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Psychosocial Predictors of Female Entrepreneurship in Nigeria, The Gains and The Gaps: A Systematic Review

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Female entrepreneurship is crucial for fostering sustainable economic growth, gender diversity in economic opportunities, achieving an inclusive economy, and addressing gender disparities in development. However, the realisation of these merits of female entrepreneurship in Nigeria is encumbered by several challenges, which have only been examined from domain-specific perspectives. Hence, this paper was committed to a multidisciplinary investigation of female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Using systematic review and narrative synthesis methods, this study examined the psychosocial predictors of female entrepreneurship, barriers, and relevant solutions in Nigeria. The designed search strategy was used on Google Scholar and EBSCO Essentials. Fifty-one studies were deemed appropriate and synthesised. The cumulative sample size of the studies was 11,757, with participants from twenty-seven states and the Federal Capital Territory. The thematic findings showed critical policy implications, including integrating psychological and social dynamics into entrepreneurship policies, training programmes and initiatives targeted at women to boost motivation to participate; providing enforceable policies against gender-based discrimination; and improving and easing access to financial assistance for women entrepreneurs. Further findings also showed the need to promote women's social capital and empowerment; address infrastructural deficits; and provide entrepreneurship education and skills programmes for women.

Keywords: Female entrepreneurship, psychosocial predictors, entrepreneurial barriers, policy, systematic review

Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship has been identified as a catalyst for economic growth for developing countries (Deepa et al., 2022). Gulvira et al. (2024) express that the underdevelopment of women-led enterprises in developing countries represents untapped potential for growth and prosperity. Similarly, Al-Qahtani et al. (2022) argue that female entrepreneurship is crucial to the development of a sustainable economy, emphasising the importance of female entrepreneurs in economic diversification and social development. These academic insights indicate that one of the factors that sustainable economic growth is predicated on, especially for developing countries like Nigeria, is an enabling environment for female entrepreneurship. Promoting female entrepreneurship is rooted in numerous social and economic benefits, including reducing gender disparities in employment outcomes, increasing gender diversity in economic opportunities, and enhancing national economic performance.

Entrepreneurship is integral to Nigeria's economy, as small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) account for 48% of the country's gross domestic product, 96% of businesses and 84% of employment (Akinlesi, 2025). Despite the importance of entrepreneurship to Nigeria's economy, the entrepreneurial market is beset by various barriers stemming from a lack of government support, infrastructural shortcomings, limited access to funding, policy and regulatory inconsistencies, and business environment uncertainty (Adesua-Lincoln, 2022; Adeyemi et al., 2021; Ajuwon et al., 2024; Gumel & Bardai, 2021). The evidence from these cited studies reflects that the challenges facing entrepreneurs and enterprises in Nigeria are multi-sectoral.

The influence of these multisectoral barriers is further characterised by gender differences, often with a greater negative impact on female-owned enterprises, increasing the risk of female-led business failure and low performance (Ajuwon et al., 2024; Madein, 2020). While this does not imply a significant gap in the percentage of male- and female-owned enterprises in Nigeria, it, however, indicates disparities in access to growth opportunities. For instance, Adeyemi et al. (2021) report that women account for 43% of the entrepreneurs in Nigeria, but the distribution of entrepreneurs across states shows that high female entrepreneur prevalence is only observable in a few states, such as Abia, Gombe, and Lagos. Despite accounting for about 43% of Nigerian entrepreneurs, only 10% of loans from financial service providers get to female-led businesses (Uddoh, 2023; Women's World Banking, 2024). Some barriers to entrepreneurial success that are gender-specific to Nigerian women include gender discrimination, work-family conflict and lack of entrepreneurship education (Nwachukwu et al., 2021). A news report adds that the gender-based digital divide in Nigeria, especially in northern Nigeria, where 60% of women lack access to the internet, is another major factor undermining female-led entrepreneurship in Nigeria (Uddoh, 2023).

The discussions in the paragraph above suggest that female-led entrepreneurship lacks the enabling environment for growth, thus limiting the economic contribution of female entrepreneurship to the Nigerian economy. This indicates the need to systematically leverage the existing corpus of evidence to understand women's entrepreneurial success and practical solutions to female entrepreneurship barriers in Nigeria. But beyond this, we must also understand the psychosocial factors that motivate women to entrepreneurship in Nigeria. This will play an important role in considering social and psychological factors that drive participation and resilience in entrepreneurship when designing initiatives and interventions to promote female-led enterprises and their success. The literature on public policy shows that integrating sociological and psychological dynamics into policy design and implementation, including finance and economic policies, enhances their performance or outcomes (Cairns et al., 2014; Cati, 2024; Sofi et al., 2023).

The literature on female entrepreneurship has, unsurprisingly, mostly used the feminist theories, especially social and liberal feminism, to investigate and explain gender-specific dynamics (Skubis, 2023; Nwachukwu et al, 2021; Ofomata, 2021; Aladejebi, 2020). However, several theories relevant to entrepreneurship, such as the Schumpeterian entrepreneurship theory, the Human Capital theory, network theory and the resource-based view theory (Adekunle, 2024; Akintayo et al., 2024; Aminu, 2024; Fabian & Ibrahim, 2022; Jinjiang et al., 2025; Roland et al., 2025). This further demonstrates the complex and multifactorial nature of female entrepreneurship, justifying the need for a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the phenomenon.

Research Rationale

The rationale for this research is rooted in the need to drive sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Nigeria by creating an enabling environment for the development of female entrepreneurship. Existing investigations into this issue have been domain-specific, mostly focusing on the financial and economic perspectives. However, the entrepreneurial experience of women is necessarily multidisciplinary, requiring sociological, psychological, economic and managerial perspectives. Hence, this research addresses the pressing issue from a multidisciplinary perspective by comprehensively investigating the dynamics of female entrepreneurship, including psychosocial predictors, barriers and potential solutions, in Nigeria. The findings from these investigations will constitute empirical insights for designing and implementing a multidisciplinary evidence-based policy or interventions that promote women's participation and success in entrepreneurship. This will further improve how female entrepreneurship is leveraged as an economic development catalyst in Nigeria.

