Creating a more prosperous life through beauty: how entrepreneurship education empowers women MSME in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to determine whether a top cosmetic company’s Beauty for Better Life Women’s Empowerment Program (BFBL – WEP) has encouraged women to become entrepreneurs in the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) sector, and identify the various obstacles and challenges they face in navigating their entrepreneurship journey. Launched by the L’Oréal Foundation in 2009 in 27 countries including Indonesia, the BFBL Program believes that a program like this will play a central role in helping vulnerable, underprivileged, or marginalized women regain their self-esteem, develop self-confidence and enhance their well-being. Using a qualitative research design with primary data collected through semi-structured interviews of thirteen (13) female beneficiaries of the Program, the research covered six (6) regions in Indonesia. Additional data was obtained from two (2) more key informants representing the Head of the BFBL Program in L’Oréal Indonesia and a beauty coach. Interviews were done through hybrid methods of offline and online engagements with respondents, enabling reach as well as convenience as the respondents came from different regions across the country. Findings show that the BFBL produces successful women MSME entrepreneurs through a) training in the planning and design of beauty services; b) resource support provides mentoring and coaching, and c) marketing support skills through social media promotion, creating a business portfolio, and learning ethical practices in dealing with clients. Geographical challenges in program implementation as well as logistical capabilities of participants were detected. Implications to organizational practices related to women’s entrepreneurship promotion are presented.

Introduction

Based on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) of 2022-2023, women represent one in four high-growth entrepreneurs globally, with higher proportions seen in low-income countries (one in three) and North America (two in five). Women in lower- and middle-income countries are more likely to offer innovative new products and services than women in high-income contexts. In fact, women comprise the majority of innovative entrepreneurs in Togo (58.7%), Indonesia (55.3%), Romania (54.5%), Colombia (53.3%) and Iran (52%). Women are highly active in targeting international markets. This is clearest in Latin America and the Caribbean (43.1%), and Europe (41.3%), where women make up over two-fifths of entrepreneurs serving international markets (Somers, et.al., 2023).

Gender participation rates in establishing entrepreneurial activities is detected higher for women than men. Based on this GEM Report, one in six women globally reported an intention to start a business in the near future, compared to one in five men. Entrepreneurial intentions were highest for women in low-income countries (28.2%) and lowest in high-income countries (11%). Two regions – Latin America and the Caribbean and in the Middle East and Africa – lead globally with one in three women reporting entrepreneurial intentions. One in ten women globally were in the earliest stages of starting a business compared to one in eight men.

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The highest startup rates for women were found in low-income countries (13.3%) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (21.2%), with Guatemala (28.2%) and Colombia (26.1%) leading worldwide (Somers, et al., 2023).

Data from the World Bank shows that the poverty rate in Indonesia is higher for women compared to men, with 63.3 million women living below the poverty line in 2020. The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Menteri Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak or MPPA) reported that almost half (49.5%) Indonesia’s population of 273 million are women, and there is still gender inequality in various aspects. Access, control, participation and benefits from development resources are not equally felt by women (Nadia, 2022). According to a report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2020, Indonesia has a gender inequality index score at 121 out of 162 countries, Indonesia's position is in the lowest rank among the other G-20 countries (www.Kompascybermedia, 2022). There is therefore urgency to address issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in this country (Ventura, 2023). Labor force participation rate in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, the micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) sector comprise 64.2 million companies working around a 107.2 million national workforce and is considered the most prominent job producer. Based on World Bank records, as many as 30% of entrepreneurship is owned by women. In Indonesia, the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is synonymous with women. Women entrepreneurs contribute to the Indonesian economy and own 57 percent of microenterprises, almost 34 percent of medium-sized enterprises, and 34 percent of small businesses (Haryati, 2024). Women own MSMEs and collectively account for 60 percent of the industrial output (Ministry of Finance, 2020).

Women’s empowerment is an effort to enable women to gain access to and control over resources, economically, politically, socially, culturally, so that women can self-regulate and increase their self-confidence to be able to play a role and participate actively in solving problems, so as to be able to build capabilities and empowerment (Bappeda Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 2022). Empowerment is a process for individuals or groups to change the balance of power in terms of the social, economic, and political spheres in a society or community. Empowerment activities can refer to many activities, including increasing awareness of the existence of social forces that suppress others and also actions to change patterns of power in society. Empowerment means strength or ability to change (Diwanti et al., cited in Rapii, 2020).

