
Training needs for successful businesswomen: a narrative analysis of stories of women entrepreneurs

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Abstract: This research is a qualitative study that develops a narrative analysis of the entrepreneurial experiences of two women business owners in the State of Nuevo Leon, Mexico. This study sought to understand the training needs of female entrepreneurs from the experiences of these women who started their own companies. This issue of entrepreneurship arouses much curiosity and interest in the characteristics of the people who undertake it and how they develop their plans. It is essential to analyse the experiences of entrepreneurs to incorporate the lessons learned into training programs that fulfil the needs and learning styles of people starting and operating their own companies. The women consulted recommended as the key topics in a training program the incorporation of the family into the training processes, the methodologies for scaling up businesses, tools that facilitate the management of revenue, expenses, and earnings, activities that increase self-efficacy, how to search for funding resources and investment capital, and networking.

Keywords: education for entrepreneurship; narrative research; gender equality; women and development; social justice; higher education; educational innovation.

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1 Introduction

Entrepreneurial activity has aroused great interest in recent years, especially as a means to promote economic development and create jobs (Alvarado et al., 2018). Women entrepreneurs are making significant contributions to the global economy (Hodges et al., 2015). Nevertheless, there is still a gap between men and women in entrepreneurship, where women account for 10.1%, and men represent 17% (OECD, 2018). Also, the phenomenon of female entrepreneurship has been less studied than males (Anggadwita and Dhewanto, 2016; Rodríguez et al., 2014).

The existing studies characterise female entrepreneurship as a less represented economic sector that faces significant obstacles because they develop their companies in more traditional industries and do so out of necessity, not because of opportunity. Their work is seen as limited by the demands of their families (OECD, 2018).

According to Portuguez Castro et al. (2019), the training of people in entrepreneurship skills is an essential element for these companies to endure after they begin operations. The entrepreneurs must learn from experiences and apply their knowledge to adapt to circumstances (Dana, 1987). However, training programs also must be adjusted to the environment of operations because different settings can have unique requirements (Dana, 2001). For women to acquire the necessary skills and have significant opportunities for growth, the training programs should consider the needs and characteristics of the female entrepreneur (Kelly et al., 2018) and have activities that reduce disparities and empower women to develop entrepreneurial skills that increase their competitive advantages.

In a literature review made in specialised journals to determine the factors that might help develop a gender-focused training program, there are few studies conducted in Latin American countries, especially in Mexico. Instead, research took place in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the USA – countries whose social, political, and economic characteristics do not necessarily match the reality of our countries. Furthermore, entrepreneurs are affected by the nations and regions in which they operate (Shinato et al., 2013). Therefore, there must be research into the values and aspirations of the people in the regions where they work and policy formulation to stimulate entrepreneurship there. Trying to implement strategies from other places will likely fail (Dana and Dana, 2005).

To understand further the reality of women entrepreneurs, we directed this research to know what people who are living the experience say, and we developed a narrative study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). So, the purpose of this research article is to describe the entrepreneurial experiences of Paty and Anilu, two female entrepreneurs from the State of Nuevo Leon in Mexico. In this research, the entrepreneurial experiences are those that the participants narrated. Their thoughts, feelings, frustrations, successes, and failures can be incorporated into a training program that impacts them. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the research question, how can the experiences of women entrepreneurs be incorporated into a training program for entrepreneurship?

This question aims to contribute to research by focusing on how it is possible to analyse these narrations to benefit the training of other female entrepreneurs following a qualitative, holistic-inductive approach (Dana and Dana, 2005). This type of study examines how people act, their narrative, intentions, actions, and interactions (Dana and Dumez, 2015). To answer the research question, first, we conducted a literature review of gender-based studies that empirically determined the principal factors that affect the

development of entrepreneurship in women. These factors include the personal, cultural, and social characteristics that surround a woman, as elements that either promote success or become obstacles in entrepreneurial activity. Then, we made and recorded observations, conducted open interviews, and interacted with the entrepreneurs to arrive at descriptions of their attitudes, beliefs, actions, and experiences.