Research Aim and Objectives

This study aims to systematically synthesise evidence on factors that influence the entrepreneurial experience and success of women in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1) identify the psychosocial predictors of female entrepreneurship in Nigeria;

2) discuss the barriers to women's entrepreneurial success in Nigeria; and
3) evaluate the solutions to challenges faced in female entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted the systematic review methodology, which entails the methodological synthesis of evidence on clearly defined research topics or objectives (Atkinson & Cipriani, 2018). The systematic review methodology was adopted in this research because it is a reliable, sophisticated and evidence-based approach to informing public policy (Gough & Tripney, 2016), which is needed for improving female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The systematic review methodology provides a scientific approach to searching, selecting, and synthesising the literature relevant to specified research objectives, as the involved processes are reproducible, transparent, thorough, and objective (Chrastina, 2019). To achieve these scientific features, the processes involved in conducting a systematic review require clearly defining a search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality appraisal approach and synthesis approach (Phillips & Barker, 2021).

Search Strategy

This study adopted the SPIDER search strategy. SPIDER is an acronym for sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, and research type (Methley et al., 2014). With the use of SPIDER, the keywords and search parameters are clearly defined. Table 1 below defines the elements of SPIDER and shows their application to this research.

Table 1: Search Strategy using SPIDER

SPIDER Elements	Relevance	Keywords or applications
Sample	This refers to the population that the systematic review focuses on.	"women" OR "female" AND "Nigeria*"
Phenomenon of interest	This includes the concepts, variables or factors the research seeks to study.	"Entrepreneurship" OR "entrepreneurs"
Design	This refers to the data collection techniques of the literature selected for synthesis.	This systematic review selected all identified primary studies, regardless of their data collection design, that met the inclusion criteria.
Evaluation	The predictors or outcomes of the selected studies that this research will synthesise.	"barriers" OR "challenges" OR "solutions" OR "psychological predictors*" OR "Sociological* predictors*"
Research	This refers to the research method of the selected literature.	Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method studies were allowed.
Operational Search Strings	1) "Female entrepreneurs" OR "women entrepreneurs" AND "barriers" OR "solutions" AND "Nigeria". 2) "Psychological predictors" OR "Sociological predictors" AND "Female entrepreneurs" OR "women entrepreneurs" AND "Nigeria". 3) "Psychological predictors of entrepreneurship among Nigerian women". 4) "Sociological predictors of entrepreneurship among Nigerian women".	

Asterisk (*) is used to represent terms that are expansive or replaced with synonyms during the search. For instance, Nigeria expanded to include the regions in it, "predictors" expanded to include terms like "drivers", and "sociological" was replaced by "social" in search iterations. The search strings were used on Google Scholar. To ensure a robust search, the search strings were also used on EBSCO Essentials to identify potentially relevant studies that are not shown on Google Scholar. This search strategy was motivated by the assertion by Ewald et al. (2022), which states that using multiple databases for a systematic review search reduces the risk of missing relevant studies. While the first five search result pages contained the most useful results, this systematic review examined the first ten search result pages of each search iteration on Google Scholar (10 research items per page) to enhance the identification of relevant studies. However, only the first two search result pages of EBSCO Essentials were reviewed, given that the platform reports 50 research items per page.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Specifying study inclusion and exclusion criteria in review-based studies contributes to the transparency, methodological rigour and reproducibility of the studies. Table 2 below shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria in this research.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Elements	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Date	Only studies published between 2020 and 2025 were included in this systematic review. This enabled the synthesis of recent evidence.	Studies published earlier than 2020 were excluded.
Phenomenon of interest	Only studies that align with the aim and objectives of this research were included; these are studies that report findings on the psychosocial predictors of female entrepreneurs, barriers to women's entrepreneurial success and solutions.	Studies that do not focus on entrepreneurship experience and outcomes with a female gender-specific focus were excluded from this study.
Regional focus	Only studies that focus on Nigeria or specific states or regions in Nigeria were included.	Studies that focus on regions other than Nigeria were excluded.
Publication type	The publication types allowed for inclusion in this systematic review were peer-reviewed journal articles, published conference proceedings, and reports from reputable institutions.	The excluded publication types include preprints, books, abstract articles, reports from unverifiable sources, dissertations and non-academic publications.
Method	Only studies that report findings from primary investigations were included in this research. This included quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method studies.	Secondary data-based studies or review studies were excluded from this research. Also, theoretical and conceptual papers were excluded.
Language	Only studies published in the English language were included.	Studies published in any other language were excluded.

Quality Appraisal

Before the inclusion of studies into this systematic review, they were subjected to a quality appraisal to critically examine their methodological rigour, contribution to the literature and appropriateness as a scientific source of evidence (Perera, 2020). There are multiple quality appraisal tools for assessing studies used in systematic reviews, but this study adopted the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) tool because of its ease of use and comprehensive evaluation framework (Long et al., 2020; Nadelson & Nadelson, 2014). CASP provides separate tools for qualitative and quantitative studies, thus enabling this research to apply the appropriate assessment tool to selected studies. However, CASP does not provide a tool for mixed-method study appraisal. Thus, the Mixed-Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was applied for mixed studies, which has been established to be appropriate (Karlsson & Takahashi, 2017). The quality appraisal results are appended on the Open Society Foundations (OSF), a data-sharing platform, at https://osf.io/35cyh/files/osfstorage/68b4fc87b5bb55b69896af66 (Omosebi, 2025).

Synthesis of the Literature

The synthesis of the gathered literature in this study was achieved using a narrative approach. The findings in the gathered literature were thematically analysed and reported. This approach ensured the seamless integration of findings from different types of studies and ease of understanding among non-academic audiences, especially policymakers. However, while the narrative synthesis of qualitative evidence poses no major limitation, the narrative synthesis of quantitative evidence is often limited by the failure to appropriately represent statistical values (Campbell et al., 2018). This limitation was addressed by integrating statistical values and levels of significance into the narrative synthesis in this study. A systematic approach to the thematic synthesis of the literature was used by applying the thematic analysis framework by Labra et al. (2020). The framework outlines the steps involved in conducting thematic analysis:

familiarisation with collected data, generating codes, developing themes and discussing them.

The data familiarisation process included reading the objectives and findings of the selected paper to determine their alignment with the objectives of this systematic review. The generation of codes was done by categorising each study into psychological predictors, social predictors, barriers, and/or solutions based on the findings of the study. The findings in the studies in each code were further assessed and categorised into themes and subthemes in alignment with the objective of this research. The themes and subthemes were developed strictly from the findings section of each study and by synthesising the findings across studies by virtue of their thematic connections. These themes and subthemes were reported and discussed narratively.

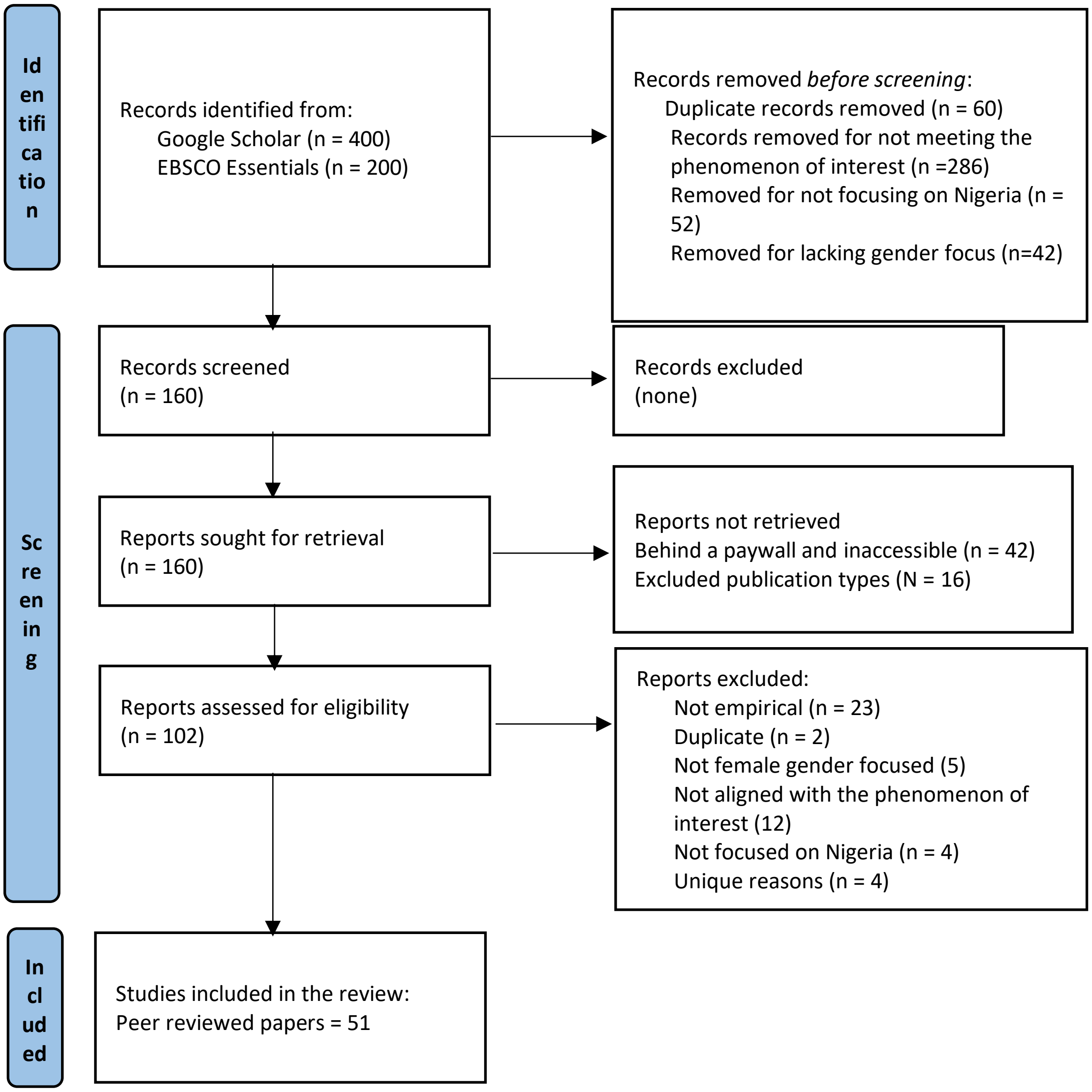
Findings

The literature search and selection processes are summarised with the use of the PRISMA flow chart, a standard and recommended systematic review tool (Kahale et al., 2021), below (Figure 1). A total of fifty-one studies were selected after assessing each of the identified research items with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The initial search queries led to the identification of 600 research items. Reasons for excluding many of the identified studies include being non-empirical, not having a gender-based analysis, being an excluded publication type and not focusing on the Nigerian context. Four studies were excluded for unique reasons. Table 3 shows the studies and reasons for exclusion.

Table 3: Studies excluded for unique reasons

Studies	**Reasons for exclusion**
Ukwueze (2022)	The survey data it relied on were from 2017, which is three years before the periodic scope of this systematic review (2020-2025).
Irene et al. (2025)	The study focuses on multiple countries (South Africa and Nigeria) but lacks country-level analyses; thus, it is impossible to extract the Nigerian experience from the study.
Abdulsalam and Uthman (2025)	The study does not provide an adequate discussion on its research methods, including sampling techniques, data collection techniques and data analysis methods.
Jubril et al. (2022)	The study fails to clearly report the frequency and percentage distribution of their Kenyan and Nigerian participants, making it impossible to determine the sample size of Nigerian participants.

Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart



After the selection of appropriate studies, their characteristics were extracted. The table of studies' characteristics is appended on OSF at https://osf.io/35cyh/files/osfstorage/68acebfe15ea6a25d1161ea2 (Omosebi, 2025). 64.71% (33) of the included studies employed the quantitative research method, 21.57% (11) used the qualitative method, and 13.72% (7) used the mixed-methods approach. The sample populations of the selected studies collectively form a representative sample of the Nigerian population. From studies that specified the specific sample population, a total of 27 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, were recorded. The total sample of the included studies is 11,757; see the referenced OSF file for further details.

Themes and Discussions

Table 4 below shows the themes identified from the synthesis of the literature.