The low participation rate of women's labor force causes obstacles for women to enter the labor market and women's work is more concentrated in the informal sector (Mala, Suyadi, & Sedyati, 2017). Wage discrimination for women in the workplace is also rampant; based on data on average female labor wages for all levels of education and age groups, women's wages are still quite far below male workers, evidence of inequality that still occurs among women in Indonesia (Violyta, 2022). This has an impact on women's skills in accessing formal employment opportunities or starting large-scale businesses. (BPS, 2021). Therefore, there must be policies in supporting social welfare to overcome poverty and unemployment through empowerment programs. Several studies conducted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection shared that empowerment programs are relatively effective in supporting economic independence, especially for women (Aryanti, 2022).

The B20 Women in Business Action Council noted that Indonesia’s micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contribute 60 percent to the national economy, and 97 percent in terms of creating and absorbing job opportunities. Sixty-four percent of MSMEs entrepreneurs are women. The government, especially the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (MWECIP) aims to encourage various development programs so that women's MSMEs does not only survive but also continue to grow. This was reinforced through the directives of Indonesian President Joko Widodo which became one of the priority agenda of the MWECIP in 2020–2024, namely “increasing women's empowerment in entrepreneurship with a gender perspective” (www.Kemenpppa, 2021, 2022).

The development of women's entrepreneurship is seen as an effort to increase gender equality and reduce poverty. Women entrepreneurs still encounter various obstacles in running their business so that they are reluctant to increase the scale of their business. They prefer to keep their business small and informal (Dewi, 2022).

In line with the government's target to grow women MSMEs, the focus is mainly on 3 sectors culinary, craft and fashion. The beauty industry still has great opportunities to develop. Seeing this opportunity, L’Oréal Indonesia launched the Beauty for Better Life program to provide beauty skills training and certification to women from marginalized and underprivileged groups. Thus, women can improve their skills and have the ability to start a highly competitive beauty business. This program aims to provide job opportunities for its graduates, so the program's training modules are designed to adapt to local culture and beauty.

The L’Oréal Foundation created the BFBL as a sustainable program to empower women with socio-economic limitations so that they have a more prosperous life through beauty. The BFBL – WEP was launched in 2014 in Indonesia The L’Oréal Foundation believes that beauty can play a central role in helping vulnerable, underprivileged, or marginalized people regain their self-esteem, develop self-confidence and enhance their well-being. This program provides free, high-quality, professional hairstyling and makeup training. L’Oréal Indonesia believes that beauty can give women who are less fortunate hope for a better life. L’Oréal Indonesia collaborates with four social organizations in 10 training centers located in several regions in Indonesia, and cooperates with several NGOs (Harness, 2023). Through this partnership, vocational cosmetology training programs are operating in countries including Brazil, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Colombia, Argentina and Lebanon.
This program provides free, high-quality professional hairdressing and makeup training in various regions in Indonesia. The trainings are held intensively from two to four straight months. With this skills training, L’Oreal hopes they can regain motivation, self-confidence and professional integration in their position in society. In addition to technical expertise, the program promotes social and interpersonal skills, offers practical assistance in seeking internships, employment, or entrepreneurial opportunities, and supports participants in realizing their ambitions. Since the program’s inception, more than 35,000 people have had access to professional training through this training programme. Together, the Program supports young women aged 15–25, including single mothers (especially those who are unemployed), victims of physical and sexual violence or domestic violence, orphans, victims of human trafficking, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and ex-convicts. Each student is awarded a recognized diploma developed in partnership with local authorities. Equipped with valuable beauty skills and greater self-confidence and self-esteem, they have greater opportunities to gain access to jobs and build careers in the beauty field.

People who have an entrepreneurial spirit must have high inventiveness and creativity so that they are able to come up with new ideas and innovations that are different from other people and do not give up easily and are eager to find solutions and try all opportunities for their progress (Sipayung, 2022). The creative industry is an industry that relies on individual skills, talents, skills, and creativity that can create jobs through the exploitation of creativity and intellectual property (Dyson and Moore, 1983 cited in O’Connor, 2010).

This study therefore aims to determine how the BFBL - WEP has enabled its participants to become MSME entrepreneurs. There are four research questions that the study aims to address: How does the BFBL Program encourages Indonesian women to become MSME entrepreneurs, and what benefits as well as obstacles were experienced in the program’s implementation?