2 Literature review

Entrepreneurship is a global phenomenon increasing daily, and businesses created by women are on the rise and impacting the economies of their countries (Mueller and Conway, 2013). According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), in a study conducted in 73 countries in 2016, 163 million women were starting their businesses, and 111 million were running established businesses. This analysis indicates that female entrepreneurship rose 10% from 2014 to 2016, and the gap between the number of men and women operating businesses shrunk (Kelly et al., 2018).

In Latin America, the total number of women entrepreneurs also increased; as well, there was an increase in the comparison between women and men who formed a company (80% of women compared to men). Although the development of female entrepreneurship has improved in this region, it is necessary to boost some areas, increase the creation of companies for reasons of opportunity rather than a necessity, ensure business continuity, and elevate growth expectations (Elizundia, 2014). These areas of improvement should include support for businesses already created, the incorporation of coaching, greater access to capital, and education that strengthen entrepreneurship over time (Amorós and Pizarro, 2008).

In the studies analysed, the principal personal factors that affect female entrepreneurship relate to the commitment and motivation the women have to complete the activities they perform, the desire they have to undertake business on their own, and the intention that they have to carry it out (Gupta and Mirchandani, 2018). In one of these studies, women had the best results in the categories of responsibility in the position, freedom of action, persistence, and obligation to complete projects.

In the studies, men presented greater creativity and innovation. No differences were found between women and men in terms of risk propensity. Among the recommendations were to include in the training the activities that are related to creativity and innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking, with deeper extension according to the group in training (Reyes et al., 2014).

Concerning the social and cultural aspects, in countries where gender roles are not as marked in society, there is not a difference between men and women when it comes to entrepreneurship. However, in more radical countries, where the roles are sharply defined, family and institutional support and personal attitudes are lower in the female gender, so it is necessary to consider the environment where entrepreneurship desired. In that way, one can promote or counteract the effects of these realities (Hechavarría et al., 2016).

A study in Chile and Colombia found that the conditions for entrepreneurship are not as favourable, because there is a lack of training for women, low levels of support, and a high fear of failure (Soria et al., 2016). Also, it established that previous contact of participants with other entrepreneurs improves the intention to start a business. So, it is

also advisable to incorporate activities that enable interactions among entrepreneurs to increase their confidence and decrease the fear of creating a company. That confidence was lower in the women participants than in the somewhat overconfident men.

One study conducted in Mexico City with 192 companies sought to find significant differences in the performance of new businesses started by men or women, the result of which found no differences by gender in terms of performance. There were also no differences in levels of academic degrees. There were significant differences in that the age of entrepreneurship was higher for women than men. Also, a disadvantage presented to companies headed by women is the low access to credit due to the smaller size of their companies, so the initial capital investment has to be economical for them (Elizundia, 2014).

In a comparative study of the USA, Belgium and China, Shinnar et al. (2012) encountered obstacles to female entrepreneurship, such as lack of support, fear of failure, and lack of entrepreneurship skills. When there is no support, there are difficulties in getting help from institutions, obtaining support from families, building good relationships with suppliers, and having strong relationships with customers. This support is essential because more significant assistance from organisations external to the entrepreneur can generate a greater entrepreneurial intention.

The fear of failure was more present in women than in men. Concerning the lack of skills, gender differences were more common in the USA and Belgium, where women face these barriers more than men, but in the case of China, these differences do not occur. In this latter country, these authors attribute it to the culture and policy known as one child per family, which leads to no expectations of gender differences in the family. The Chinese attach more importance to work than to skills, whereas, in the other two countries, there are more gender roles and expectations according to socially appropriate professions for women, which define the perception of their competencies (Shinnar et al., 2012).

On these differences in roles, Venugopal (2016) conducted a study in India that sought to establish how aspects such as role identity affected the intention for entrepreneurship, understanding that women fulfil different roles both in the family and at work there. They also analysed the perceived self-efficacy of the participants. Self-efficacy refers to the abilities people have to control the events that happen to them. The results indicated that, in this context, the perception of self-efficacy does affect the intention for entrepreneurship and growth, so the report suggested that confidence in the skills of this population to carry out entrepreneurship should be strengthened.

In a study by Ramadani et al. (2013) in Macedonia, a survey was used to find out the general characteristics of entrepreneurs, the main obstacles experienced by the female business starters, as well as their motivations to do it. Among the results, the main reason to undertake to start a business is to have freedom for decision-making, followed by the desire for achievement and the opportunity to work for themselves; the social status appears as one of the least important. The difficulties identified included establishing a balance between family life and work, financial problems, finding time to strengthen their skills, and the creation of contact networks to manage their businesses better. Success factors for these women came from establishing quality relationships with clients, formulating goals and implementation plans, and managing finances and marketing activities. Finally, entrepreneurs considered knowledge and education as necessary factors, as well as having competencies in decision-making and taking action, insistence, self-confidence, experience, and networking.

In Indonesia, a quantitative study sought to analyse the impact of personal attitudes and social perceptions on the intention of female entrepreneurs (Anggadwita and Dhewanto, 2016). Research showed that psychological characteristics and social perceptions influenced personal attitude and business intention. Previous studies had indicated that Indonesian women entrepreneurs did not consider that they have the skills to undertake entrepreneurship. However, the study showed that they do have the character and skills to be entrepreneurs, so it is necessary to promote female entrepreneurship in that region.

In a study carried out in Kosovo, how women entrepreneurs decide on the succession of their companies was analysed. This aspect is crucial because it allows the sustainability of the business in the long-term (Ramadani et al., 2017). The study was qualitative, and they conducted interviews to answer the study questions. The women interviewed were interested in passing on the business to the next generation because it is the primary source of livelihood for their families, and they also highlighted the challenge of maintaining a balance between family and business. The biggest challenge for women entrepreneurs was to keep their children close by, teaching them to love the business and becoming role models to hold their interest.

In that same country, Ramadani et al. (2015) analysed the results of a survey about entrepreneurship on the reasons, problems, perspectives, and skills of the women. The respondents answered that one of the biggest obstacles is balancing work and family to develop a more successful business; others included accessing financial resources, lack of experience, and lack of confidence. They mentioned financial and personnel management and marketing skills with clients. Furthermore, they believed that self-confidence is the most crucial factor for success in their businesses, as well as family support, experience, knowledge, and education.

According to the research reviewed, within a gender-focused training program, the skills that can increase entrepreneurial intent should be considered so that the start-ups can endure over time. Other aspects should also be strengthened, such as motivation, self-efficacy, the social environment, support from families, and institutional structure.

To confirm these elements, we analysed the stories of the life experiences of two women entrepreneurs, Paty and Anilu, to know what their challenges had been, their opportunities, and the needs they had lacked in the development of their endeavours. Knowing these stories can help to identify good practices that can be replicated by other entrepreneurs and determine the personal and social characteristics that result in the failure or success of an entrepreneurial initiative. From this understanding, one can design training programs and policies specifically relevant to the economic development of women. As Martín-Alonso et al. (2019, p.105) mention, the reconstruction of these narratives allows “knowing how they have built their stories, what role their encounters have played in the story of each woman, and, finally, what has made possible that relation.”

Continuing with Creswell and Poth (2018), the fundamental aspects of the narrative structure are the summary or central point of the stories found in the narratives of Paty and Anilu. This narrative summarises the history of their entrepreneurial development in the three dimensions established by Clandinin (2012). The evaluation is presented in the interpretation of the data and the resolution in the mutual themes of the two entrepreneurs. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications that these experiences have for the development of training programs. At a microlevel, the strategy of the study

was to present the facts over time and rewrite and interpret the stories through a progressive-regressive methodology (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3 Method

This study followed an inductive, qualitative methodology that is convenient for research in small companies and entrepreneurship (Dana and Dana, 2005). This research consists of a narrative study that sought to explain the phenomena analysed from the perspective of those who had lived it (Clandinin, 2012), providing the opportunity to learn directly from the research subjects (Dana and Dana, 2005). So, the implementation procedure was to study the experiences of two female entrepreneurs and collect the information, reporting in chronological order the meaning of those experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The research design followed the structure proposed by Dana and Dana (2005), which involved asking some research questions per the objectives of the study, collecting data through observation and in-depth interviews, encoding the data, carrying out the analysis and triangulation of the information, and communicating the results. The study was performed with a small sample of businesswomen (two), and this allowed them to understand their environment better.

