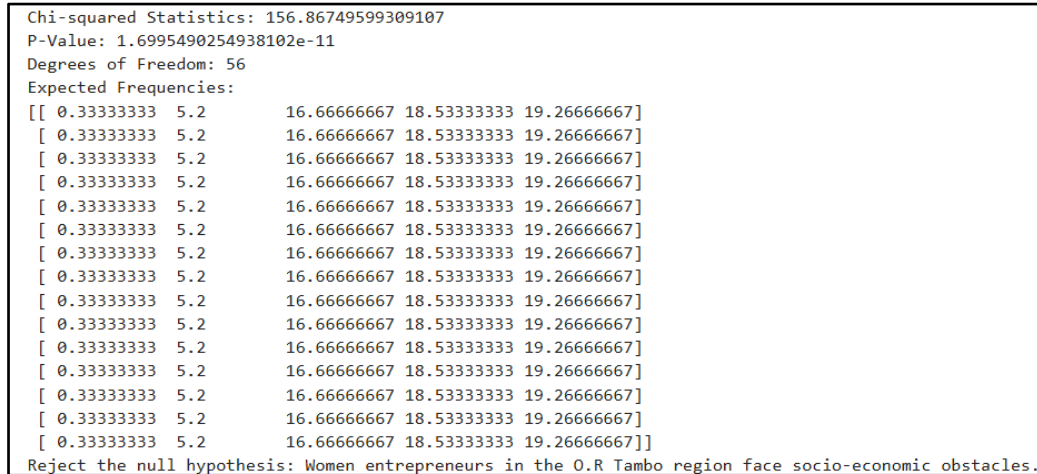


FIGURE 1
CHI-SQUARE STATISTICS

The distribution shows the sentiment per question based on the number of responses to each question, giving an idea of where respondents are leaning towards. The allocation of section B is illustrated in Figure 2 as follows.

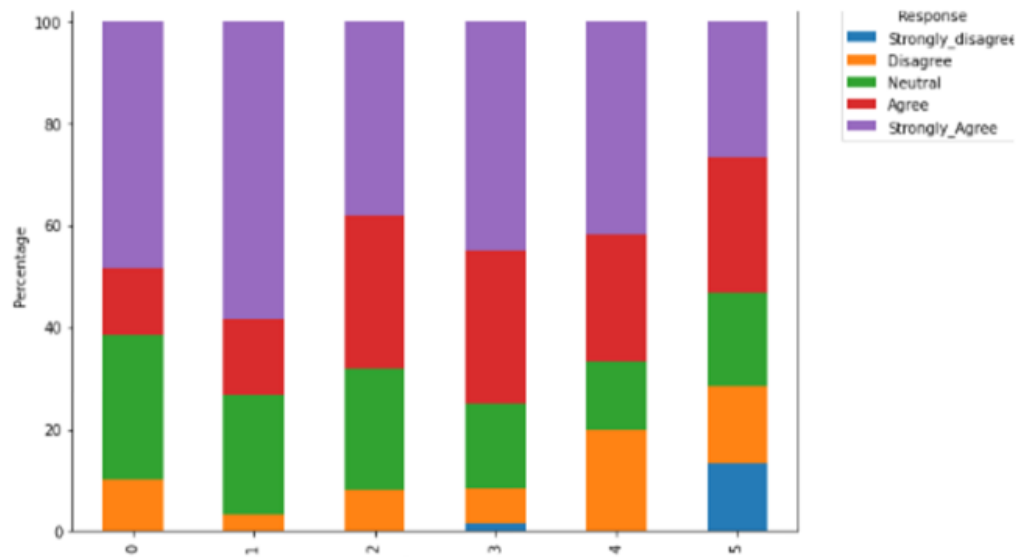


FIGURE 2
RESPONSE DISTRIBUTION B

From the survey data, one immediately sees that respondents are responding positively to the trend that female entrepreneurship aids in economic development as seen in Figure 3 below.