This article is structured as follows: We will present the background context and economic necessity for women entrepreneurship promotion in Indonesia, pose the research objectives, introduce relevant research on this subject, discuss the methods used to collect and analyze data, and discuss the findings and implications.

**Literature Review**

Gender theory guides the approach and analysis in this research. Gender is a collection of qualities, labelled male or female, that is created culturally (Ridgeway, 2001). Gender studies have been helpful in highlighting the role of women in entrepreneurial pursuits, global leadership positions in business, politics, and government (Bowles, 2012; Vecchio, 2002; 2003).

Gender empowerment initiatives in Indonesia are aimed at increasing the role of women in community development programs as well as increasing their ability and contribution in economic pursuits. Females are often profiled within a model of institutional and individual deficit and personal disadvantage (Airini et al., 2011; Fitzgerald, 2014; Arquisola, et.al 2023; Arquisola and Rentschler, 2023). Examples include assumptions that females do not have the necessary traits for management, leadership and entrepreneurial positions because they lack self-confidence, self-esteem, competitiveness, and have a fear of failure (Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012; Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

Atwell (2006) documented what initiatives women take in order to rise above this admonishment of gender, for example, making financially-productive ventures or businesses greatly improves self-confidence and self-belief. Cubillo and Brown (2003) and Shah (2010) argued this point in their studies, noting that self-esteem and desire for self-actualisation by undertaking activities that are financially-productive could inspire women to rise above the perceived glass ceiling and have their voices heard.

Women's participation in such activities expands their reproductive roles, enabling women to contribute to the family economy and improve economic welfare for its members. Women empowerment through entrepreneurship increases the role of mothers/family in parenting/ children's education, reducing violence against women and children, reducing child labor, and preventing child marriage.

Previous research in the women empowerment program shows that many women in poor communities in Indonesia have low incomes and have difficulty accessing decent housing and education. In 2017, a qualitative case study in West Java, Indonesia related to family empowerment and welfare mobilization found that women's participation activities not only expanded their procreation and reproduction roles; it also expanded their income-generating capacities, a boost of confidence for them. However, the same study also found that it is both society and spouses themselves that pose obstacles as men feel disempowered when their wives earn higher than they do (Tjiptaningsih, 2017). Alleviating village poverty through women's empowerment can bring changes - women become motivated to earn income through family welfare programs. Moreover, they feel empowered and enthusiastic because the village community feels like a strong sense of sisterhood has been developed among these women entrepreneurs (Rapisi & Waladjatussopia, 2020). Aligned with this program are intervention related to changing women’s attitudes to entrepreneurship, e.g. creating a sense of cooperative attitudes, knowledge sharing, encouraging innovation, and self-directed learning.

The source of poverty problems faced by women according to Arjani (2007) lies in patriarchal culture, namely the values that live in a society that positions men as superior and women as subordinate to men. Women are not only required to be housewives, faithful wives, exemplary members of society, and pious, obedient, and submissive women; they are also expected to act as breadwinners, to help their families in times of need. Indonesia’s patriarchal society is reflected in the life of the family, society, nation and state and is used to justify of division of authority, systems of decision-making, systems of division of labour, systems of ownership and systems of distribution of resources. Such a culture will eventually lead to discrimination, marginalization, exploitation and violence.
(Nursito & Faeni, 2019). Wage discrimination for women in the workplace, based on data on the average female labour wages for all levels of education and age groups (Violleta, 2022).

Another study found that when empowerment initiatives are run by independent women’s groups, the level of creativity increases in designing community programs that solve social problems like in education, e.g. high school drop-out rates and health, e.g. reducing the number of professional sex workers. The entry points used by the local government to influence change in mindset were through the implementation of micro-enterprise training and skills knowledge, and provision of seed capital for small business, even if one of the main inhibiting factors for this creative program was the high illiteracy rate in the women’s group (Ginting & Sihura, 2022). However, training alone is not sufficient. Supeni and Sari (2011) found that housewives who engage in entrepreneurial activities still need coaching assistance to manage their start-up businesses rather than just training. The study found evidence that women entrepreneurs still need post-training support rather than being left on their own after the training is completed.

