



## Exploring the Lived Experiences of Entrepreneurial Empowerment and Value Internalization among Participants of Community-Based Training Programs

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### ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship training plays a vital role in fostering economic development and social empowerment, particularly within community-based programs that aim to cultivate self-reliance and creativity among participants. While previous studies have focused on measurable outcomes such as income generation and business performance, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences and subjective meanings that shape entrepreneurial transformation. What remains insufficiently understood is how individuals internalize entrepreneurial values and reconstruct their sense of agency through participation in such training. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, this study explores how participants experience, interpret, and give meaning to entrepreneurship training as a transformative process. The study involved twelve adult participants (aged 22–45) who had completed a community-based entrepreneurship training program and represented diverse micro-enterprise backgrounds. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed following a structured descriptive phenomenological procedure, including bracketing, horizontalization, eidetic reduction, and imaginative variation to identify the essential structures of lived experience. The findings reveal three core dimensions of transformation: rediscovering self-efficacy, developing empowerment through collective support, and redefining success as moral and social contribution. These themes illustrate that entrepreneurship training extends beyond technical skill-building to become a reflective and existential journey of self-awareness, social connection, and purposeful engagement. The study advances our understanding of entrepreneurship as a human-centered process that integrates emotional, relational, and ethical dimensions into economic action. By clarifying the participant demographics and methodological rigor, this study strengthens the transparency and credibility of its phenomenological contributions. These insights provide a foundation for designing more holistic and empathetic entrepreneurship education models that prioritize human development alongside economic sustainability..



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### INTRODUCTION

Economic development and entrepreneurship training have long been recognized as integral components of sustainable growth and community empowerment (Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023; Mukhlis, 2025b). Within developing economies, particularly in regions facing limited access to capital and education, entrepreneurship serves not only as an avenue for income generation but also as a pathway to social mobility and identity formation (Dokuchayeva et al., 2024). Programs designed to promote entrepreneurial competencies have increasingly emphasized the cultivation of creativity, innovation, and self-reliance as essential tools for navigating volatile market conditions and fostering economic independence (Kiani et al., 2025). In this context, entrepreneurship training functions as more than a technical exercise; it becomes a social and psychological process that shapes individuals' understanding of themselves and their roles in society.

The relevance of this phenomenon extends beyond its economic outcomes. Entrepreneurship training embodies a deeply human experience, reflecting the struggle, adaptation, and transformation of individuals as they internalize new values and redefine their sense of agency (Mishra & Sahoo, 2025). The subjective nature of this transformation how participants perceive their capabilities, failures, and aspirations represents a vital yet underexplored dimension of entrepreneurial development (Kayani & Hasan, 2024). Traditional quantitative approaches have often captured metrics such as business success rates or income growth but have failed to illuminate the lived experiences underlying these outcomes. As such, entrepreneurship must also be understood through the lens of meaning, identity, and self-realization. To avoid repetition and overextension, this study frames entrepreneurship as both an economic and existential process shaped by individuals' interpretations of their learning experiences.

A phenomenological perspective offers a valuable framework for examining these dimensions, as it centers on how individuals experience, interpret, and make sense of their participation in entrepreneurship programs (Senadjki et al., 2024). By focusing on lived experience, this approach moves beyond external indicators of success to uncover the essence of human transformation the subtle psychological and existential shifts that accompany learning, risk-taking, and economic participation (Kleibert et al., 2021). Exploring the meanings embedded in participants' narratives provides insight into how entrepreneurship training contributes not only to economic outcomes but also to the reconstruction of personal and social identities (Isakova & Stroila, 2025). Understanding these experiences is crucial for designing empowerment programs that genuinely respond to the human dimensions of economic life, making phenomenology a compelling approach for this line of inquiry.

Building upon the general understanding of entrepreneurship as both an economic and existential endeavor, research focusing on the lived experience of individuals participating in entrepreneurship training has emerged as an important area of inquiry. Scholars increasingly recognize that the effectiveness of such programs cannot be adequately measured solely through quantitative indicators such as income levels, business survival rates, or employment outcomes. Instead, attention has shifted toward understanding how participants experience empowerment, internalize entrepreneurial values, and reconstruct their identities through the learning process (Naheed, 2024). This experiential dimension reveals how entrepreneurship serves not only as a socioeconomic mechanism but also as a deeply personal journey of meaning-making and transformation.