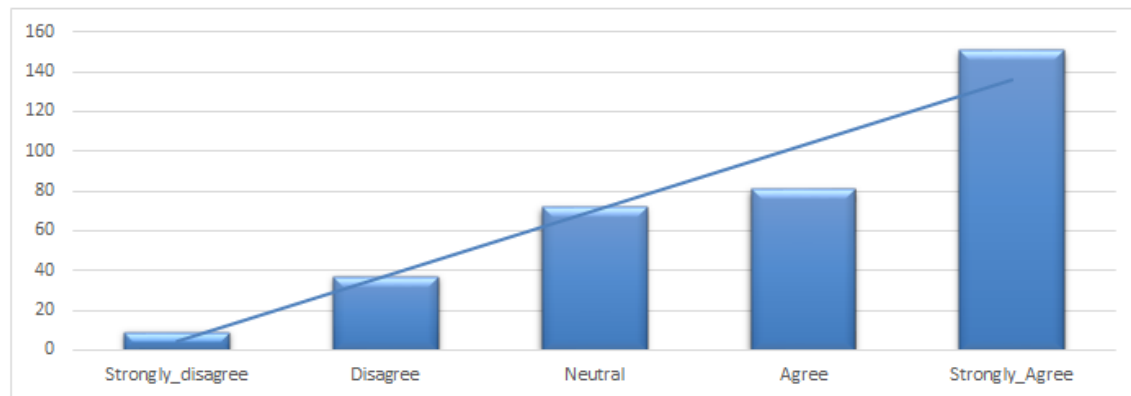


FIGURE 3
FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH

The study investigated obstacles faced by women in promoting economic growth through entrepreneurship, focusing on Section C (Obstacles) and distributing it as seen in Figure 4 below.

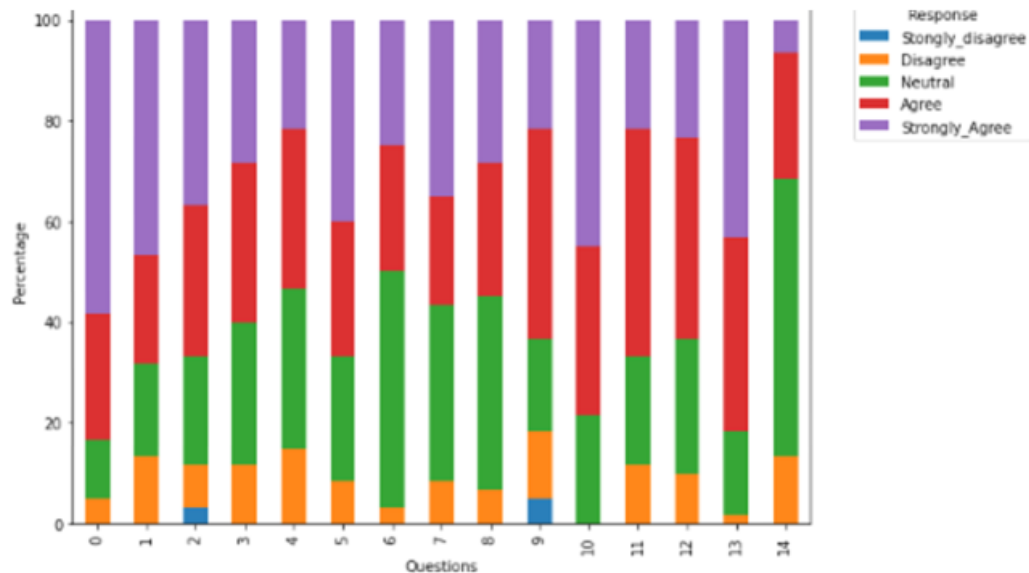


FIGURE 4
RESPONSE DISTRIBUTION FOR SECTION C

Survey data indicates that obstacles faced by women in entrepreneurship are a significant driving factor, with some respondents feeling less strongly about this issue as seen in Figure 5 below.

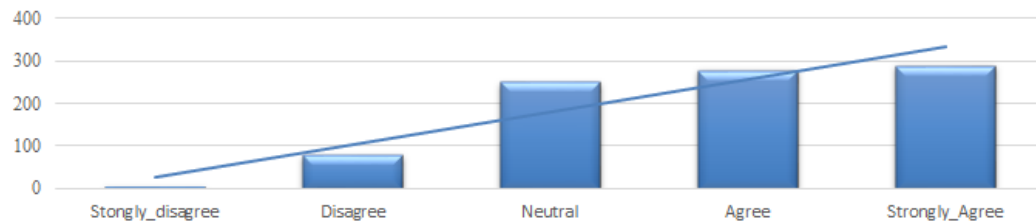


FIGURE 5
OBSTACLES BY WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

4.1 Comparative analysis- Section B vs Section C

The Spearman correlation analysis results between Section B (Entrepreneurship Perception) and Section C (Obstacles) are presented, based on correlation coefficients and p-values. The study found a perfect positive correlation between strongly disagree and strongly disagree, suggesting that respondents tend to disagree when strongly disagree. However, the correlation between strongly disagree and neutral was weakly negative, suggesting a slight tendency to disagree. The correlation between strongly disagree and agree was strongly negative, suggesting less likely to strongly disagree. The correlation between strongly disagree and strongly agree was moderately positive, but not statistically significant. The summary of other correlations ranged from nan to 0.4, with a strong positive correlation at 0.77 but not statistically significant.

The study found a clear correlation between respondents' views on entrepreneurship and obstacles faced by women in the O.R. Tambo region. However, weak correlations with high p-values suggest a non-significant relationship, possibly due to the complexity of the relationship. Further investigation may be needed with a larger sample size or different methodologies to draw more definitive conclusions. Figure 6 below is an interpretation of the regression results between Section B (Entrepreneurship Perception) and Section C (Obstacles).

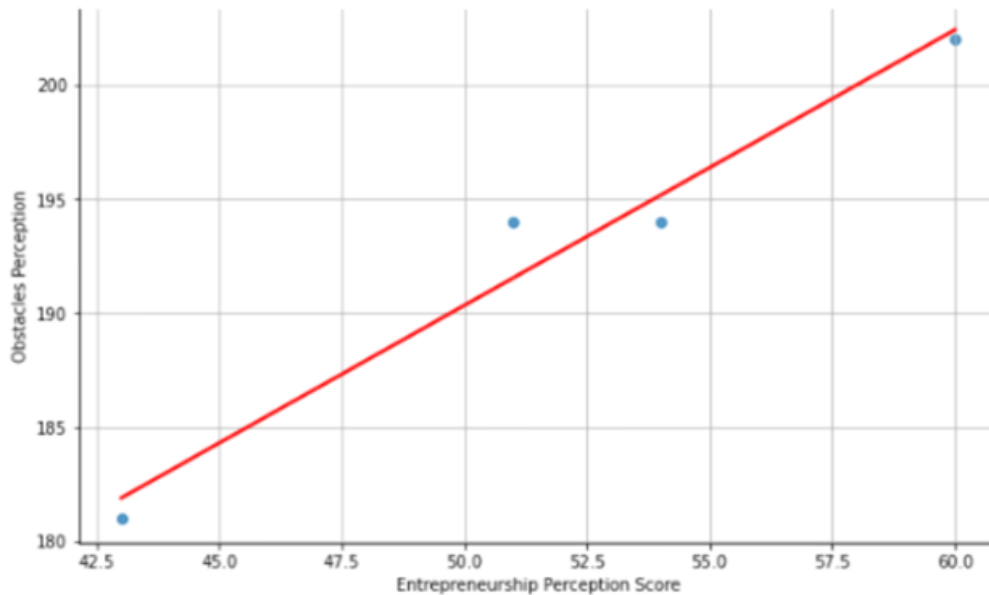


FIGURE 6 ENTREPRENEURSHIP PERCEPTION VS OBSTACLES

To interpret the regression results between Section B (Entrepreneurship Perception) and Section C (Obstacles), we break down the key components of the output. The regression output reveals a model that predicts obstacles perception based on entrepreneurship perception from Spearman. The model fits well, explaining 96.3% of the variance in obstacle perception. The F-statistic tests the model's significance, and the entrepreneurship perception coefficient indicates a significant relationship. However, the small sample size may affect the analysis's reliability. The regression analysis shows a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurship perception and obstacles perception, but the small sample size raises validity concerns and requires further investigation. This study's overall sentiments are seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Overall sentiments

Section	Conclusion
Section B: Entrepreneurship and economic growth	Women entrepreneurship does not drive economic growth
Section C: Obstacles	Women do face more obstacles than men in entrepreneurship, but some people may not feel as strongly about it

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As seen in the findings, women play a part in the economic development of SA through entrepreneurship. Ngumbela (2023) claims that women entrepreneurs boost local economies by leveraging their potential. Women-owned businesses are the latest growth drivers of emerging economies (Egere et al., 2024). Research shows that women's entrepreneurship drives global economic growth by creating jobs, reducing poverty, and improving living standards (Moloto & Muchie, 2023).

Entrepreneurs boost economic growth by starting new businesses and creating jobs, according to Shrivastava (2023). Small businesses, often started and managed by entrepreneurs, create jobs because they are more labour-intensive and employ more local workers (Bobek et al., 2023). In contrast to large corporations, small businesses hire locally, creating jobs for residents (Charles & Ochieng, 2023). New jobs boost domestic tax revenue and community spending (Nugroho & Numata, 2022). Entrepreneurship fosters self-employment and risk-taking, which can create jobs for individuals and the community (Ratten, 2023).

Women entrepreneurs face many challenges. Financial, business, and cultural barriers hinder female entrepreneurs (Manasoe et al., 2023). These barriers affect economic growth, family well-being, empowerment, and meaningful social integration (Friedson-Ridenour & Pierotti, 2019). Women entrepreneurs are "untapped sources of economic growth" (Vossenbergh, 2013, p.1) because they reduce poverty (Mensah, 2023). However, social, economic, structural, and cultural factors limit and enable their entrepreneurship (Vracheva & Stoyneva, 2020). The results in this section are consistent with results from Klaa (2024), as seen below.

African countries have been promoting women's status and involvement in development processes, but policies have varied across the continent. Recognising the constructive roles African women play in sustainable economic development is crucial. Many governments have implemented programmes to support entrepreneurship ventures, but these programmes have limited impact and scope and often disregard gender equality. Klaa's (2024) study assesses the role of African women in economic development, particularly in entrepreneurial ventures. The study highlights the constraints faced by women in starting, operating, and expanding businesses, indicating the need for appropriate policies and procedures to strengthen women's inclusion in the business world. Klaa's (2024) study underscores the need for inclusive policies and procedures to ensure women's participation in the business world.

Work-family conflicts and resource access issues plague women entrepreneurs more than men. In its fourth decade of democracy, South Africa faces many challenges that threaten social stability and economic growth (Masha, 2024). A financial system that requires collateral and track records makes financing new entrepreneurs difficult (Khan, 2024).

Male and female entrepreneurship is debated, but most authors agree that stereotypes, social norms, and cultural factors make female entrepreneurs more vulnerable to discrimination and scrutiny (Kawai et al., 2023). Women are starting businesses in record numbers, but they face many obstacles (Azis, 2023; Moral, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023). In underdeveloped economies like Eastern Cape Province, women suffer the most.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Seeing that this study's results indicate that entrepreneurship does not promote the economic development of female entrepreneurs in the O.R. Tambo region, there is a need to review the obstacles behind this and find a remedy to solve this issue. One of the solutions would be to boost efforts to promote entrepreneurship. Several suggestions come to mind. One is assisting female entrepreneurs to gain access to finance. This issue features prominently in this study. Another is offering training and education in entrepreneurship. This could include how to write effective business plans, how to run a business and which traits to have in a world of entrepreneurship that is full of competition dynamics.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The survey results indicate a discrepancy between the data and statistical tests, suggesting a lack of significant association between women's entrepreneurship and economic growth. Factors like question framing, response options, sample size, statistical power, and contextual factors can affect the results.

The lack of significant findings underscores the need for further investigation into factors influencing perceptions and the impact of women's entrepreneurship on economic growth. Future research should expand the sample size and explore qualitative insights. Validation techniques like cross-validation, contextual analysis, regression analysis, and Spearman correlation can be used to validate the findings.

8. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that while there is potential for women's entrepreneurship to contribute to economic growth, further empirical evidence is needed to substantiate these claims. The Spearman correlation analysis provides valuable insights into the relationships between women's entrepreneurship and various influencing factors, but the results caution against drawing definitive conclusions without further investigation. The coefficient for entrepreneurship perception suggests a negative relationship with economic growth perception, but this result is not statistically significant.

The findings suggest that perceptions regarding women's entrepreneurship and its impact on economic growth are significantly associated across different questions, potentially implying that respondents' views are influenced by their responses to section C, which deals with obstacles to entrepreneurship. The findings will contribute to understanding the dynamics of entrepreneurship and its impact on economic growth among women in the O.R. Tambo region, providing insights that can inform policy and support initiatives.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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10. COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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