Women’s motivation to start their MSME can be enabled through a structured process of training and evaluation. A study involving 132 women entrepreneurs found that women learn better if the training is done in several stages from ideation, planning, designing, strategizing, analyzing cost and benefits implementing, and evaluation. All participants found the structured process as very useful because it increased their knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship (Yuniawati, 2021).

Aside from the fashion industry, the beauty industry has been recognized as one of the trailblazers in promoting women entrepreneurship initiatives. Part of the reason for its popularity is the Indonesian woman’s regard for beauty, hairdressing, and makeup; they view it as innate necessities in daily and social life. The increase in the number of cosmetic companies, and the attraction of cosmetology, in the areas of makeup and bridal hairdressing, for example, show how much Indonesian society favors beauty as an essential way of life for Indonesian women. A program in 2022 aimed at improving women's skills in cosmetology documented that the training participants gained additional insights and skills related to jathilan or traditional dance makeup and other facial make-up skills to augment their family income (Pambudi & Rohmawati, 2022). Participants in another program found that the cosmetology training they attended created such enthusiasm in developing their own start-up businesses, and even if the interest in the beginning was quite minimal, the continued engagement with trainers in this field created a sense of ownership for these skills, and the support of their families and the community drove the enthusiasm further (Aryanti and Safitri, 2022). Therefore, empowering women through cosmetology training can potentially increase women’s roles and contribution to the family and society, enabling them to feel confident of such contributions in the family and society and increase the potential of women with soft skills training so that they feel empowered and confident.

By possessing these skills, women can create job opportunities for themselves and others, as well as overcome limitations related to formal employment. In addition, through entrepreneurship training, women can change negative stereotypes and views about their role in the world of work, as well as create inclusive economic growth. However, there are still obstacles where not all women can access skills development training, both due to economic factors of time when most women are preoccupied with household chores, cultural factors where women are considered unfit for higher education (patriarchal culture), as well as cost factors, e.g. undertaking paid training to get certification for certain skills, for example, certification in makeup artist or hairdressing can be very costly for women with limited income.

**Research and Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology was deemed the appropriate approach to collect and analyze the data for this study. Qualitative research is a research process to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex picture that can be presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained from informant sources, and carried out in natural settings (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005; Fadli, 2021).

Using purposive sampling, 15 respondents participated in this research: 13 women participants of the BFBL Program in 6 regions, namely: Bali, Tangerang, Tanjung Balai, Semarang, Jakarta and Lombok; one respondent who was Head of Program; another from L’Oreal, a beauty coach. The participants were between the ages of 17-30 years old, single, married or divorced, jobless or unemployed, sole breadwinner or from low-income families, and had at least reached senior high-school level education.

Some were housewives with limited skills, or those who have self-taught themselves how to do cosmetology, while others had experience working as laborers, market sellers, and in tourism.

Most of the participants were recommended by the local NGO partners.
Semi-structured interviews with female respondents were used to collect data. The interviews were done in a variety of ways: Face to face interview, WhatsApp Video Call or Chat on WhatsApp application. While face to face interviews is a preferable mode of data collection, the use of online interviews could not be avoided due to the geographical spread of the respondents. Personal engagements were hampered by location. The data obtained from the interviews were analysed using an abductive process (Danermark, et.al 1997; Birnik & Bowman, 2007). Analysing abductively means trying to understand the participants’ social realities from their perspective.

After the transcribing process, the interview transcripts were read to obtain a sense of the whole database, and ascertain what initial messages or preliminary information can be noted. The researcher called this coding where similar information, quotes, or ideas were placed into initial categories or codes, and then labelled. The first batch of codes was guided by the theoretical literature congruent with the research questions that were addressed (Kvale, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding mechanism was designed to reveal patterns of ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and facilitated ease of analysis of data scripts. The researcher created an initial bucket of codes. Undertaking this procedure helped the researcher to discover that, for each code, there were multiple perspectives coming from the participants. This provided evidence that every code could contain many different ways of perceiving and understanding (Creswell, 2013), giving the researcher rich data to start with.

Then the analysis examines the meanings that participants attributed to their sensemaking and actions (Birnik & Bowman, 2007, p. 3). Categorising is a process whereby the coded data were organised into categories or nodes that provided descriptive or inferential information about the context or setting from which the data were derived (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After these meanings were analysed, the researcher then starts to recontextualise – or interpret and explain the meanings within the frame of a new context. A new set of ideas is then created (Danermark, et.al, 1997, p. 91).

After this process was completed, major themes were interpreted. Interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the themes to the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013) to reflect the combined categories and the homogeneous themes observed in the transcript analysis.

### Findings and Discussions

Reiterating the research question: *How does the BFBL Program encourage Indonesian women to become MSME entrepreneurs, and what benefits as well as obstacles were experienced in the program’s implementation?* We discuss the following findings:

**The BFBL Program creates economic and life impact for women MSME**

The *Beauty for Better Life* program is designed to improve the lives of its participants through skill development, especially in the fields of make-up and hairdressing. According to the Head of the Beauty School, this program enables the participants to channel their passion in craftmanship that help them find jobs and secure employment. She states thus:

“This program enables the women to channel their passion towards activities that increase the economic status, a definition of a better life. We provide support to reduce unemployment because the addition of skills is an indirect initiative to increase the economy or income.” (Head of L’Oreal Beauty School).

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**Table 1: BFBL Participants, 2023**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>BATCH</th>
<th>CLASS/PROGRAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Head of School, BFBL Program, L’Oreal</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Trainer, Makeup Class Beauty for Better Life</td>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>Make Up Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Participant #1</td>
<td>Tangerang, Banten</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Offline/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Participant #2</td>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Offline/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Participant #3</td>
<td>Tanjung Balai, Riau</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Offline/Saloon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Participant #4</td>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Online/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Participant #5</td>
<td>Lombok, NTB</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Offline/Salon Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Participant #6</td>
<td>Lombok, NTB</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Offline/Salon Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Participant #7</td>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Online/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Participant #8</td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Online/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Participant #9</td>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Online/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Participant #10</td>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Online/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Participant #11</td>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Offline/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Participant #12</td>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Offline/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Participant #13</td>
<td>Bali</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Offline/Make Up Class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One participant from Semarang says that the BLBF has enabled her to fulfil her dreams of opening a salon and developing skills in cosmetology so she can bring in extra income other than just selling herbal medicines and homecare products. These activities were not enough to support her family. The BFBL provided her more skills (with her knowledge on make-up almost zero) than her previous training in a local skills training institute. By participating in the BLBF, participants can maximize their skills in the field of makeup and Paes (a form of local make-up and hairstyling) that is tailored to the needs of Javanese women in that area. Now her income has doubled, with 8 customers every month. She attests:

“I want to have skills other than hair and make-up. There are benefits from training in makeup and beauty for a better life. Now I learned Javanese Paes. This is even better. If I had another opportunity to zoom like that, I would like to participate in finger styling, bun styling, and hijab do. After participating in Beauty for a Better Life, I can also do makeup for people, so my income has doubled, in one month there are 8 customers” (BFBL Participant # 4, Semarang). – please identify this as participant 1 or what number

PT. L’Oreal holds BLBF Programs through online and offline method since COVID-19. According to one of the BLBF Trainers, these two programs are the same for the curriculum with a program length of 2 months, the difference lies only in the way it is implemented. In Bali, both online and offline learning models were implemented. The manner of teaching the classes is fully hands-on. The Trainers teach eight (8) types of make up for indoor and outdoor use. The training is customized to the particular unique style of a certain province, “for example in Bali, there are a lot of traditional ceremonies that require buns, so we teach them different ways of making hair buns for weddings, evening parties, and traditional dances” (BFBL Trainer, Bali). The learning program is implemented through a structured step by step process yet participants are encouraged to experiment on styles and design. This enabled the participants to be creative, innovative, and inventive in how they understand and approach the concept of beauty and how beauty should be interpreted by the user and its designer.

The BLBF was considered a God send program that came at the height of various complications of COVID – 19, especially those who lost their jobs or were terminated because of the pandemic. The skills they learned helped get them out of economic struggles. Many of the participants had only one job when the crisis hit; having learned new skills afforded them additional ways of holding 2 or 3 more jobs that help support the family. One participant commented positively:

“I came to the customer’s house, I used to get 1 or 2 jobs. In Bali, especially when we went to temples, nowadays there are a many people who do makeup. Then after a while, we go up again to pick up the makeup a wedding. It’s very helpful.” (BFBL Participant #6, Bali)

The BFBL Program increases human resource skills in training and development focused on building women’s confidence to be independent

The BFBL helps increase the capacity of Indonesian women's human resources by carrying out training programs in various regions in Indonesia such as Bali, Lombok, Jakarta, Semarang, