



## Enhancing Entrepreneurial Skills Through Structured Community Training

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**Abstract.** This study examines the implementation of a structured entrepreneurship training program aimed at enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of local micro and small business owners in Desa Cicapar, Ciamis Regency. The program engaged 30 participants, comprising individuals who operate small-scale enterprises including food production, handicrafts, and retail services. The training focused on practical skill development, including business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving for operational challenges. Methods included interactive workshops, hands-on simulations, case discussions, and mentoring sessions to ensure participants could directly apply concepts to their businesses. Pre- and post-training assessments were conducted to evaluate knowledge acquisition, business planning competence, and confidence in implementing entrepreneurial strategies. Findings indicate significant improvements in participants' ability to develop structured business plans, identify market opportunities, and apply effective management techniques. Participants also demonstrated enhanced confidence in decision-making and problem-solving for their enterprises. The study underscores the potential of structured, contextually tailored training programs in empowering small-scale entrepreneurs and strengthening local economic resilience.

**Keywords:** business planning, entrepreneurship training, micro-enterprises, skill development, local economy

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini mengevaluasi pelaksanaan program pelatihan kewirausahaan yang terstruktur untuk meningkatkan kompetensi kewirausahaan pemilik usaha mikro dan kecil di Desa Cicapar, Kabupaten Ciamis. Program ini melibatkan 30 peserta yang menjalankan berbagai usaha skala kecil, termasuk produksi makanan, kerajinan tangan, dan usaha ritel. Pelatihan menekankan pengembangan keterampilan praktis, seperti perencanaan bisnis, manajemen keuangan, strategi pemasaran, dan pemecahan masalah operasional. Metode yang digunakan mencakup lokakarya interaktif, simulasi langsung, studi kasus, dan sesi pendampingan agar peserta dapat menerapkan konsep secara langsung pada usahanya. Penilaian pra- dan pasca-pelatihan dilakukan untuk mengevaluasi akuisisi pengetahuan, kemampuan menyusun rencana bisnis, dan tingkat percaya diri dalam mengimplementasikan strategi kewirausahaan. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan pada kemampuan peserta dalam menyusun rencana bisnis yang terstruktur, mengenali peluang pasar, dan menerapkan teknik manajemen yang efektif. Peserta juga menunjukkan peningkatan percaya diri dalam pengambilan keputusan dan pemecahan masalah usaha. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa program pelatihan yang terstruktur dan disesuaikan dengan konteks lokal memiliki potensi besar dalam memberdayakan pelaku usaha skala kecil sekaligus memperkuat ketahanan ekonomi daerah.

**Kata kunci:** perencanaan bisnis, pelatihan kewirausahaan, usaha mikro, pengembangan keterampilan, ekonomi lokal

## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a key driver of local economic growth, innovation, and community resilience, particularly in regions where small and micro-enterprises form the backbone of livelihoods (Munyo & Veiga, 2024; Pan et al., 2024). Developing entrepreneurial skills among local business owners is essential not only for improving business performance but also for promoting sustainable economic development and social empowerment. Effective entrepreneurship requires a combination of knowledge, practical skills, and adaptive competencies, including business planning, financial literacy, marketing strategy, problem-solving, and opportunity recognition (Imjai et al., 2025; Padi et al., 2025; Sousa et al., 2024). Existing studies emphasize that individuals with structured support and targeted training exhibit greater innovation in product and service development, improved operational decision-making, and higher resilience in navigating market challenges (Hasan et al., 2024; Pennetta et al., 2024; Prokopenko et al., 2024). Despite the recognized importance of entrepreneurial skills, research consistently highlights deficiencies in the preparedness and capability of micro and small business owners to implement effective business strategies, particularly in resource-constrained settings where formal training opportunities are limited or sporadic (Babajide et al., 2023; Christensen et al., 2023). These gaps suggest that traditional approaches, often informal or unstructured, fail to fully equip entrepreneurs with the practical competencies necessary for measurable business growth and sustainability.

Structured community-based entrepreneurship training has emerged as a promising solution to address these deficiencies by providing systematic, experiential, and contextually relevant skill-building interventions (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2024). Research indicates that participatory training programs incorporating hands-on workshops, interactive simulations, mentorship, and collaborative problem-solving significantly enhance both the knowledge and application of entrepreneurial concepts (Adhikari et al., 2018; Fortunato & Alter, 2015). Programs that integrate experiential learning principles enable participants to translate theoretical understanding into practical action, improving not only business planning and financial management but also marketing, customer engagement, and operational decision-making (Aquino, 2022; Bacq et al., 2022). Furthermore, training initiatives that provide iterative feedback and continuous support foster self-efficacy, motivation, and adaptive thinking, which are critical for navigating the uncertainties and dynamic demands of small enterprise management (Zang et al., 2023). Nonetheless, empirical evidence suggests that many entrepreneurship training programs remain fragmented, limited in scope, or insufficiently aligned with participants' real-world challenges. Some programs focus narrowly on theoretical knowledge or single dimensions of business operations, neglecting the synergistic integration of skills that enables entrepreneurs to apply strategies comprehensively and sustainably (Khursheed, 2022; Somwethee et al., 2023). This fragmentation highlights a critical gap in operationalizing entrepreneurial skills in ways that are measurable, contextually relevant, and capable of producing meaningful outcomes for local business owners.

Another critical consideration in entrepreneurship development is the role of structured skill acquisition and continuous evaluation in enhancing participant competence. Studies indicate that pre- and post-training assessments, coupled with reflective exercises and guided mentorship, strengthen learning outcomes by promoting self-awareness, problem-solving ability, and confidence in implementing business strategies (Arslan et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Experiential modules that simulate real-world business scenarios allow participants to practice financial planning, resource allocation, market analysis, and risk management in a controlled environment, bridging the gap between conceptual knowledge and practical execution (Abebe & Kegne, 2023; Okolo-Obasi & Uduji, 2024; Weng et al., 2022). Moreover, collaboration among participants through group discussions, peer feedback, and joint problem-solving contributes to knowledge sharing, exposure to

diverse perspectives, and refinement of individual business strategies (Adhikari et al., 2018; Buratti et al., 2022). Despite these proven benefits, gaps persist in the availability and accessibility of structured programs for small-scale entrepreneurs, particularly in rural or semi-urban areas where logistical, financial, and institutional constraints limit participation and follow-up support (Hasan et al., 2024; Pennetta et al., 2024; Prokopenko et al., 2024). The absence of integrated, well-monitored training frameworks restricts the potential of such programs to produce sustained improvements in business competence and operational performance.

Taken together, the literature highlights several critical gaps that the present study seeks to address. First, there is a need for structured, experiential, and contextually relevant entrepreneurship training that goes beyond theoretical instruction and equips participants with both conceptual understanding and practical skills. Second, existing initiatives often fail to integrate iterative feedback mechanisms, collaborative learning, and reflective exercises, which are essential for consolidating learning and ensuring the application of skills in real-world business operations. Third, research underscores the lack of measurable evaluation of outcomes, limiting understanding of the effectiveness of training programs on participants' business competencies and confidence. Addressing these gaps requires operationalizing entrepreneurial skills through a comprehensive program design that incorporates targeted skill-building modules, experiential exercises, mentorship, and pre- and post-assessments. Such an approach ensures that variables including business planning ability, financial literacy, marketing strategy, problem-solving skills, and entrepreneurial confidence are explicitly developed, assessed, and reinforced throughout the program, providing a rational basis for intervention and evaluation. Based on the identified gaps and operationalization of key variables, the present study focuses on two primary objectives: the first objective is to design and implement a structured entrepreneurship training program that enhances practical business competencies among small-scale entrepreneurs. The second objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in operationalizing entrepreneurial skills, ensuring that participants acquire both theoretical understanding and practical abilities to manage and grow their enterprises effectively.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Entrepreneurial Skills Development in Small-Scale Enterprises**

Entrepreneurial skills encompass a combination of cognitive, technical, and interpersonal competencies that enable business owners to identify opportunities, manage resources, and navigate market uncertainties effectively (Buratti et al., 2022; Okolo-Obasi & Uduji, 2024). Core competencies include business planning, financial management, marketing strategy, problem-solving, and adaptive decision-making (Adhikari et al., 2018; Padi et al., 2025). Research indicates that entrepreneurs who receive structured support in these areas demonstrate higher operational efficiency, innovative capacity, and resilience in responding to dynamic market conditions (Liu et al., 2023; Sousa et al., 2024). Despite the acknowledged importance, numerous studies highlight persistent gaps in skill acquisition among small-scale business owners, particularly in rural and semi-urban contexts where access to formal training is limited (Khursheed, 2022; Somwetee et al., 2023; Zang et al., 2023). Many micro-entrepreneurs rely on informal knowledge transfer or ad hoc learning opportunities, which often fail to provide comprehensive, practical competencies (Babajide et al., 2023; Christensen et al., 2023). This gap emphasizes the need for structured, participatory programs that operationalize entrepreneurial skills through measurable, contextually relevant interventions that strengthen both conceptual understanding and practical application.

## **Experiential and Structured Entrepreneurship Training**

Experiential learning has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach in entrepreneurship education (Kolb, 2014). Structured programs that integrate hands-on workshops, interactive simulations, case discussions, and reflective practice enable participants to translate theoretical knowledge into practical competencies (Arslan et al., 2023; Weng et al., 2022). Studies show that such programs enhance not only technical skills, such as business planning and financial literacy, but also adaptive competencies, including problem-solving, creativity, and opportunity recognition (Abebe & Kegne, 2023; Zang et al., 2023). Additionally, mentorship and peer collaboration within structured training environments foster critical thinking, feedback assimilation, and iterative improvement of business strategies (Adhikari et al., 2018; Bacq et al., 2022). Nonetheless, literature indicates that many existing entrepreneurship programs remain fragmented, emphasizing either theoretical instruction or isolated skill areas, which limits their effectiveness in producing measurable improvements in business operations and confidence (Christensen et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of designing integrated training interventions that combine experiential exercises with structured skill-building modules, fostering comprehensive competency development.

### **Business Planning and Financial Competence**

Effective business planning and financial management constitute foundational elements of entrepreneurial success (Babajide et al., 2023; Pennetta et al., 2024). Research demonstrates that small-scale entrepreneurs often struggle with budgeting, cost analysis, pricing, and cash flow management, which constrains business growth and sustainability (Prokopenko et al., 2024; Sousa et al., 2024). Training programs that incorporate realistic simulations, scenario-based exercises, and iterative planning exercises have been shown to enhance participants' ability to forecast, allocate resources, and make informed financial decisions (Imjai et al., 2025; Padi et al., 2025). Despite this evidence, gaps remain in providing systematic opportunities for entrepreneurs to practice these skills in a controlled yet realistic environment, as many programs rely heavily on theoretical instruction without ensuring operational application (Munyo & Veiga, 2024; Pan et al., 2024). Structured interventions that integrate financial simulations with guided mentorship and peer feedback are therefore necessary to strengthen skill acquisition and confidence in executing business strategies.

### **Marketing Strategy and Opportunity Recognition**

Marketing and opportunity recognition are critical drivers of competitiveness for micro and small enterprises, enabling entrepreneurs to identify market niches, promote products effectively, and respond to customer needs (Arslan et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Research highlights that small-scale entrepreneurs often lack systematic knowledge of marketing tools, digital promotion, and customer analysis, limiting their ability to expand market reach and optimize sales (Abebe & Kegne, 2023; Okolo-Obasi & Uduji, 2024; Weng et al., 2022). Experiential programs incorporating case studies, market simulations, and participatory exercises have been shown to improve participants' ability to identify opportunities, segment markets, and implement marketing strategies in line with consumer behavior and local context (Khursheed, 2022; Somwethee et al., 2023; Zang et al., 2023). Yet, literature indicates that few programs comprehensively integrate marketing and opportunity recognition with broader skill development in entrepreneurship, leaving a critical gap in holistic training design (Adhikari et al., 2018; Bacq et al., 2022; Buratti et al., 2022). Addressing this gap requires training programs that embed marketing and opportunity recognition exercises alongside financial, planning, and operational skill modules.

## **Theoretical Framework and the Study Context**

The present study draws on experiential learning theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed through experience, reflection, and iterative application (Kolb, 2014). This framework underscores the importance of hands-on workshops, simulations, and reflective exercises in enabling participants to internalize entrepreneurial concepts and operationalize skills effectively. The study contextualizes this framework within a structured entrepreneurship training program implemented for 30 local micro and small business owners in Desa Cicapar, Ciamis Regency, including food producers, handicraft artisans, and retail operators. The program integrated business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving exercises, delivered through interactive workshops, case discussions, simulations, and mentoring sessions. Pre- and post-training assessments were conducted to evaluate participants' knowledge acquisition, business planning competence, and confidence in implementing entrepreneurial strategies. The contextualization of experiential learning in a real-world, community-based environment ensures that theoretical constructs are directly translated into practical skills, addressing identified gaps in entrepreneurship education and fostering sustainable improvements in small enterprise performance.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive-analytical design combined with participatory action principles to examine the effectiveness of a structured entrepreneurship training program in enhancing the skills of local micro and small business owners. The approach integrated quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to capture both measurable improvements in entrepreneurial skills and the subjective experiences of participants in applying these competencies to their businesses (Creswell et al., 2004). The design focused on operationalizing key entrepreneurial competencies, including business planning, financial management, marketing strategy, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial confidence, ensuring that skill development could be systematically assessed before, during, and after the program. The training program was structured to be experiential and participatory, aligning with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, emphasizing learning through active engagement, reflection, and iterative practice (Kolb, 2014). By combining interactive workshops, simulations, case studies, and mentoring, participants could translate theoretical concepts into practical business solutions, bridging the gap between knowledge acquisition and operational application.

### **The Participants**

The study involved 30 participants comprising small-scale business owners from Desa Cicapar, Ciamis Regency, engaged in food production, handicrafts, and retail operations. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that individuals were actively managing enterprises and demonstrated willingness to engage in structured training interventions. Participant demographics included age ranges from 22 to 55 years, with varied levels of formal education and prior entrepreneurial experience, reflecting the diverse nature of local small-scale business operations. Ensuring participant diversity was critical to understanding how structured training could be generalized across different enterprise types and experience levels. Table 1 provides an overview of participant characteristics.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics (*n* = 30)

Variable	Category	Frequency ( <i>n</i> )	Percentage (%)
Age	22–30	8	26.7
	31–40	12	40.0
	41–55	10	33.3
Gender	Male	17	56.7
	Female	13	43.3
Education Level	Primary/Secondary	12	40.0
	Diploma/Bachelor	18	60.0
Business Type	Food Production	12	40.0
	Handicrafts	8	26.7
	Retail Services	10	33.3

### Training Program Design

The structured training program was designed with four core modules targeting essential entrepreneurial competencies: business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving. Each module combined theoretical instruction with practical exercises, ensuring that participants could directly apply concepts to their businesses. The program spanned five consecutive days, with each day including a combination of lectures, group exercises, case simulations, and mentoring sessions. Table 2 presents the modules and their respective components.

**Table 2.** Training Modules and Components

Module	Learning Objectives	Activities	Assessment Methods
Business Planning	Develop structured business plans; identify market opportunities	Workshops on business plan creation; group exercises; case analysis	Pre/post business plan evaluation; facilitator observation
Financial Management	Improve budgeting, cost analysis, cash flow monitoring	Hands-on simulations; scenario exercises; peer review	Pre/post financial exercises; portfolio review
Marketing Strategies	Enhance customer analysis, product promotion, and market segmentation	Interactive marketing games; digital marketing exercises; role-playing	Pre/post marketing assessment; practical presentation evaluation
Problem-Solving	Develop adaptive thinking and operational decision-making	Group problem-solving challenges; reflective discussion	Observation checklist; reflective journal evaluation

### Data Collection

Data collection incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the program. Pre- and post-training assessments measured participants’ knowledge acquisition, business planning competence, financial literacy, marketing understanding, and confidence in implementing strategies. Quantitative measures included structured observation rubrics, standardized assessment exercises, and scoring of business plan outputs. Qualitative data were gathered through reflective journals, focus group discussions, and mentoring feedback to capture participants’ perceptions, challenges, and the applicability of skills learned.

**Table 3.** Data Collection Instruments

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Type of Data</b>
Observation Rubric	Evaluate application of business skills during exercises	Daily	Quantitative
Business Plan Evaluation	Assess structure, market strategy, financial planning	Pre/post training	Quantitative
Marketing Simulation Score	Measure ability to identify and implement marketing strategies	Pre/post training	Quantitative
Reflective Journals	Capture participant insights and self-perceived skill improvement	Daily	Qualitative
Focus Group Discussion	Explore challenges and program applicability	Post-training	Qualitative
Mentoring Feedback	Provide individualized guidance and assess engagement	Daily	Qualitative/Quantitative

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentage improvement) to measure skill development across training modules. Pre- and post-training scores were compared to evaluate learning outcomes and operationalization of entrepreneurial competencies. Qualitative data from journals and focus group discussions were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying patterns related to skill application, perceived usefulness, and challenges in implementing learned strategies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings ensured validity and reliability in assessing the program’s impact.

**Table 4.** Observation Rubric for Business Competencies

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Scoring Scale (1–5)</b>	<b>Description</b>
Business Planning	Market analysis; strategic goal-setting; structured plan	1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent	Evaluates completeness and practicality of plans
Financial Management	Budgeting, cost control, cash flow tracking	1–5	Assesses ability to apply financial tools
Marketing Strategy	Customer analysis; promotion plan; segmentation	1–5	Measures application of marketing concepts
Problem-Solving	Identifying operational challenges; adaptive solutions	1–5	Assesses critical thinking and decision-making

### Program Implementation

The program was implemented over five consecutive days in a participatory setting. Each day combined theoretical instruction, practical exercises, collaborative group work, and individualized mentoring. Daily schedules included a morning theoretical session, midday applied exercises, afternoon simulations, and mentoring review, ensuring continuous engagement and iterative skill reinforcement. Table 5 provides an overview of the daily implementation plan.

**Table 5.** Daily Training Schedule

<b>Day</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Duration</b>
1	Theoretical Introduction	Overview of entrepreneurship concepts	2 hours
	Applied Exercise	Drafting initial business plans	2 hours
	Mentoring	Individual guidance on plan structuring	1 hour
2	Financial Management	Budgeting & cash flow simulations	2 hours
	Group Exercise	Scenario-based problem solving	2 hours
	Reflection	Journaling insights	1 hour
3	Marketing Strategies	Case study & digital promotion	2 hours
	Role Play	Customer analysis & promotion exercises	2 hours
	Mentoring	Feedback & discussion	1 hour
4	Problem-Solving	Operational challenges group simulation	2 hours
	Applied Task	Implementing solutions in mock scenarios	2 hours
	Reflection	Group discussion & journal entries	1 hour
5	Integration	Developing full business plan incorporating all modules	3 hours
	Presentation	Group presentations & peer evaluation	2 hours
	Feedback	Final mentoring & closing	1 hour

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the university research committee to ensure adherence to research ethics standards. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality of participant data was maintained, with information anonymized and securely stored. Participants were informed that all assessments, observations, and mentoring sessions were designed for professional development purposes rather than formal evaluation. Constructive feedback was provided throughout the program to enhance skill acquisition, reflective practice, and confidence in applying entrepreneurial strategies.

## **RESULTS**

### **Design and Implementation of a Structured Entrepreneurship Training Program**

The design and implementation of the structured entrepreneurship training program were grounded in the premise that practical business competencies among small-scale entrepreneurs cannot be developed through fragmented or purely theoretical instruction. Instead, entrepreneurial skill acquisition requires an integrated training architecture that combines conceptual grounding, experiential engagement, iterative practice, and reflective reinforcement. The program was therefore designed as a coherent learning trajectory that systematically addressed business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving as interdependent competencies essential for enterprise sustainability and growth. Each component of the program was intentionally sequenced to move participants from foundational understanding to applied execution, ensuring that learning outcomes were not limited to cognitive gains but translated into operational capability.

The program engaged 30 participants who operated micro and small enterprises across food production, handicrafts, and retail sectors. This diversity informed the design of training materials and activities, which emphasized adaptability and contextual relevance rather than prescriptive business models. The training structure acknowledged that small-scale entrepreneurs often manage multiple operational roles simultaneously, requiring competencies that are flexible, efficient, and immediately applicable. As such, the program adopted an experiential learning orientation, integrating interactive workshops, hands-on simulations, case discussions, and mentoring sessions.

This approach allowed participants to construct knowledge through direct engagement with realistic business scenarios, while continuously reflecting on their own enterprise contexts.

Central to the program design was the development of modular learning units that aligned conceptual input with applied tasks. The business planning module emphasized opportunity identification, goal formulation, and strategic alignment, enabling participants to articulate coherent business directions grounded in market realities. Financial management sessions focused on budgeting, cost control, pricing strategies, and cash flow monitoring, areas frequently identified in prior studies as persistent weaknesses among micro-entrepreneurs. Marketing modules addressed customer analysis, value proposition development, and promotional strategies, while problem-solving sessions targeted adaptive decision-making in response to operational constraints and market fluctuations. These modules were not treated as isolated components but were interwoven through cumulative tasks that required participants to integrate competencies across domains.

Implementation was characterized by intensive participant engagement and iterative learning cycles. Interactive workshops introduced core concepts using accessible language and contextually relevant examples, followed by hands-on simulations where participants applied these concepts to structured exercises. Case discussions facilitated collective sense-making, allowing participants to compare experiences, examine alternative strategies, and challenge assumptions about business practices. Mentoring sessions functioned as a critical implementation mechanism, providing individualized guidance that enabled participants to refine their ideas, troubleshoot challenges, and align training outputs with their specific enterprise conditions. This layered implementation strategy ensured that learning remained dynamic, dialogic, and practice-oriented throughout the program.

Evidence of effective implementation is reflected in participants' progressive engagement with training tasks and their increasing ability to articulate and operationalize business concepts. Table 6 presents descriptive results from pre- and post-training assessments of core business competencies, illustrating the extent to which the structured program supported skill development at the implementation level.

**Table 6.** Pre- and Post-Training Scores of Practical Business Competencies (*n* = 30)

Competency Area	Pre-Training Mean (SD)	Post-Training Mean (SD)	Increase (%)
Business Planning	2.4 (0.6)	4.1 (0.5)	70.8
Financial Management	2.2 (0.5)	3.9 (0.6)	77.3
Marketing Strategies	2.3 (0.6)	4.0 (0.5)	73.9
Problem-Solving Skills	2.5 (0.5)	4.2 (0.4)	68.0
Entrepreneurial Confidence	2.6 (0.6)	4.3 (0.4)	65.4

Table 6 demonstrates substantial and consistent improvements across all assessed domains of practical business competencies following the structured entrepreneurship training program, indicating that the intervention effectively translated instructional design into measurable skill development. Participants' business planning competence increased markedly from a pre-training mean of 2.4 (SD = 0.6) to a post-training mean of 4.1 (SD = 0.5), reflecting a 70.8 percent gain, which suggests a strengthened capacity to formulate clearer goals, structured plans, and more realistic operational strategies. Financial management exhibited the highest relative improvement, rising from 2.2 (SD = 0.5) to 3.9 (SD = 0.6), equivalent to a 77.3 percent increase, indicating that participants became more capable of managing cash flow, recording transactions, and making informed financial decisions that are critical for business sustainability. Similar patterns were observed in marketing strategies, which improved by 73.9 percent from a mean of 2.3 (SD = 0.6) to 4.0 (SD = 0.5), suggesting enhanced understanding of market positioning, customer targeting, and promotional planning. Problem-solving skills also showed notable development, increasing from 2.5 (SD = 0.5)

to 4.2 (SD = 0.4), which points to greater analytical flexibility and responsiveness to operational challenges. Importantly, entrepreneurial confidence rose from 2.6 (SD = 0.6) to 4.3 (SD = 0.4), a 65.4 percent increase, underscoring that the program fostered not only technical competence but also psychological readiness to apply new knowledge. Collectively, these results indicate that the integration of interactive workshops, simulations, and mentoring created a coherent learning environment that supported both skill acquisition and the internalization of entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

Beyond quantitative improvements, qualitative evidence from training artifacts and facilitator observations further demonstrates the effectiveness of program implementation. Participants progressively shifted from fragmented business ideas to more structured and coherent planning documents, reflecting an increased capacity to synthesize information across operational domains. Table 7 summarizes key features of business plans developed during the program, illustrating how training activities translated into tangible outputs.

**Table 7.** Characteristics of Business Plans Developed During Training

<b>Component</b>	<b>Initial Draft Characteristics</b>	<b>Final Draft Characteristics</b>
Business Goals	General and short-term	Clear, measurable, and time-bound
Market Analysis	Descriptive and intuitive	Structured with customer segmentation
Financial Planning	Limited cost awareness	Detailed budgeting and pricing strategies
Marketing Approach	Informal promotion	Integrated promotional and branding plans
Risk Identification	Largely absent	Identification of operational and market risks

Table 7 illustrates a clear and systematic progression in the quality and sophistication of business plans developed during the training, highlighting how the structured program facilitated meaningful cognitive and practical transformation rather than superficial compliance. In the initial drafts, business goals were largely general and short-term, indicating limited strategic orientation; however, in the final drafts, these goals evolved into clear, measurable, and time-bound statements, reflecting improved strategic planning and goal-setting competence. Market analysis similarly shifted from descriptive and intuitive assumptions toward more structured analyses incorporating customer segmentation, suggesting that participants moved beyond personal experience to evidence-informed decision-making. Financial planning showed one of the most critical transformations, as early drafts revealed limited cost awareness, while final versions demonstrated detailed budgeting and pricing strategies, indicating enhanced financial literacy and a stronger grasp of cost structures and profitability considerations. The marketing approach also matured substantially, transitioning from informal promotional efforts to integrated promotional and branding plans that aligned products, target markets, and communication channels. Notably, risk identification, which was largely absent in the initial drafts, became an explicit component in the final plans, with participants identifying both operational and market-related risks, signaling a more anticipatory and resilient entrepreneurial mindset.

This progression underscores the effectiveness of the training’s process-oriented design, which emphasized iterative drafting, structured feedback, and guided revision rather than the production of static business plan documents. By engaging repeatedly in cycles of application and reflection, participants were required to operationalize abstract concepts in varied contexts, thereby strengthening conceptual clarity and practical transferability to real business operations. Hands-on simulations further reinforced this process by situating learning within realistic decision-making environments. Financial simulations exposed participants to fluctuating cost and demand scenarios, compelling them to justify trade-offs and evaluate consequences, while marketing simulations required alignment between customer segmentation and promotional strategies under resource constraints. These activities mirrored the uncertainties and limitations commonly faced by small-scale

entrepreneurs, enhancing ecological validity and decision-making confidence. The mentoring component functioned as a critical bridge between training content and enterprise application, as facilitators provided individualized, targeted feedback on both business plans and simulation outcomes. This support enabled participants to contextualize learning within their own enterprises, address misconceptions, and refine implementation strategies, thereby reinforcing the integration of strategic thinking, technical competence, and reflective practice. Table 8 presents a summary of mentoring focus areas and participant responses.

**Table 8.** Mentoring Focus Areas and Observed Participant Development

<b>Mentoring Focus</b>	<b>Initial Participant Response</b>	<b>Subsequent Development</b>
Goal Setting	Broad and ambiguous	Specific and actionable
Financial Decisions	Cost-oriented only	Cost-benefit oriented
Marketing Choices	Product-focused	Customer-focused
Problem Response	Reactive	Anticipatory and adaptive

Table 8 demonstrates a substantive transformation in participants' entrepreneurial reasoning as a result of sustained mentoring interactions embedded within the training program. In the initial phase, goal setting tended to be broad and ambiguous, reflecting limited strategic clarity and an emphasis on immediate operational concerns rather than longer-term direction. Through iterative mentoring sessions, these goals became increasingly specific and actionable, indicating that participants developed a stronger capacity to translate abstract aspirations into operational plans that could be monitored and adjusted over time. Financial decision-making exhibited a similar shift, as early responses were largely cost-oriented, focusing narrowly on expense reduction. Subsequent development revealed a more nuanced cost-benefit orientation, suggesting that participants began to evaluate financial choices in relation to value creation, risk exposure, and sustainability rather than short-term savings alone.

Changes in marketing choices further illustrate this cognitive progression. Initially, participants adopted a product-focused perspective, emphasizing features and production processes with limited consideration of consumer needs. Mentoring guided them toward a customer-focused orientation, where market preferences, purchasing behavior, and perceived value informed promotional and distribution strategies. This shift indicates deeper market awareness and improved alignment between business offerings and demand conditions. Problem response patterns also evolved notably, transitioning from reactive approaches that addressed issues only after they emerged to more anticipatory and adaptive strategies that considered potential risks and alternative courses of action. This progression highlights the role of mentoring in fostering reflective thinking and foresight. Collectively, these developments suggest that structured, dialogic mentoring functioned as a catalyst for higher-order entrepreneurial cognition, enabling participants to internalize analytical frameworks and exercise greater autonomy in diagnosing challenges and formulating context-sensitive solutions, thereby strengthening both competence and resilience in managing their enterprises.

Collectively, the design and implementation of the structured entrepreneurship training program demonstrate that practical business competencies can be effectively enhanced when training is intentionally aligned with experiential learning principles, contextual relevance, and sustained participant engagement. The integration of workshops, simulations, case discussions, and mentoring created a comprehensive learning environment that supported iterative skill development rather than one-off knowledge transfer. The program's structure allowed participants to internalize entrepreneurial concepts, apply them through guided practice, and refine their approaches through reflection and feedback. By operationalizing business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving as interconnected competencies, the program addressed longstanding gaps in entrepreneurship training that often treat these domains in isolation. The evidence presented

indicates that such an integrated and structured approach is essential for enabling small-scale entrepreneurs to develop practical capabilities that are both robust and transferable, laying a strong foundation for subsequent evaluation of program effectiveness in operationalizing entrepreneurial skills.

### **Evaluation of Program Effectiveness in Operationalizing Entrepreneurial Skills**

The second objective of this study centers on evaluating the effectiveness of the structured entrepreneurship training program in operationalizing entrepreneurial skills, with particular attention to whether participants acquired not only theoretical understanding but also practical abilities to manage and grow their enterprises effectively. Evaluation in this context was not limited to measuring knowledge gain; rather, it focused on examining the extent to which learning outcomes were translated into observable behavioral changes, applied competencies, and increased confidence in real business decision-making. This evaluative orientation reflects the understanding that entrepreneurship training is effective only when participants are able to internalize concepts and enact them consistently within their operational environments.

The evaluation framework was designed to capture multiple dimensions of effectiveness, including cognitive mastery, practical execution, and self-regulatory capacity. Pre- and post-training assessments were employed to measure changes in participants' understanding of business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving. These assessments were complemented by performance-based evaluations derived from simulations, business plan outputs, and mentoring observations. This multi-layered approach allowed for a more robust assessment of effectiveness, as it reduced reliance on self-reported perceptions alone and emphasized demonstrated competence. Quantitative analysis of pre- and post-training scores revealed substantial gains across all targeted entrepreneurial skill domains, indicating that the program effectively facilitated skill operationalization. Participants demonstrated marked improvement in their ability to translate abstract concepts into structured business practices. Table 9 presents comparative results of theoretical understanding and applied performance scores, highlighting the convergence between knowledge acquisition and practical execution.

**Table 9.** Comparison of Theoretical Understanding and Applied Performance Scores (*n* = 30)

<b>Skill Domain</b>	<b>Pre-Training Knowledge Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Post-Training Knowledge Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Pre-Training Performance Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Post-Training Performance Mean (SD)</b>
Business Planning	2.6 (0.5)	4.3 (0.4)	2.3 (0.6)	4.1 (0.5)
Financial Management	2.4 (0.6)	4.0 (0.5)	2.2 (0.5)	3.9 (0.6)
Marketing Strategies	2.5 (0.6)	4.1 (0.5)	2.3 (0.6)	4.0 (0.5)
Problem-Solving	2.7 (0.5)	4.4 (0.4)	2.5 (0.5)	4.2 (0.4)

Table 9 provides a detailed picture of how the training program facilitated convergence between participants' theoretical understanding and their applied performance across core entrepreneurial skill domains. Prior to the intervention, knowledge scores in business planning, financial management, marketing strategies, and problem-solving were consistently higher than corresponding performance scores, indicating that participants possessed partial conceptual awareness that had not yet translated into effective practice. Following the training, substantial gains were evident in both dimensions, with post-training knowledge means rising to 4.3 in business planning, 4.0 in financial management, 4.1 in marketing strategies, and 4.4 in problem-solving, while applied performance scores increased in close alignment to 4.1, 3.9, 4.0, and 4.2 respectively. The narrowing gap between knowledge and performance suggests that learning outcomes were not confined to cognitive acquisition but were internalized as actionable competencies. This alignment is

particularly notable given long-standing concerns in entrepreneurship education regarding the persistence of inert knowledge that remains unused in practical contexts. The structured sequencing of conceptual instruction, guided practice, and reflective feedback appears to have enabled participants to repeatedly enact abstract principles within realistic tasks, thereby strengthening procedural understanding. Performance in integrated simulations further reinforced this pattern, as participants were required to synthesize planning, financial judgment, marketing decisions, and problem-solving under simulated constraints. Their progressively coherent and adaptive responses indicate that the program supported higher-order transfer of learning, enabling participants to mobilize multiple competencies simultaneously rather than applying skills in isolation. Table 10 summarizes performance trends observed during simulation-based evaluations.

**Table 10.** Simulation-Based Performance Evaluation Across Training Phases

<b>Evaluation Aspect</b>	<b>Early Phase Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Mid Phase Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Final Phase Mean (SD)</b>
Decision Accuracy	2.4 (0.6)	3.5 (0.5)	4.2 (0.4)
Resource Allocation	2.3 (0.5)	3.6 (0.6)	4.1 (0.5)
Risk Anticipation	2.2 (0.6)	3.4 (0.5)	4.0 (0.4)
Strategic Coherence	2.5 (0.5)	3.7 (0.5)	4.3 (0.4)

Table 10 illustrates a clear developmental trajectory in participants’ simulation-based performance across the early, mid, and final phases of the training, revealing how entrepreneurial competence emerged through cumulative learning rather than instant mastery. In the early phase, mean scores for decision accuracy at 2.4, resource allocation at 2.3, risk anticipation at 2.2, and strategic coherence at 2.5 reflect a tendency toward intuitive and reactive decision-making, with limited integration of analytical reasoning. By the mid phase, noticeable gains were observed, with means increasing to 3.5 for decision accuracy, 3.6 for resource allocation, 3.4 for risk anticipation, and 3.7 for strategic coherence, indicating growing familiarity with analytical tools and improved ability to connect concepts across business domains. In the final phase, performance reached consistently high levels, with decision accuracy rising to 4.2, resource allocation to 4.1, risk anticipation to 4.0, and strategic coherence to 4.3, suggesting that participants had internalized strategic thinking patterns and were able to apply them in an integrated manner. The gradual reduction in standard deviations across phases further indicates increasing consistency in performance among participants. This pattern underscores the critical role of iterative simulations combined with mentoring, as repeated cycles of action, feedback, and reflection enabled participants to move beyond trial-and-error approaches toward anticipatory, coherent, and strategically grounded entrepreneurial decision-making.

Another critical indicator of effectiveness was the quality of participants’ final business plans, which served as integrative artifacts demonstrating the operationalization of entrepreneurial skills. These plans were evaluated using standardized criteria assessing coherence, feasibility, and strategic alignment. Comparative analysis of initial and final submissions revealed substantial enhancement in structural clarity, financial rigor, and market responsiveness. Table 11 presents aggregated evaluation results of business plan quality.

**Table 11.** Evaluation of Business Plan Quality (Initial vs Final Submission)

<b>Evaluation Criterion</b>	<b>Initial Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Final Mean (SD)</b>
Strategic Clarity	2.5 (0.6)	4.3 (0.4)
Financial Feasibility	2.2 (0.5)	4.0 (0.5)
Market Alignment	2.4 (0.6)	4.1 (0.5)
Risk Management	2.1 (0.5)	3.9 (0.6)
Overall Coherence	2.3 (0.5)	4.2 (0.4)

Table 11 presents a detailed comparison of business plan quality between initial and final submissions, demonstrating substantial and systematic improvement across all evaluation criteria. Strategic clarity increased markedly from a mean of 2.5 to 4.3, indicating that participants progressed from loosely articulated ideas to well-defined strategic directions supported by explicit objectives and action plans. Financial feasibility showed a similar pattern, rising from 2.2 to 4.0, which reflects enhanced capacity to construct realistic budgets, align pricing strategies with cost structures, and anticipate cash flow implications. Improvements in market alignment from 2.4 to 4.1 suggest that participants moved beyond intuitive assumptions about customers toward more structured analyses that considered segmentation, demand characteristics, and competitive positioning. Risk management, which initially recorded the lowest mean at 2.1, increased to 3.9, signaling growing awareness of operational, financial, and market uncertainties and the ability to propose mitigation strategies. The rise in overall coherence from 2.3 to 4.2 confirms that participants were increasingly able to integrate strategic, financial, and market considerations into unified business narratives rather than treating them as isolated components. These patterns indicate that learning outcomes were not confined to improved documentation skills but reflected deeper conceptual integration and systems thinking. Participants demonstrated a more holistic understanding of how strategic choices, financial decisions, and market dynamics interact to shape business viability. Complementing these gains, enhanced entrepreneurial confidence emerged as an enabling condition for application, as participants showed greater readiness to justify decisions, adapt plans in response to feedback, and engage proactively in strategic discussions. Taken together, the convergence of quantitative improvements and observed behavioral changes underscores the effectiveness of the structured training design in fostering durable, integrated entrepreneurial competence, while also revealing the importance of sustained mentoring and follow-up mechanisms to support participants with limited prior business exposure and to assess the longer-term sustainability of these competencies.

Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that the structured entrepreneurship training program was effective in bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. The integration of experiential learning, iterative assessment, and individualized mentoring enabled participants to internalize entrepreneurial concepts and enact them within realistic decision-making contexts. These findings underscore the value of comprehensive evaluation frameworks that move beyond knowledge testing to examine how training translates into actionable competencies, thereby providing a robust basis for strengthening entrepreneurship training initiatives aimed at small-scale enterprise development.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of the present study demonstrate that a structured entrepreneurship training program can substantially strengthen the practical business competencies of small-scale entrepreneurs when learning is deliberately designed to integrate conceptual understanding with sustained experiential application. Consistent with established perspectives in entrepreneurship education, the results reinforce the argument that meaningful skill development emerges through active, problem-centered engagement rather than passive knowledge transmission (Kolb, 2014; Liu et al., 2023). By embedding conceptual input within simulations, mentoring interactions, and iterative practice, the program enabled participants to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward functional mastery of entrepreneurial tasks. Importantly, the study shows that competencies such as business planning, financial management, marketing strategy formulation, and problem-solving did not develop in isolation but evolved as interconnected capabilities. This integrated growth addresses persistent critiques in the literature that entrepreneurship training often fragments learning into discrete topics, thereby limiting participants' ability to transfer knowledge into coherent operational practice (Bacq et al., 2022; Weng et al., 2022). The findings suggest that alignment between

instructional design and the realities of enterprise management is essential for producing durable entrepreneurial capability.

Moreover, the study extends existing research by demonstrating that experiential and participatory training models are particularly effective in enabling entrepreneurs to operationalize skills across varied business contexts. Previous studies have observed that micro and small entrepreneurs frequently rely on tacit, experience-based knowledge that supports day-to-day survival but remains insufficient for strategic growth and adaptation (Fortunato & Alter, 2015; Tran et al., 2024). The present findings advance this line of inquiry by illustrating how structured experiential learning, when scaffolded through guided simulations, targeted mentoring, and reflective dialogue, facilitates the transformation of implicit experience into explicit, transferable competence. Participants were not only exposed to realistic business challenges but were also encouraged to analyze decisions, justify strategic choices, and revise approaches in response to feedback, thereby deepening cognitive engagement. This supports and elaborates arguments by Babajide et al. (2023) and Prokopenko et al. (2024) that effective entrepreneurship education must balance real-world complexity with intentional pedagogical structure. Through this balance, the program fostered strategic thinking, adaptive reasoning, and confidence in decision-making, positioning experiential learning not as an end in itself but as a mechanism for consolidating entrepreneurial knowledge into sustainable practice.

Another significant contribution of the present study lies in its reconceptualization of mentoring as a core pedagogical mechanism for operationalizing entrepreneurial skills rather than a peripheral or optional support activity. While existing entrepreneurship literature widely acknowledges the value of mentoring, it is frequently positioned as an ancillary component that complements formal instruction rather than shaping learning trajectories in a systematic way (Hasan et al., 2024; Pennetta et al., 2024). The findings of this study indicate that mentoring functions as a critical bridge between structured training activities and enterprise-level application by enabling participants to interpret abstract concepts through the lens of their own business realities. Through sustained mentoring interactions, participants were guided to identify context-specific constraints, reassess assumptions, and refine strategic decisions in ways that formal instruction alone could not achieve. This directly addresses concerns raised by Padi et al. (2025) and Tran et al. (2024), who argue that many professional development initiatives fail due to insufficient attention to individual learning needs and contextual diversity. By embedding mentoring throughout the training process rather than confining it to isolated sessions, the program supported adaptive learning pathways, deeper reflection, and more durable engagement with entrepreneurial practice.

The synthesis of findings further underscores the centrality of confidence development as a defining outcome of effective entrepreneurship training. In line with social cognitive theory, confidence operates as a mediating mechanism that transforms acquired knowledge and skills into observable entrepreneurial behavior (Christensen et al., 2023). Prior studies have consistently shown that entrepreneurs may demonstrate adequate technical understanding yet refrain from strategic action due to low self-efficacy, fear of failure, or uncertainty in decision-making (Munyo & Veiga, 2024; Pan et al., 2024). The present study extends this body of research by illustrating how confidence can be systematically cultivated through iterative practice, constructive feedback, and supportive peer and mentor interactions. Rather than emerging incidentally, confidence was reinforced through repeated opportunities to test ideas, receive guidance, and adjust strategies in a psychologically safe environment. This finding suggests that evaluations of entrepreneurship training effectiveness should move beyond narrow cognitive indicators to include the extent to which programs empower participants to act decisively and persist in the face of uncertainty.

In the domains of business planning and financial management, the findings both confirm and advance earlier research that identifies these areas as enduring challenges for micro and small-scale entrepreneurs (Imjai et al., 2025; Padi et al., 2025). While previous studies often attribute these challenges to limited financial literacy or planning knowledge, the present study demonstrates that the underlying issue is more deeply rooted in the lack of structured opportunities for guided enactment and iterative refinement. By operationalizing planning and financial concepts through simulations, scenario-based tasks, and mentored revisions, participants developed procedural and strategic understanding that extends beyond formulaic knowledge. This responds directly to critiques by Pennetta et al. (2024) and Sousa et al. (2024), who argue that entrepreneurship education must emphasize how entrepreneurs reason, prioritize, and adapt in practice rather than merely what they know. The findings indicate that when planning and financial management are treated as dynamic processes rather than static outputs, entrepreneurs are better equipped to navigate complexity and make informed trade-offs.

Finally, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on marketing competence and opportunity recognition by demonstrating that these capabilities are strengthened when entrepreneurs are guided to adopt an analytical and customer-oriented mindset rather than relying predominantly on intuition. Prior research has shown that micro-entrepreneurs often depend on informal marketing practices shaped by habit and immediate experience, which can constrain market responsiveness and limit growth potential (Babajide et al., 2023; Prokopenko et al., 2024). The present findings suggest that structured training can recalibrate strategic orientation by encouraging systematic market analysis, customer segmentation, and value proposition alignment. This addresses gaps identified in the literature regarding the underrepresentation of applied marketing skill development in entrepreneurship programs (Buratti et al., 2022; Fortunato & Alter, 2015). By integrating marketing concepts with hands-on application and reflective mentoring, the program enabled participants to recognize opportunities more strategically and to position their enterprises in ways that are responsive to evolving market conditions.

From a broader perspective, the discussion of findings reinforces the need to conceptualize entrepreneurship training as an evolving and cumulative learning process rather than a discrete, one-off intervention. The patterns of development observed in this study suggest that entrepreneurial competence emerges through sustained participation in learning activities that allow for repetition, experimentation, and progressive refinement of skills. This aligns with experiential learning theories that emphasize learning as a cyclical process in which experience, reflection, conceptualization, and action continuously inform one another (Arslan et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023; Weng et al., 2022). The findings indicate that meaningful change in entrepreneurial practice is rarely immediate; instead, it requires time for participants to internalize concepts, test strategies, and recalibrate decisions in response to feedback and changing conditions. This perspective challenges training models that prioritize rapid knowledge transfer over deep capability building. At the same time, the findings prompt critical reflection on the methodological limitations of short-term evaluation frameworks commonly employed in entrepreneurship training research. While the present study demonstrates clear evidence of skill operationalization within the training period, it also highlights the difficulty of determining whether such gains are sustained once structured support is withdrawn. Prior research has cautioned that short-term improvements may not translate into long-term behavioral change without ongoing reinforcement and opportunities for application (Abebe & Kegne, 2023; Zang et al., 2023). By situating the findings within this broader debate, the study underscores the importance of longitudinal assessment designs that can capture the durability, adaptation, and evolution of entrepreneurial skills over time, particularly in contexts characterized by market volatility and resource constraints.

In sum, the discussion of findings indicates that the present study not only corroborates existing entrepreneurship education research but also extends it by providing empirical support for integrated, mentoring-centered, and experiential training designs. By addressing gaps related to fragmentation, lack of contextualization, and insufficient operational focus in prior programs, the study offers a more holistic understanding of how structured training can effectively enhance entrepreneurial skills among small-scale business owners. These insights contribute to ongoing scholarly debates on the design, implementation, and evaluation of entrepreneurship training, while also offering a robust foundation for future research and program development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that a structured entrepreneurship training program can substantially enhance the operational capacity of small-scale entrepreneurs when pedagogical design prioritizes experiential learning, contextual relevance, and sustained mentoring. The positive insights indicate that integrating business planning, financial management, marketing, and problem-solving within applied learning environments fosters not only skill acquisition but also confidence and strategic awareness, enabling participants to translate knowledge into practical business actions. At the same time, the findings reveal critical limitations, particularly the contextual dependency of learning outcomes and the constraints of short-term program implementation, which may limit the sustainability of skill application without continued support. These limitations suggest that entrepreneurship training should not be treated as a standalone intervention but as part of a broader capacity-building ecosystem that includes follow-up mentoring, peer learning networks, and adaptive program refinement. The implications extend to policymakers and community development practitioners, highlighting the need for training models that are flexible, practice-oriented, and responsive to diverse enterprise contexts. Future initiatives should incorporate longitudinal evaluation designs to capture long-term impacts, integrate digital tools to expand access and scalability, and tailor instructional strategies to varying levels of entrepreneurial readiness. By synthesizing both strengths and shortcomings, this study provides a grounded foundation for advancing more effective and sustainable community-based entrepreneurship development programs.

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