The sample of the two women entrepreneurs was for convenience, with the objective that they share their experiences of life and the principal challenges at the time of starting their businesses. This type of sampling is appropriate for data collection that allows knowing the meaning of the phenomenon (Ramadani et al., 2017). Cornejo et al. (2008) indicate that to build a relationship of trust with the participants, one should provide information to the participants about the objectives of the research and let them know about the interest in their life stories and the roles that they have occupied.

The assessment instruments used were the interview, participant observations, and photographs and documents as a means of capturing the stories of the participants. The interviews sought to learn the characteristics of the female entrepreneurial experiences, the challenges they confronted, and their achievements. As mentioned above, it is crucial to meet with the interviewees first and inform them about the objectives of the research (Cornejo et al., 2008; Gómez-Zermelo, 2018). This helps to establish a rapport, to make the women feel trusting toward the researcher and see the genuine interest in knowing their life stories to give opportunities to other female entrepreneurs who might identify with these stories.

3.1 Analysis of the data

Once the interviews were concluded, the transcriptions of the participants' narratives proceeded. Initially, the objective was to determine the turning points in the stories told by entrepreneurs, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). Subsequently, inductive analysis was performed (Dana and Dumez, 2015) with the help of the MAXQDA 2018 software to determine the categories that emerged from the data. These pieces of data were aligned with the three dimensions proposed by Clandinin (2012) that determine the aspects that influence the narratives:

- a the transience (personal and social)
- b the continuity of the actions (past, present, and future)
- c the place where the activities occurred.

Finally, five principal themes or categories that emerged from the narratives of the participants were determined inductively. These came from a paradigmatic analysis (Bolívar, 2002) that identified common issues and illustrated them with the voices of the interviewees.

4 Results

The information shared by the participants was exhaustive. It led to know in detail the evolution that they had as entrepreneurs, from before their beginnings to what they are in the present, and the expectations they have for the future. These experiences allowed us to define particular situations that they had lived, which could help other entrepreneurs understand the paths they have taken and identify mutual themes.

In the stories of these women, there were two epiphanies (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The first was when the initiative to become entrepreneurs emerged, and the second was how they decided to make the passage from individual jobs to developing their businesses. These experiences were crucial because it made it possible to determine the influence that other people inside of their closest circles had and the reasons that made them leave their positions to seek growth and validation of their identities as entrepreneurial businesswomen.

4.1 Narrative of Paty

Paty is a 51-year-old woman, married, a dentist who has had her own dental office for 30 years. She began her practice as a recent graduate in her major to work without reliance on other people, and she wanted to manage her own time. Her grandmother had told her to study to be a dentist because she could combine her married life with her business. Paty had a mother who did not want to study and an uncle who was a dentist, and these factors influenced her to follow her grandmother's advice to pursue dentistry. Once Paty graduated, she started working with her uncle. He subsequently encouraged her to open her own office. Paty started with used equipment, and with her husband's help, she was able to put her office in her home. She worked first in one room that she remodelled and later expanded the house to place her office in the garage. When her children were older, Paty felt that they no longer depended on her very much. She could get out of her house and rent a place that would allow her to grow to serve more clients because she no longer needed to be so attentive to her home. She has had her clinic 15 years, and she also refers work to her daughters, who are now dentists with different specialties. Paty sends referrals also to other specialists who support her in the care of her patients.

As can be seen in Paty's case, the influence of her grandmother and the uncle who motivated her to study that career and open her own business was significant in the decision to become an entrepreneur. Another moment of change was when her children grew up, and she decided to open a clinic outside her home, which allowed her to expand the business.

4.1.1 Interaction

Paty began her career very young, thanks to the push she received from her family. When she was forming her family, she had to make sacrifices, principally time, to care for her young children and her office. As her children were growing up and her business was prospering, she could expand her business. Paty did not require any loan or help beyond that of her family, which fills her with pride. However, she thinks that the dedication she must bring to her work is very demanding because she cannot stop working; she has to attend her business herself. The contact she has with other colleagues who work with her has allowed her to position herself. However, Paty feels that she is not well compensated for making her office available to a dentist who does not pay her well to be there. She believes that her daughters, who studied the same career, can work with her and do the work that other specialists are doing. This temporality is expressed by Paty when she recounts what she has experienced with her daughters:

“... the best thing is not having bosses ... well, my bosses are many, because every patient is my boss, right? But I can handle my time, so that’s what I always liked, and I always instilled this in them (her daughters) and, at the end of the day, they also ended up falling in love with the career, both, yes. Then, there was a time when I felt bad, because I said, ‘I better tell them about odontology’, ... odontology, for their good. I inclined them toward that without them feeling it, but already seeing them working ... as they speak, how their eyes shine! They like it, and I said, ‘well, this was not so bad, it was a good decision.’”

4.1.2 Continuity

One early lesson learned by Paty was income management, an essential element in her opinion. She thinks that, because she was organised in the past, she could manage her family finances. As she remarked,

“Since I got married, I had to manage myself with a certain amount of money. Me? If I don’t work today, I do not earn; then the bills are coming in, I am paying them with what I am earning.”

In the present, she feels like a successful entrepreneur because she has people who know her, and she has been able to expand her practice. Her vision for the future is to continue managing the clinic, but not having to work so hard, because other specialists are working for her, and she will be able to have more time for her family.

4.1.3 Situation

Paty is happy with her situation and would like to buy the office where she practices dentistry. She considers that the place where she has her office is adequate and that it has cost her a lot, so she is grateful for what she has. As she commented, “I would like to have my own place. The gentleman who rents to me, yes, I did tell him, the first option would have to be me. If he offered it to me and I did not buy it, he would be free to search for someone, but that his first option would be me.”

4.2 *Anilu's narrative*

Anilu is a 30-year-old woman who has a website-based company that looks for flexible job opportunities for professional women with children, i.e., women who cannot work full-time, but who do want to enter the job market. Her interest comes from seeing that her mother always worked flexibly in a company, and she was able to negotiate that scheme informally, and it benefited her family. When Anilu was older and wanted to work, she saw that this was not realistic and that women stopped working because they could not work full time. She saw that the talent of people who had five or ten years of work experience was lost because motherhood took priority, and this situation affected women economically. She saw an opportunity in a need that was not being addressed, and, so, her company emerged. She began working on her own at her parents' house when she won an award, which gave her an investment that allowed her to have the capital to grow her idea and partner with other people. At this time, she has 22 employees and four partners who collaborate with her, in addition to having won several awards as a social entrepreneur and raising investment funds for her business.

In Anilu's case, her mom's influence made her see the necessity that women have for flexible hours that facilitate attending their children and allowing them to work. This insight came at a time when she had the opportunity to grow a company and start a new phase of her life outside of her parents' house.

4.2.1 *Interaction*

Anilu started her company at home, supported by her parents. Once she strengthened her business model and saw that she could become independent, she began to develop her web platform and to look for partners and collaborators to support her with the project. These people, together with her family, have been excellent support for Anilu to become a businesswoman. She has been recognised as a social entrepreneur; thanks to the collaboration she has with women who need flexible schedules to be able to work. Also, the relationships that she establishes with her customers and the companies that hire them lead her to believe that her business responds to a need that helps other people, as she commented:

“What we do in Bolsa Rosa is to integrate or reintegrate women into the workforce in jobs with flexible work schemes. Our objective is to give an opportunity to women who stopped working because of maternity, who could not reconcile family and work schedules, but who can return or who can change from a job to a more flexible one. The client company gains talent in qualified women or professional women who increase their productivity. What we seek to do is to promote the whole theme, that of labor flexibility through flexible jobs, so that women can return to work.”

4.2.2 *Continuity*

In the past, it was important for Anilu to develop her management skills. As the business grew, she had to learn how to manage her company and delegate to others because she was no longer alone in developing her idea but was becoming something bigger:

“I had to develop management skills and learn to delegate so that I could do more things myself and not be in operations as often. Very early on, they teach you or guide you to know how to ask for capital, that you think big, that you do

not limit yourself to what your resources are now but be like any company of men thinking big, so you also can do it. I would work a lot on myself, on my belief side and everything, to have more confidence.”

At present, Anilu feels that her business model is validated and that she provides a service with which she feels happy. She believes that it generates satisfaction to those who implement it, in addition to highlighting her contribution, as mentioned in these promotional statements:

“We are looking to promote equal opportunity, gender equality, and more flexible work culture. We bring a higher quality of life for everyone, generating a more productive environment that is more profitable for the company, more satisfying, resulting in more retention, and attracting better people to your corporation.”

“The principal factor of success is the linkage, giving jobs to women that improve their lives and helps their families because, in part, they have the time to join their families, thanks to the flexibility that the entrepreneur or companies provide in this labour trend.”

Her vision for the future is to continue to develop her business outside Mexico. Although she believes that they have done an excellent job, she would still like to keep growing, as she commented:

“Obviously, we lack even more success, economically speaking, because we could earn more, bill much more, have higher projections, go beyond Mexico with this so that other countries can have it. At the end of the day, every time a woman gets a job through us, and another company becomes flexible, it is a success for us.”

4.2.3 Situation

Anilu is in search of resources to grow her company more. She works in a co-working space, and her collaborators work remotely. Also, her customers and the companies that work with her do it through her website. She comments, “Everything is remote, we see each other once a month, those who are out, connect themselves. The whole service is online; it is personalized; we never see the customers and candidates. It helps us to cover the entire country.”

5 Categories

From the conversations, we found mutual themes between the female entrepreneurs during the creation and development of their companies. Five topics or categories of analysis emerged, which are:

5.1 Family support

This category of analysis consists of the support that the entrepreneurs receive from their families. It was essential both at the time of brainstorming their company and in its development. Family support is associated with the first dimension established by Clandinin (2012) within the social aspect. In Anilu’s case, her parents’ collaboration at the beginning of creating her company was critical, as she said, “When I started this, I

worked where my parents live. They supported me, saying, “You can work here in the house”. It was like a theme of, “You are not going to starve, and we’re going to support you”.” Also, her husband is a person who supports her. “My husband has always been very supportive of me. He has always been there, standing by me, and supporting me because he knows my conviction, my passion for this project” (Anilu Interview).

For Paty, also, her husband and daughters have been important. Even her daughters help her learn new things, as she pointed out: “Now that my daughters are developing their businesses, they are also injecting me with the new knowledge that they are acquiring so that I can grow also.” The importance that her daughters have and their involvement in her business are described in the field note:

“In the office, the dentist has degrees and titles of her daughters, photographs of them, and information when they graduated. When I asked her to show me pictures that represented something meaningful to her, she proudly showed me the ones on the wall along with her degree.” “Although she said that she was concerned that she had insisted that her daughters study the same thing, her goal is that they can continue to work there.” (Field note on Paty’s office)

5.2 Connection

This category is also related to the social dimension. It refers to relations with people who know what the entrepreneur needs, namely, to have the talent that promotes entrepreneurship and the growth of the company.

In this sense, Paty works with specialists from other areas where she is not an expert to be able to provide better service to her patients. She commented, “Right now, I am in that moment of being able to grow. I have surrounded myself with specialists from different areas.”

Anilu feels that the main success factor of her company is the people who work with her, as she commented:

“Surrounding yourself with people better than you, asking for help when it’s needed, not skimping on talent, going for the best ... you see how to bring it. You ask for help; you can’t do everything by yourself. This lets you arrive at the next stages of the company.” (Interview with Anilu)

5.3 Learning

This category is to meet the training needs to improve competencies, which are in the first dimension of personal and social interaction. The topics important for the female entrepreneurs in the study are related to income management and training skills. In Paty’s case, she also mentioned her career techniques, as follows:

“... many (dental) materials are evolving. Also, knowing income management, making a savings account because businesses have good and bad days, and if there is not enough money for me to pay for the rent or the materials, then the company would not be profitable.” (Interview with Paty)

Anilu commented, “In management skills and abilities such as learning to delegate ahead of time so that you can do more things and not be in operations so much and, from very early on, they teach you to know how to ask for capital, that you think big” (Interview with Anilu).

5.4 *Confidence*

Confidence refers to believing that things can be done and that opportunities to start a business do not depend on gender. The women interviewed do not consider that being a woman limits them and that more depends on the attitude of each person to pursue their goals. Anilu thinks this is an issue where women do not have enough confidence to undertake entrepreneurship:

“I think that the issue of entrepreneurship in women is a matter of confidence and belief, believing that we can create large companies ... a woman is just as able as a man to build her company; there is not less competency or fewer opportunities.” (Interview with Anilu)

Paty shares the opinion that it has to do with the attitude of the woman to look for opportunities, as she commented: “I noticed that I suddenly think about what one should be. At times, I’ve realized that many women don’t want to fight and prefer not to try.”

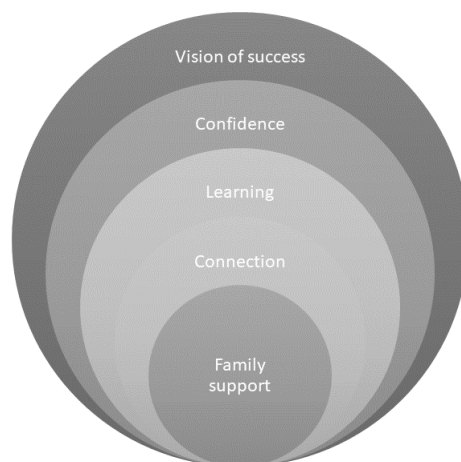
5.5 *Vision of success*

The female entrepreneurs interviewed are considered successful because they have managed to combine their lives with work and relate this to the decisions they have made and the achievements attained in the company. This category is in the continuity dimension. Especially significant are the past and present, how they have evolved, and how they feel now. As Anilu mentions, she feels happy because the service she provides has helped others “... even if it’s one or 100, getting a woman a job, every day of every month is a success” (Interview with Anilu).

Paty, feeling happy, relates growth to the workplace that she has now, where she has managed to grow since her beginnings, which refers to the third dimension, the place where the facts unfold. She commented, “It has taken me many years to have my practice. I have always said, poor, rich, ugly, it is clean, it is comfortable, and it has cost me many years” (Interview with Paty).

Figure 1 presents the five categories of analysis.

Figure 1 Topics emerging from the narratives of the female entrepreneurs: vision of success, confidence, learning, connection, and family support



5.6 Data validation

The data was validated by triangulation comparing the interview transcripts with the field notes of the observations, a reflexive diary carried during the research, and the photographs taken during the interviews and solicited from the entrepreneurs. Also, the workplaces of the female entrepreneurs were visited to test reliability, their web pages were reviewed, and the data collected were carefully recorded and transcribed for future reference.

6 Discussion

In recent years, entrepreneurship has aroused interest as a tool that contributes to economic growth, energises the innovative process, and generates new jobs (Dana and Dana 2005; Sánchez et al., 2017). However, while the start-ups done by women are increasing in the world, generally, there is still a gap with men to be overcome to approach equality and reduce disparities (OECD, 2014).

Among the reasons mentioned by international organisations that there is this gap between men and women in entrepreneurship is, first, the entrepreneurial endeavours of women are carried out due to necessity and not opportunity (Kelly et al., 2018). Also, women need greater flexibility to achieve a balance of family and work. They face higher barriers, especially in the areas of acquiring entrepreneurial skills, having access to initial financing, and conducting entrepreneurial networking. Finally, social and cultural attitudes often do not support and encourage women to have an entrepreneurial spirit (OECD, 2018).

Considering that this panorama explains the reality that women entrepreneurs experience in general, we sought in this study to analyse particularly the aspects that could strengthen a training program of entrepreneurial skills, drawing from the voices of the people who live the experience. The goal of narrative research is not to make broad generalisations about phenomena. However, to understand the viewpoint of the participants (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), we believed that analysing their visions using this approach could help confirm the barriers to female entrepreneurship and allow us to delve into their solution. This approach agrees with Dana and Dumez (2015). They indicate that the qualitative approach is useful when you want to present and analyse the results of the discourse, the intentions, and the actions from the actors' viewpoints.

According to Dana and Dana (2005), the use of naturalistic research like the one used in this study can help researchers and policymakers to better understand entrepreneurship in the context in which it is developed. In the analysis of the case studies of Anilu and Paty and the categories extracted from the essential topics in the lives of these entrepreneurs, we saw that the issues are consistent with those presented in the literature about the need to strengthen programs of connecting, innovating, and financing the different types of entrepreneurship led by women (Kelly et al., 2018). Family support is another element that aligns with studies that attribute the lack of support to failure in entrepreneurship, as well as to the various roles that family members play (Elizundia, 2014; Shinnar et al., 2012; Ramadani et al., 2015).

The results also show that female entrepreneurs have a desire to work independently, which motivates them to start. This agrees with the study by Ramadani et al. (2013) in which women felt instigated to start businesses by the desire to work for themselves and

achieve in their professional careers. The issue of business succession was represented by one of the interviewees who wanted her daughters to continue her company, so she has prepared herself and intends to incorporate them with the business, as presented in the study by Ramadani et al. (2017). The entrepreneurs also have an interest in helping other people, which is consistent with the results of Anggadwita and Dhewanto (2016), in which contributing to society and the desire to help others is a crucial factor for women deciding to develop a business. On the contrary, the success factors found in the studies relate more to profits, sales growth, and the perception of business survival (Gupta and Mirchandani, 2018) than to the way the female entrepreneurs perceive themselves, as the interviews indicated.

However, the success factors found in this study are confirmed in the research by Ramadani et al. (2015), where self-confidence, family support, knowledge, and education are essential for the interviewed entrepreneurs. Finally, skills that must be developed by female entrepreneurs include self-efficacy. This refers to the extent to which a person relies on his or her abilities to confront challenges. Deciding how much effort to muster to overcome challenges and how much perseverance to deal with obstacles are part of self-efficacy (Mauer et al., 2017). The interviewees mentioned all these elements as ones that promote entrepreneurship.

6.1 Implications for the training of women entrepreneurs

According to Dana and Dana (2005), qualitative research is appropriate for entrepreneurship research, as it can help to generate theories to formulate new policies in the future. Among the recommendations that emerged from the interviews to strengthen the training programs of women entrepreneurs are:

- Incorporate family and people close to the female entrepreneur in the effort so that they can understand the importance of their support and what they are doing, find ways to promote them, and integrate them into the training processes of the women.
- Include in training programs the methodologies that allow a scaling up of business, so they can start with a few resources and fortify their business ideas over time.
- Train women with tools that allow them to manage their earnings and income.
- Perform activities that increase self-efficacy.
- Train how to find resources and investment funds and create networks.

7 Conclusions

This study used a gender approach in contributing to education for entrepreneurship in which the voices of those involved can speak about the need for useful training, what works and what does not. It imparts the experiences of women entrepreneurs so that the findings can be helpful and replicated by other entrepreneurs to start successful companies. The research findings are limited to the context of the interviewed participants. Nevertheless, the results are regarded as useful for training programs geared toward women entrepreneurs because it emerges from personal and particular points of

view that can deepen the understanding of those who want to live the phenomenon under study.

For universities, entrepreneurial education not only means teaching theoretical concepts but, as Dana (1987) mentions, helping entrepreneurs develop the ability to learn and apply the knowledge to practice. Therefore, this study aimed to address the training needs of female entrepreneurs. We note that in this type of training, institutions of higher should consider the individual characteristics of the students, their abilities, and the environment in which the programs will be developed (Dana, 2001).

For future studies, we recommend analysing the results of incorporating elements relevant to women entrepreneurs in the training programs. Such programs should strengthen the development of self-efficacy and teach finance management, fundraising, and upward scaling of the businesses. Another recommendation is to increase the number of cases analysed, using different approaches, and to increase the number of publications, especially in the Latin American countries, where research is scarce (Venugopal, 2016). Finally, make comparative studies in different unions, cities, states, with differing socioeconomic and cultural statuses. Doing this will help female entrepreneurs to define the factors that improve the conditions in which they perform their economic activities.

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