Despite growing academic interest in this field, methodological challenges persist in capturing the subjective depth of participants' experiences (Giri, 2024). Much of the existing research has relied on survey-based approaches and statistical analyses that, while valuable for assessing measurable outcomes, fall short in representing the nuanced and emotional realities of human experience. Quantitative studies tend to abstract the human element of entrepreneurship, treating individuals as data points rather than as meaning-making agents within complex social and cultural contexts (Oderich & Baldi, 2020). As a result, the essence of how individuals interpret, embody, and sustain entrepreneurial knowledge often remains obscured or underexplored.

These methodological constraints underscore the limitations of traditional research paradigms in addressing the phenomenological core of entrepreneurship education the conscious and reflective dimension through which individuals perceive growth, agency, and transformation. Prior studies have provided fragmented insights into motivation or behavioral change but have rarely captured the inner processes of awareness and realization that define genuine empowerment. Consequently, the need arises for a qualitative and phenomenologically grounded approach that can articulate the essence of entrepreneurial transformation from the perspective of those who live it (Massari et al., 2025). Such an approach enables a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurship training reshapes self-concept, social identity, and economic meaning, thereby offering insights that quantitative frameworks alone cannot achieve.

While entrepreneurship training has been widely promoted as a practical solution to stimulate self-employment and economic growth, most existing programs and studies have relied on

instrumental and outcome-oriented frameworks (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). These approaches often emphasize measurable indicators such as skill acquisition, business performance, or income generation without addressing the subjective dimension of human experience that shapes how participants actually internalize and sustain entrepreneurial behavior. As a result, much of the current understanding of entrepreneurship education remains confined to its functional aspects, overlooking the deeper psychological and existential transformations that accompany the learning process.

The predominant reliance on quantitative and programmatic evaluation models has therefore limited the capacity of existing research to capture the lived meanings of empowerment, resilience, and personal growth. Such models treat entrepreneurship primarily as an economic function rather than as a human experience of becoming, reducing complex emotional and cognitive processes into abstract variables (Flores-Fernandez et al., 2025). This epistemological gap has led to a fragmented understanding of how individuals experience and reinterpret their socioeconomic realities through entrepreneurship. Moreover, contextual factors such as cultural identity, community support, and personal motivation are often underrepresented, leaving unanswered questions about how these dimensions influence the transformative potential of training programs.

To bridge this gap, it becomes essential to adopt a phenomenological approach that privileges subjective experience over external evaluation. Phenomenology enables the exploration of entrepreneurship as a lived reality, allowing researchers to uncover the essence of transformation experienced by participants rather than merely its outcomes (Solehudin et al., 2024). By examining how individuals make sense of their participation, negotiate meaning, and redefine their sense of agency, this study aims to illuminate the inner structure of entrepreneurial empowerment a domain that remains largely unexplored within current literature. Through this approach, the research seeks to move beyond functional interpretations and toward a holistic and human-centered understanding of how entrepreneurship training fosters personal and social change.

Previous studies on entrepreneurship education and empowerment have primarily examined the effects of training on participants' economic performance, self-efficacy, and behavioral change. Research in this area has provided valuable insights into how individuals acquire entrepreneurial skills and knowledge; however, it has often neglected the subjective experience underlying these transformations (Andreyanova, 2025). A few qualitative studies have attempted to address this gap by exploring the psychological and social meanings participants attach to entrepreneurship, but these works remain limited in scope and depth. Theoretical contributions from humanistic psychology and social learning theory suggest that entrepreneurship is as much an experiential process of identity formation as it is an economic endeavor. This growing recognition calls for an approach that prioritizes the lived meanings and personal interpretations that shape entrepreneurial transformation.

To address this need, the present study adopts a descriptive phenomenological approach grounded in Husserl's philosophy. This method allows for the exploration of how individuals perceive, experience, and interpret their journey through entrepreneurship training, emphasizing consciousness, reflection, and meaning-making. By focusing on the lived experience rather than external outcomes, phenomenology provides the analytical depth necessary to uncover the essence of empowerment and transformation as experienced by participants (Parthasarathy et al., 2025). This approach directly responds to the knowledge gap identified earlier, where quantitative evaluations failed to reveal how individuals internalize entrepreneurial values and construct new understandings of success. Through phenomenological reduction and thematic synthesis, this study seeks to articulate the essential structures of these experiences as expressed in participants' own words.

The structure of this article reflects the logic of phenomenological inquiry. It begins with an introduction that situates the research problem within the broader context of economic development and human experience. The following sections describe the methodological framework, detailing the phenomenological design, participant selection, and procedures for data collection and analysis (Mukhlis et al., 2024; Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023). The Results section presents thematic findings that reveal the essential meanings of entrepreneurial transformation, followed by a Discussion that interprets these meanings in relation to existing theory and practice. Finally, the

article concludes by highlighting the implications of these findings for future research, policy, and the design of human-centered entrepreneurship programs.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach, rooted in Husserl's philosophy, which seeks to uncover the essence of human experiences as they are lived and perceived (Lutz & Knox, 2014; McNabb, 2015). The phenomenological design was chosen for its suitability in exploring how individuals internalize and make meaning of their entrepreneurial experiences following community-based training. Rather than focusing on measurable outcomes, this approach emphasizes the subjective consciousness and lived meanings of participants, enabling a rich understanding of how entrepreneurship is experienced as a transformative social and personal phenomenon.

The descriptive orientation of phenomenology was particularly relevant for this study, as it prioritizes bracketing preconceived notions and allows the researcher to return "to the things themselves." By doing so, it becomes possible to describe the core structure of entrepreneurial transformation as perceived by participants, without interpretive bias. This approach enabled the systematic exploration of how individuals reconstruct their understanding of economic empowerment, self-efficacy, and purpose through their lived participation in entrepreneurship training. To safeguard against researcher bias, the study incorporated a structured bracketing process in which the researcher articulated and documented prior assumptions about entrepreneurship training before data collection, maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study, and engaged in periodic peer debriefing to critically examine emerging interpretations in light of these documented preconceptions.

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of twelve individuals who had completed a community-based entrepreneurship training program within the previous year (Hillman & Radel, 2018; Migdal, 2018). They were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that all participants possessed direct experience with the phenomenon under study—namely, participation in structured entrepreneurial capacity-building programs aimed at economic empowerment.

Inclusion criteria required that participants:

- (a) had completed at least one certified entrepreneurship training program,
- (b) were actively involved in micro or small enterprises, and
- (c) were willing to engage in in-depth discussions about their lived experiences.

Exclusion criteria included individuals who had not completed the training program or who participated only in administrative roles rather than as trainees. The participants represented diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, with ages ranging from 22 to 48 years and a relatively balanced gender distribution (seven females and five males). Their educational backgrounds varied from secondary school graduates to university degree holders, reflecting the inclusive nature of the training initiative.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit rich and reflective descriptions of participants' lived experiences (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Iosifides, 2016). The interviews were guided by an open-ended question framework that encouraged participants to articulate how they perceived, interpreted, and integrated the entrepreneurial knowledge and values acquired from the training.

Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a quiet and neutral setting to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality. All interviews were audio-recorded with

consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Follow-up conversations were conducted when clarification or elaboration was needed to ensure accuracy and depth.

The interview protocol was adapted from established phenomenological interview guidelines and refined to suit the specific context of entrepreneurship education and empowerment. The protocol included prompts such as:

“Can you describe what changed in the way you view entrepreneurship after the training?”

“How did the experience influence your confidence or motivation?”

Participants were assured of anonymity, and pseudonyms were assigned to all transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using eidetic reduction and thematic analysis consistent with descriptive phenomenology (Daly, 2007; Longhofer et al., 2012). The analysis followed several systematic stages:

1. Immersion – Reading and rereading the transcripts to gain a holistic sense of the lived experiences.
2. Identification of Meaning Units – Segmenting text into meaningful expressions related to participants’ perceptions and reflections.
3. Clustering of Themes – Grouping related meaning units to form preliminary thematic categories.
4. Eidetic Reduction – Refining and abstracting these categories to capture the essential structure of the phenomenon.
5. Synthesis of Essence – Constructing a composite description that represents the shared essence of participants’ experiences.

NVivo qualitative analysis software supported the process of data organization and theme mapping, although interpretation and synthesis remained grounded in phenomenological principles rather than software-generated coding (Fife, 2020; Kawamura, 2020). The outcome of this process was the identification of three essential themes rediscovering self-efficacy, collective empowerment, and redefinition of success which together expressed the core essence of the entrepreneurial transformation experience.

## **RESULTS**

### **Rediscovering Self-Efficacy Through Experiential Learning**

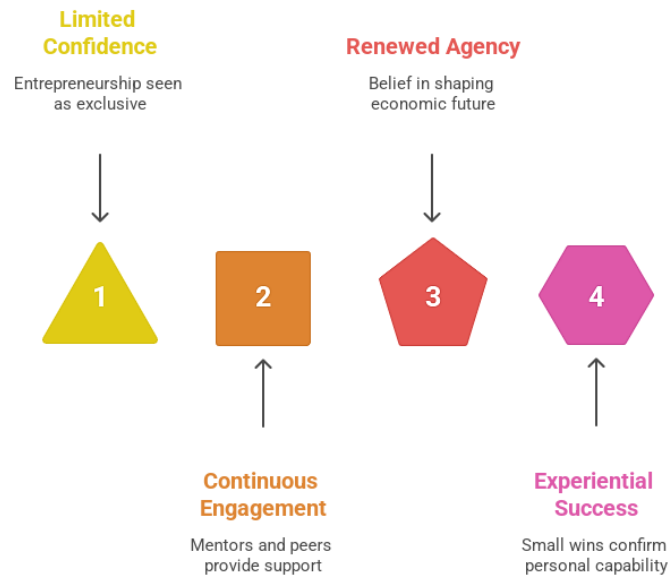
Participants described the training process as a turning point in their perception of capability and self-worth. Many entered the program with limited confidence, perceiving entrepreneurship as an exclusive domain for the highly educated or financially privileged. However, through continuous engagement with mentors and peers, participants developed a renewed sense of agency – a belief that they could shape their economic future through persistence and creativity.

One participant reflected:

“At first, I thought business was only for people with capital. But after this training, I realized that confidence and creativity are also capital. Now, I see myself differently – I can create something valuable with my own hands.”

This rediscovery of self-efficacy marked the first phase of transformation. The experience of success, however small, acted as an existential confirmation of personal capability, leading participants to internalize entrepreneurship as a meaningful act of self-expression rather than mere survival.

### **Rediscovering Self-Efficacy**



### The Social Dimension of Empowerment and Collective Support

A strong pattern emerged regarding the social nature of empowerment. Participants consistently emphasized that entrepreneurial motivation was sustained through collective interaction, emotional support, and shared experiences during training sessions. This collective process fostered not only technical learning but also a deep sense of belonging and mutual growth.

“When we shared our challenges in the group, I felt I was not alone. Others were also struggling, but together we learned how to overcome. That togetherness gave me strength to keep trying.”

said one participant who had previously failed in a small retail business.

The communal aspect of the training revealed empowerment as a relational construct, rooted in empathy, solidarity, and shared resilience. The group dynamic transformed the entrepreneurial journey from an individualistic endeavor into a collaborative process of mutual upliftment, where emotional connection was as vital as economic skill.

### Internalizing Economic Meaning and Redefining Success

The most profound theme centered on the internalization of economic meaning—a reorientation from external measures of success (profit, status, recognition) toward intrinsic values of purpose and contribution. Participants articulated how entrepreneurship came to embody moral, familial, and social significance beyond financial gain.

“I used to think success meant having a lot of money. Now, I feel successful when my business helps my family and gives jobs to others. It’s not only about me anymore.”

This transformation illustrated a shift from instrumental rationality to existential understanding, where economic activity became intertwined with identity, spirituality, and social responsibility. The phenomenological reduction revealed that participants experienced entrepreneurship as an act of self-realization—a path toward meaning, autonomy, and dignity in their socio-economic context.

## DISCUSSION

### Summary of Main Findings

The phenomenological analysis revealed that entrepreneurship training functions as a transformative experience that extends far beyond skill acquisition (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Participants reported a profound shift in self-perception, social engagement, and the meaning of success reflecting a process of internal transformation that redefined

both personal and communal notions of empowerment. These findings directly respond to the research question by uncovering how individuals internalize entrepreneurial values and reconstruct their sense of agency through lived experience.

### **Contribution of Findings to the Research Question**

The findings offer a rich, experiential answer to the central inquiry: How do participants in entrepreneurship training internalize entrepreneurial values as part of the process of economic empowerment? The results demonstrate that the essence of transformation lies in three interrelated dimensions: rediscovering self-efficacy, experiencing empowerment through social connection, and redefining success as a moral and communal achievement (Manzoor et al., 2025). Rather than depicting entrepreneurship as a purely economic pursuit, the study illustrates it as an existential journey of self-realization, where participants reconstruct meaning through lived encounters, shared struggle, and reflective growth (Langseth et al., 2023). This contribution advances our understanding of entrepreneurship as an inherently human process—one that fuses emotional resilience, relational interdependence, and ethical purpose into economic action. It also positions phenomenology as a powerful framework for examining the inner architecture of empowerment, offering insights that conventional evaluation metrics fail to capture.

### **Relation to Previous Literature and Theoretical Frameworks**

The findings align with and extend previous qualitative studies emphasizing the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education. Consistent with the works of Cope (2005) and Rae (2017), this study confirms that entrepreneurial learning involves identity work, where individuals reinterpret failure, uncertainty, and aspiration through self-reflective experience. However, the phenomenological emphasis on consciousness and meaning-making deepens this understanding by showing how empowerment unfolds as a lived structure of awareness, not merely as behavioral adaptation (Švarc et al., 2020). The findings also resonate with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, which posits that genuine growth arises from reflective reinterpretation of one's assumptions and worldview. Yet, unlike traditional cognitive models, this study foregrounds the embodied and emotional dimensions of transformation: how participants feel and experience change, rather than how they rationalize it. Furthermore, by revealing the centrality of social and communal support, the results expand upon Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, situating confidence not only as an individual trait but as a collectively constructed phenomenon nurtured through empathy and shared experience.

Overall, this research contributes to the phenomenological understanding of entrepreneurship as a process of becoming an interplay of self-awareness, intersubjectivity, and purposeful economic engagement (Miyandazi, 2025). It underscores that entrepreneurship training, when viewed through the lens of lived experience, operates as a humanizing practice that cultivates both economic agency and existential meaning.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study hold significant theoretical, social, and practical implications for the understanding of entrepreneurship as a lived human experience. From a theoretical standpoint, the results reinforce the importance of interpreting entrepreneurship not merely as an economic process but as a transformative phenomenon of consciousness and identity. This view invites a reorientation of entrepreneurship education toward cultivating reflective awareness and meaning-making, rather than focusing solely on technical competence or measurable outcomes (Coe, 2025). Socially, the findings highlight how collective support and shared experience strengthen empowerment, suggesting that community-based training should be designed to foster interpersonal empathy and relational learning. Practically, these insights can guide policymakers, educators, and development practitioners in designing training models that value emotional and existential dimensions of learning, ensuring that entrepreneurship initiatives contribute to both economic resilience and human flourishing.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Despite its meaningful contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations that shape the interpretation and scope of its findings (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). The

phenomenological approach, by its nature, emphasizes depth over breadth; thus, the sample size though sufficient for phenomenological rigor limits generalizability to broader populations. Participants were drawn from a specific community-based entrepreneurship program, which may reflect particular social and cultural dynamics not present in other contexts. Furthermore, as the analysis relied on participants' retrospective accounts, the temporal distance between experience and reflection may have influenced the way memories and meanings were articulated. Methodologically, while bracketing was employed to minimize bias, the interpretive process in phenomenology remains inherently subjective. These limitations, however, are consistent with qualitative inquiry and serve not as weaknesses but as invitations for continued exploration within different contexts and populations.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of participants in community-based entrepreneurship training, focusing on how they internalized entrepreneurial values and redefined empowerment through personal and social transformation. The findings revealed that entrepreneurship functions not merely as an economic activity but as an existential process of self-discovery, encompassing rediscovered self-efficacy, collective support, and a redefined sense of success. By employing a descriptive phenomenological approach, this research addressed gaps in prior studies that overlooked the subjective dimensions of entrepreneurial learning and empowerment. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurship as a human-centered phenomenon that integrates emotional, relational, and moral dimensions into economic behavior. These insights highlight the importance of designing training models that nurture reflective learning and social connectedness rather than focusing solely on technical competencies. Future studies could expand this inquiry by examining diverse cultural contexts or longitudinal experiences to enrich the understanding of entrepreneurship as a lifelong process of meaning-making and empowerment.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript, and the research was conducted independently without any financial or personal relationships that could influence the study's findings or interpretations.

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