Table 4: Themes

Themes	Subthemes	Sources of Evidence	Addressed RO

Psychological predictors of Female entrepreneurship	Self-efficacy	(Gutiérrez-Broncano et al., 2024; Awotoye & Stevens, 2023; Adeniyi et al., 2022; Unyime et al., 2025).	1
	Social desirability	(Skubis et al., 2023; Aremu & Epetimehin, 2020; George-Ufot & Halkias, 2021; Ayodele et al., 2021).	
	Desire for self-attainment and autonomy	(Skubis et al., 2023; Aladejebi, 2020; Ayodele et al., 2021; Aluko et al., 2024; Aremu & Epetimehin, 2020; Tijjani et al., 2024; Jinjiang et al., 2025).	
Social predictors of Female entrepreneurship	Communal and familial support	(Awotoye & Stevens, 2023; Tijjani et al., 2020; Ogundana et al., 2021; Omolawal & Adeniyi, 2024).	
	Market environment and technology access	(Ayodele et al., 2021; Ogundana et al., 2021; Aminu, 2024).	
	Supporting the family	(Aluko et al., 2024; Tijjani et al., 2024; Skubis et al., 2023; George-Ufot & Halkias, 2021)	
Financial and social barriers	Negative financial experience	(Jinjiang et al., 2025; Akintayo et al., 2024; Aladejebi, 2020; Opigo, 2020; Bamidele et al., 2024; Peter & Orser, 2024; Brownson, 2021; Omolawal & Adeniyi, 2024; Ogundana et al., 2021; Falobi et al., 2025; Onoshakpor et al., 2022; Nwachukwu et al., 2021; Tijjani et al., 2020).	2
	Gender discrimination and bias	(Ofomata, 2021; Aladejebi, 2020; Brownson, 2021; Adedeji et al., 2020; Tijjani et al., 2020).	
	Patriarchal institutions and cultural barriers	(Aladejebi, 2020; Opigo, 2020; Bamidele et al., 2024; Aluko et al., 2024; Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021).	
	Gender-stifled family roles and demands	(Jinjiang et al., 2025; Opigo, 2020; Hajara, 2025; Onoshakpor et al., 2022; Nwachukwu et al., 2021).	
Literacy and skill Challenges	Limited financial literacy	(Nkamnebe et al., 2024); Peter & Orser, 2024; Egbo et al., 2020; Adewumi, 2022; Tijjani et al., 2020).	
	Low education or vocational training	(Bamidele et al., 2024; Ekwochi, 2020; Gutiérrez-Broncano et al., 2024).	
Institutional challenges	Infrastructural inadequacy and poor policy system	(Ekwochi, 2020; Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2021; Ogundana et al., 2021; Ofomata, 2021; Peter & Orser, 2024; Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021; Falobi et al., 2025)	
Solutions to female entrepreneurship challenges	Entrepreneurship education and skills training	(Ofomata, 2021; Sajuyigbe et al., 2021; George et al., 2021; Salaudeen & Kofar-Sauri, 2020; Brimah et al., 2024; Egbo et al., 2020; Anam et al., 2024; Tijjani et al., 2020; Afolabi & Aghaunor, 2024; Ogundana et al., 2021)	3
	Enhanced financial access and support for informal lending systems	(Jinjiang et al., 2025; Akintayo et al., 2024; Hajara, 2025; Aluko et al., 2024; Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021; Fabian & Ibrahim, 2022; Sajuyigbe et al., 2021; Egbo et al., 2020; Onochie & Nwworie, 2025; Anam et al., 2024; Tagha et al., 2023; Ojarikre et al., 2024; Adetiloye et al., 2020; Skubis et al., 2023).	
	Enable innovation, social	(Ofomata, 2021; Bamidele et al., 2024; Akinyele et al., 2021; Brimah et al., 2024; Lawal et al., 2022;	

	empowerment and capital	Odunaike & Ajiboye, 2020; Omolekan & Alli, 2020; Aina & Durugbo, 2025; Adeola et al., 2024; Ogbari et al., 2024)	

("RO" = research objective)

Psychological Predictors of Female Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

This study found three subthemes for encapsulating the psychological predictors of female entrepreneurship in Nigeria: self-efficacy, social desirability, and the desire for self-attainment and autonomy. The evidence for self-efficacy as a predictor of Nigerian female entrepreneurship intentions is shown in four studies, with findings related to the theme being confirmatory across different populations and research methods. The qualitative investigations by Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. (2024) show that "self-confidence" and "self-efficacy" are predominant cognitive catalysts among Nigerian women entrepreneurs in the service and manufacturing sectors. The strength of this theme is further substantiated by Awotoye and Stevens's (2023) statistical finding, which shows that entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) significantly influences entrepreneurial intention among Nigerian married women. The evidence from Adeniyi et al. (2022) indicates that ESE significantly impacts the entrepreneurial readiness of Nigerian female students at technical and vocational education and training institutions, but specifically adds that only the ESE implementing dimension, which involved the ability to manage and grow a business, solely motivates the students' entrepreneurial readiness. Lastly, Unyime et al. (2025) report empirical findings showing that perceived behavioural control, self-perceived ease of doing entrepreneurial activities, significantly determines the entrepreneurial intention of Nigerian female tertiary institution graduates. The cumulative sample size of these sources of evidence is 550 Nigerian women from multiple states in Nigeria, characterised by heterogeneous sociodemographic qualities (students, married women, business owners and new tertiary institution graduates), thus giving strong transferability value to this theme. The policy implication of this finding is the need to integrate entrepreneurship efficacy-building activities into entrepreneurship education, interventions and programmes to ensure a sustainable motivation among women.

The second subtheme, social desirability, means that some Nigerian women embrace entrepreneurship because of a desire to be positively perceived, recognised or praised. Four of the selected studies provide evidence for this subtheme. It was first identified in Skubis et al.'s (2023) qualitative study, where many of the participants (existing female entrepreneurs) expressed that they started their enterprises for societal acceptance. Direct quotes from the participants include "Keeping good relationships and knowing people too", to gain "respect" and "acceptance" and a positive "social status" (Skubis et al., 2023, p. 617). This theme is also statistically underpinned by Aremu and Epetimehin (2020), where "desire for social recognition" is identified as one of the variables with a high total score. However, this finding does not demonstrate statistical significance, and the study's total sample, 100 participants, is inadequate to make conclusions based on total scores. All ten participants, who were all microentrepreneurs in the Niger Delta region, in the study by George-Ufot and Halkias (2021) expressed that they were interested in entrepreneurship because it provides them with tremendous opportunities to be relevant in their communities. Lastly, Ayodele et al.'s (2021) investigations among students studying real estate management across four universities in Southwest Nigeria capture that women scored higher on the desire to increase their status or prestige as their motivation for entrepreneurship than men. The findings related to this theme remained confirmatory across studies with different methodologies (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods), and across different study locations. This thematic finding implies that programmes that facilitate social recognition for female entrepreneurs will have a strong influence in promoting entrepreneurial intention and activities among Nigerian women.

Finally, it was found that the desire for self-attainment and autonomy is central in promoting female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Seven of the selected studies provide pieces of evidence supporting this theme. Nigerian women expressed the need to be financially independent or be in control of their (work) life through business ownership or self-employment as their motivations for entrepreneurship (Aremu & Epetimehin, 2020; Ayodele et al., 2021; Jinjiang et al., 2025; Skubis et al., 2023). Specifically, 58.1% and 61.2% of respondents from Enugu and Anambra, respectively, indicate "financial independence" as their reasons for starting a business, thus constituting the highest motivational factor in both states (Jinjiang et al., 2025, p. 206). Compared with Nigerian male entrepreneurs, Ayodele et al. (2021) show that women score higher on financial freedom and independence, dream realisation and personal fulfilment as their motivations for entrepreneurship. Additionally, women show a desire for entrepreneurship because they see it as a path to self-attainment or self-fulfilment, especially the attainment of financial success or a social status of which they can be proud (Aladejebi, 2020; Tijjani et al., 2024). "Self-fulfilment" was found as the statement with the highest mean score among entrepreneurs' motivational factors among 502 women in Southwest Nigeria (Aladejebi, 2020). The qualitative findings by Aluko et al. (2024) show that Nigerian women engage in entrepreneurial activities because they view it as a source or form of empowerment. The cumulative sample size of all the sources of evidence for this theme is 1,112, with participants from different states and different sectors in Nigeria. This shows the relevance and social significance of the finding. Hence, it is critical that a gender-inclusive growth-promoting environment, using policy, legal and financial mechanisms, is implemented in the Nigerian entrepreneurship sector to promote women's participation.

Social Predictors of Female Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

This systematic review found three subthemes that explain the factors that motivate Nigerian women towards entrepreneurship: communal and familial support, market environment and technology access, and supporting their families. Four studies in this systematic review provide the pieces of evidence supporting the communal and familial support subtheme. The evidence for this subtheme was first identified in Awotoye and Stevens (2023), where a path analysis investigation indicates that spousal support positively and significantly impacts subjective well-being with a 99% confidence ($p < 0.01$), which further significantly influences entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which finally significantly and positively predicts entrepreneurial intention with a 99% confidence. Notably, this path relationship was observed among only women (Awotoye & Stevens, 2023), thus indicating the gendered importance of familial support in female entrepreneurship. The role of communal support in promoting intention towards entrepreneurship was identified in Ogundana et al. (2021), where 79% of participants (all of whom were in the Lagos garment manufacturing sector) expressed that they get financial capital for their businesses from relatives. This is supported by Tijjani et al. (2020), who show that the second source of initial start-up funds among women entrepreneurs in Kano state is loans from families and friends. However, only 15.3% of Tijjani et al.'s (2020) participant expressed this, while 77.3% stated that they use their personal savings as start-up funds. Opposing this view is Omolawal and Adeniyi (2024), who show that financial support from family and friends as enterprise capital is mostly used by women entrepreneurs in Lagos state (36.5%), followed by personal savings (19.9%). While neither Tijjani et al. (2020) nor Omolawal and Adeniyi (2024) applied inferential statistics to obtain the impact and significance of financial support from family and friends, Omolawal and Adeniyi (2024) used a larger sample population (397) compared to Tijjani et al. (2020) (110), thus giving a higher generalizability strength to Omolawal and Adeniyi's (2024) findings.

The second subtheme, market environment and technology access, captures how factors such as market access, conditions and ability to use technology determine Nigerian women's entrepreneurial decisions. Three of the included studies provide evidence backing this theme. The ability to explore opportunities in the real estate market is a notable motivator for female real estate students in Nigeria (Ayodele et al., 2021). Ogundana et al.'s (2021) qualitative study reports that "market access played a crucial role market access played a crucial role" in women's sewing enterprise (p.S55). Lastly, Aminu (2024) reports statistical findings, based on a total sample of 828 participants from Kano state, showing that remote work and online marketplace significantly predict entrepreneurial intention, thus showing that access to these technologies and their use in the target markets determine women's decision to participate in entrepreneurship. This thematic finding emphasises the need to improve digital access and ease of market entrance. through the provision of relevant infrastructures, policies and programmes, to promote women's participation.

The last subtheme under the social predictors of female entrepreneurship in Nigeria includes the need or desire to support their families. The pieces of evidence for this subtheme were identified from four of the included studies. Aluko et al. (2024) repetitively indicate that low-income women in Ipetu-Ijesha expressed that they embraced entrepreneurship because it empowered them to support their husbands and provide for their families. Tijjani et al. (2024) further add that 10 out of the 12 participants (women entrepreneurs in Kano state) in their qualitative study unanimously stated that their enterprise "was started to provide additional support to my spouse, especially contributing to the family needs" (p.207). Further qualitative evidence is presented by Skubis et al. (2023), who show that female entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurial activities to "contribute to the family" (p. 617). Finally, George-Ufot and Halkias (2021) report that most of their participants engage in entrepreneurial activities because they enable the women to provide for their children's welfare and help their spouses.

Only a few studies from the selected literature provide relevant findings that can be synthesised as social predictors of female entrepreneurship in this systematic literature review. This points to a limitation in the review's methodology (the five-year periodic scope) and a limitation in the existing corpus of evidence, which is the absence of comprehensive and adequate research into the phenomenon. Hence, this calls for further studies into the social predictors of female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the synthesised findings indicate the need for government-funded and public-private partnership-supported orientation programmes that promote communal and social support for female entrepreneurship.

Financial and Social Barriers to Female Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

This theme captures monetary and social factors that negatively affect female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Four subthemes were identified: negative financial experience, gender discrimination and bias, patriarchal institutions and cultural barriers, and gender-stifled roles and demands.

Negative financial experience is the most supported of these subthemes, with 13 of the selected studies providing comprehensive evidence and many others highlighting it. This subtheme encompasses discouraging financial experiences that women entrepreneurs face in Nigeria, including difficulty accessing loans or financial assistance, financial institutions' gender discrimination in loan provision, and high interest rates. The descriptive statistics results in Jinjiang et al. (2025) show that difficulty in accessing finance is the highest business challenge Nigerian women experience, with 44.9% and 45.3 in Enugu and Anambra, respectively, confirming it. 46.4% and 28.2% of respondents from Osogbo, Osun state in Akintayo et al. (2024) respectively agree and strongly agree to the statement that "I lack stable source of financing to cover my business expenses", while 38.2% and 43% respectively agree and strongly agree that their businesses lack access to external funding sources, such as banks and investors (p.34). These findings are upheld by other quantitative studies, including Aladejebi (2020), Opigo (2020), Bamidele et al. (2024), Brownson (2021) and qualitative studies by Peter and Orser (2024), Onoshakpor et al. (2022), Nwachukwu et al. (2021) and Ogundana et al. (2021). Another factor constituting a negative financial experience and impeding the growth of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria is the high interest rate associated with bank loans (Jinjiang et al., 2025). Akintayo et al. (2024) report that 27.2% and 42.4% agree and strongly agree, respectively, to the statement that "Interest rates on loans are not manageable or sustainable for my business" (p.33). Even when asked in a reversed form, more than 67% of the 397 participants in Omolawal and Adeniyi (2024) disagreed with the statement that high interest rates do not discourage them from seeking loans. High interest rates, the rigid loan processing requirements and repayment and even government levies were generally identified as barriers to female entrepreneurs' access to financing, either at the start-up stage or after, and their entrepreneurial success (Falobi et al., 2025;

George-Ufot & Halkias, 2021; Nkamnebe et al., 2024; Nwachukwu et al., 2021; Opigo, 2020; Tijjani et al., 2020). This subtheme emphasises the need to facilitate easy enterprise financing for women entrepreneurs in Nigeria by removing rigid or bottleneck requirements, reducing interest rates and providing merit-based intervention loan systems that target women entrepreneurs.

The second subtheme is gender discrimination and bias, which is supported by pieces of evidence from five of the included studies. This theme shows how gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory practices negatively affect the growth of female entrepreneurs. Through the use of mean ranking, findings from Ofomata (2021) indicate that discriminatory laws and regulations are the strongest challenge to business success among Nigerian female entrepreneurs. However, a major limitation in Ofomota's (2021) study is the failure to identify specific discriminatory laws and regulations besetting the performance of female entrepreneurs in Nigeria. George-Ufot and Halkias (2021) identify one such discriminatory law or custom practised in the Niger Delta region, which is that inheritance laws only favour men. The mean ranking in Aladejebi (2020) also shows that social discrimination limiting women's business involvement is a notable issue. It was also found that 72.8% of the 195 Akwa Ibom women entrepreneurs in Brownson (2021) strongly agree that bias and prejudice affect them. The strongest piece of evidence for this theme was found in the study by Adedeji et al. (2020), where, with the use of an appropriate inferential statistics tool and a sample size of 329, it is shown that gender imbalance has a significantly negative effect on women entrepreneurs' innovativeness, thus impeding their enterprise growth. Lastly, a response from one of the participants in the study by Tijjani et al. (2020) concisely captures women entrepreneurs' experience with discrimination and bias:

> "There exists a stereotype against women, especially in this society where I belong… They do not have much confidence in women in this part of Nigeria (Kano state)… therefore, every business activity should be carried out by the men. That is the reason the banks may not view us as good prospects in terms of lending and repayment." *(Tijjani et al., 2020, p. 113)*

This subtheme has a strong policy and legal implication. It calls for the implementation of policies backed by enforceable legal provisions that shun gender discrimination in opportunities, formal and informal business exchanges and access to finance. This is very integral to promoting women's participation in entrepreneurship and achieving a gender inclusive economic growth.

Quite similar to the subtheme discussed above, the next subtheme is termed "patriarchal institutions and cultural barriers". This theme describes the presence of a patriarchal and male chauvinistic culture in Nigeria, which negatively affects female entrepreneurship. Five of the included studies in this systematic review support this subtheme. Although having a low mean ranking and not tested with inferential statistics, a preference for working with men rather than women and culture as a barrier to women's entrepreneurship are identified as notable factors undermining female entrepreneurship in Southwest Nigeria (Aladejebi, 2020). Above 70% of the women entrepreneurs from Yenagoa in Opigo (2020) agreed that limited liberty to women and a negative attitude towards "feminine mindset" constitute problems for the growth of female-owned enterprises in Nigeria. The other studies that report similar insights include Bamidele et al. (2024), Aluko et al. (2024) and Jaiyeola and Adeyeye (2021). This further strengthens the argument for developing and implementing enforceable laws that protect against gender-based bias and discrimination in entrepreneurship and other economic spheres of Nigeria. Additionally, this finding indicates the need for public orientation programmes that promote support for female entrepreneurship and discourage discriminatory attitudes.

The last subtheme under this theme is gender-stifled family roles and demands, which describes socially or culturally gendered roles that are often inflexible in Nigeria that affect female entrepreneurship. This theme is supported by five studies. Only 5.0% and 4.6% of the 400 respondents from Enugu and Anambra states, respectively, report that family obligations constitute challenges to their enterprises, thus not appearing as a prevalent issue (Jinjiang et al., 2025). However, 80% of the 50 female entrepreneurs from Yenagoa note that their domestic and social commitments create dual duties, which negatively affect their entrepreneurial commitment (Opigo, 2020). The regression analysis in the study by Hajara (2025), which recruited 120 women running small and medium scale enterprises in Abuja, shows that being married and increases in the number of dependents significantly reduce the earning capacity and business growth of women entrepreneurs. This predictive outcome of marriage and increment in dependent numbers on the growth of women-owned businesses can be explained by the implications of the factors on women's household obligations. Additionally, qualitative evidence showed that female entrepreneurs expressed that people viewed them as deviating from the social expectations of a "good wife", and experienced overwhelming hardship in balancing family obligations with entrepreneurial activities (Nwachukwu et al., 2021; Onoshakpor et al., 2022). This thematic finding, along with other social-related barriers, indicates a need for public reorientation and education on the importance of gender equality, women's entrepreneurship and their rights, as a way of improving the social capital that Nigerian women's entrepreneurs experience.

Literacy and Skill Challenges

Two subthemes capture the literacy and skill challenges that Nigerian female entrepreneurs face: limited financial literacy and low education or vocational training. The limited financial literacy subtheme explains the negative financial experience that stems from the lack of relevant financial knowledge or information that affects female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Five of the included studies provide evidence for this theme. Nkamnebe et al. (2024) identify low financial literacy, in their qualitative findings, as a challenge facing rural women entrepreneurs in Southeast Nigeria, but the authors fail to provide direct quotes demonstrating participants' real-life experiences. However, a more elaborate qualitative finding on this was observed in the study by Peter and Orser (2024), where it is shown that women entrepreneurs face challenges due to limited financial knowledge, particularly as regards acquiring credit and managing lending relationships: a participant expressed that "I am usually afraid as I don't know what I will encounter when I get there ... so that is why I didn't seek financial support" (p. 611). Another female entrepreneur from Enugu state explained that without adequate financial literacy, "managing and sustaining their (women-owned) business will be difficult" (Egbo et al., 2020, p. 441). Using split regression analysis to observe gender-based differences, Adewumi (2022) report that financial literacy has an insignificant impact on business risk taking among women, while it has a significant and positive impact among men; and this is explained to be due to constraints reducing women's financial literacy. Lastly, there is also a lack of awareness or knowledge on relevant financial programmes or services that can be used among Nigerian women entrepreneurs. A participant stated that "…many of the women may not be aware of or how to access these loans and programmes. The level of awareness should be further promoted, as this will increase the women's confidence and knowledge about how to access the loans…" (Tijjani et al., 2020, p. 114). The theme shows the need to solve financial information asymmetry and gap, especially among women in rural communities, by using media such as local radio and television stations, banners and social media platforms, to achieve public dissemination of the information.

The second subtheme, low education or vocational training, was first found in Nkamnebe et al. (2024), where 15.6% of the 340 women entrepreneurs indicated that one of the challenges they face in accessing microcredit is limited business training. Above 59% of the 346 women entrepreneurs from Kogi, Kwara and Niger states in Bamidele et al. (2024) disagreed with the statement that "lack of education and vocational skills" does not limit their ability to manage and grow their businesses (p. 37). Also, the frequency distribution in Ekwochi (2020) showed that 473 out of 550 (86%) women entrepreneurs from South-eastern Nigeria agreed that inadequate access to training is a challenge to their growth and performance. Lastly, Gutiérrez-Broncano et al. (2024) report that poor education is a barrier to women's entrepreneurial growth, and even those with high academic attainments confirmed that their colleagues with low education experience difficulties in growing their enterprises. This thematic finding emphasises strengthening gender inclusion in education and formal vocational programmes, as well as promoting social reorientation initiatives that increase positive cultural and social attitudes towards educating female children.

Institutional Challenges

The only subtheme identified here was infrastructural inadequacy and a poor policy system. Eight of the included studies support this subtheme. This theme was first identified in Ekwochi (2020), where frequency distribution shows that 515 (93%) of the total 550 women entrepreneurs from South-eastern Nigeria identified poor infrastructure as a challenge to their business growth. Qualitative evidence from Nwachukwu et al. (2021) describes the specific infrastructural deficit undermining entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria from the perspective of a frozen food retailer: "Lack of regular power supply is the main problem for my business, even if I get a loan today, will I use all to buy fuel to power generator? Buying fuel to power generator will have a negative impact on my business" (Nwachukwu et al., 2021, p. 7). Statistical evidence supports the primacy of the lack of electricity as an infrastructural barrier to enterprise growth, as it was found to be the factor with the highest mean score among 450 women entrepreneurs in the agriculture, manufacturing, and trade and service sectors in Imo state (Ofomata, 2021). Another way infrastructural deficiency affects female entrepreneurs in Nigeria is by encumbering their access to finance, especially in rural communities: Peter and Orser (2024) report that some respondents expressed discouragement in travelling long distances to access a bank because of the lack of local branches in their communities.

Poor policy support as a barrier is captured in the qualitative study by Jaiyeola and Adeyeye (2021), where the lack of maintenance of infrastructural provisions by the government and the gradual diminishing of provided support were uncovered. This indicates that the policies underpinning the governmental support and provisions were not sustainably managed. The absence of policy support for entrepreneurial growth in Nigeria is also expressed in the imposition of various levies on commodities and business activities, which in turn increase "overhead expenses and inhibited the growth of their enterprises' profit margin and financial position" (Ogundana et al., 2021, p. 60). The last piece of evidence for this subtheme was found in Falobi et al. (2025), where poor facilities and government policy are respectively ranked as the 4th and 7th challenges confronting women entrepreneurs in Lagos state. This subtheme has implications for the Nigerian government's commitment to infrastructural growth, especially regarding electricity supply and road networks, and designing policies that support the growth of (female-owned) enterprises.

Solutions to Women Entrepreneurship Challenges

To provide sustainable and effective solutions to challenges besetting female-owned businesses in Nigeria, three subthemes were identified based on the evidence in the selected studies: entrepreneurship education and skills training, enhanced financial access and support for informal lending systems, and enabling innovation, social empowerment and capital. These subthemes show the strategies and policies that the Nigerian government can use to improve and support the growth of women-owned enterprises.

The first theme, entrepreneurship education and skills training, entails providing educational and vocational programmes to assist female entrepreneurs in acquiring knowledge, such as financial literacy, that will improve their enterprise management capabilities and build skills that can contribute to their innovation or business ideation and execution. This theme is supported by pieces of evidence from ten of the selected studies. Ofomata (2021) identifies managerial skill development as the third-ranking prospect for women entrepreneurship development. Another skill development that was found to be an effective strategy for developing the performance of women-owned enterprises is networking skills, which was determined by a 99% confidence ($p < 0.01$) of its positive impact on performance (Sajuyigbe et al., 2021). Salaudeen and Kofar-Sauri (2020) report empirical findings showing that opportunity, relationship, and strategic competencies individually impact the business success of female-owned enterprises significantly and positively in Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi and Zamfara states, thus implying that training women entrepreneurs in these competencies will drive their performance. Access to learning new practical skills also gives women entrepreneurs opportunities to expand their product or service provision, thus increasing their income. This was communicated by a respondent in George et al. (2021, p. 181), who shared that "I thank God for making me to be among those selected for the training. I now earn income from making perfumes." The importance of training in female entrepreneurship in Nigeria surpasses just enabling business growth; it also positively and significantly influences business sustainability (Brimah et al., 2024). Other sources of evidence for this theme and sources that show that education builds the capacities and knowledge of Nigerian female entrepreneurs, especially regarding financial literacy, include Egbo et al. (2020), Anam et al. (2024), Tijjani et al. (2020), Afolabi and Aghaunor (2024) and Ogundana et al. (2021). Afolabi and Aghaunor (2024) specifically report that financial literacy has a significantly positive effect on the performance of female-owned enterprises, using a sample size with a high generalisability value, 1,341 women entrepreneurs in Lagos.

The second subtheme, enhanced financial access and support for informal lending systems, is comprehensively supported by 14 of the selected studies and highlighted by many others; this demonstrates the significance of the role of financing women entrepreneurs in creating a business environment that helps them realise their full potential and maximise their economic contributions in Nigeria. Tagha et al. (2023), Ojarikre et al. (2024) and Akintayo et al. (2024) report empirical findings showing that access to finance, including digitally provided financial services, positively and significantly impacts the performance of women-owned enterprises. Additionally, Anam et al.'s (2024) mean ranking shows that access to credit services promotes entrepreneurial activities, enhances the expansion of their product line and increases women's interest in expanding their business. Onochie and Nwworie's (2025) quantitative investigations add that the use of financial products and services significantly reduces female entrepreneurs' financial stress in Nigeria. The empirical findings in Adetiloye et al. (2020) call for the flexibility of loan conditions, as they pose a significant negative impact on access to loans among women entrepreneurs because the conditions are considered tough and overwhelming. The importance of financial access, especially without risk of high interest rates, in enhancing the performance of female-owned businesses and the motivation of female entrepreneurs was further confirmed by qualitative pieces of evidence (Ogundana et al., 2021; Onoshakpor et al., 2022; Skubis et al., 2023). It was also found that Nigerian female entrepreneurs often rely on informal lending or financial initiatives to gain loans (often without interest rates) or some other forms of financial assistance, and these informal systems are often called "esusu" or "ajo"; this finding is dominated by qualitative pieces of evidence (Aluko et al., 2024; Hajara, 2025; Jaiyeola & Adeyeye, 2021; Ogundana et al., 2021; Peter & Orser, 2024). Hence, the government can utilise the existing "ajo" and "esusu" systems to improve women entrepreneurs' financing by supporting the systems towards increased capacity and enhanced reach. This is particularly important for women in rural or suburban areas where bank branches are often not available and there is a high digital divide encumbering access to digital financial services.

The third subtheme captures enabling innovation, social empowerment and capital for Nigerian female entrepreneurs. This subtheme is underpinned by evidence from ten sources of evidence. Enabling innovation was identified as an important way for improving the performance of women-owned enterprises based on empirical findings demonstrating the significantly positive impact of innovation on female entrepreneurship across Nigeria (Adiza et al., 2020; Akinyele et al., 2021; Brimah et al., 2024). Innovation scored the highest mean among prospects for improving women entrepreneurs' performance in Imo State (Ofomata, 2021). It was also found that business innovation has a significantly positive impact on business sustainability (Brimah et al., 2024). The empirical findings in Omolekan and Alli (2020) add that process and product innovation have a significant and positive impact on the market share growth and business reputation of women-owned enterprises, using a total sample of 196 women entrepreneurs from the hairdressing, tailoring and baking business landscapes in Ilorin, Kwara state. Specifically focusing on social media as a means for innovative business strategies, Lawal et al.

(2022) report empirical findings showing that social media builds the social capital and self-efficacy of female entrepreneurs in Gombe state. The aspect of social empowerment and capital entails the gendered social ramifications of power balance, communal or familial support, attitudes towards women, and women's access to power (social, economic and political). The findings of this systematic review revealed that building women entrepreneurs' empowerment and social capital improves their financial access, business performance and enterprise growth (Adeola et al., 2024; Odunaike & Ajiboye, 2020). Ogbari et al. (2024) specifically show that women's empowerment greatly reduces poverty among women entrepreneurs in the Nigerian agricultural sector, which further enables them to explore more market opportunities. The qualitative findings in Aina and Durugbo (2025) offer unique insights by showing the role of male mentorship in building social capital and improving the business performance of women entrepreneurs. However, the lack of focus on examining women-to-women mentorship is a critical limitation in the paper, especially because social experience proximity may create better outcomes in women-to-women mentorship than men-to-women mentorship.

Conclusion

This paper provided a comprehensive synthesis of the experience of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, focusing on their motivators, barriers and solutions to challenges. The policy and practical implications of each thematic finding were discussed along with its presentation, thus showing key policy interventions and initiatives that the government need to put in place to promote women's participation in entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs' financing, business growth, and improve their contribution to the Nigerian economy. Based on the findings, the key focus areas include: integrating psychological and social dynamics into entrepreneurship policies, training programmes and initiatives targeted at women to boost motivation to participate; providing and enforcing policies against gender-based discrimination. Further critical areas include improving and easing access to financial assistance for women entrepreneurs, promoting women's social capital and empowerment, addressing infrastructural deficits, and providing entrepreneurship education and skills programmes for women. Additionally, the findings of this systematic review provide a guide for future investigations into female entrepreneurship in Nigeria and beyond, as it enumerates the factors to measure and the phenomena to investigate.

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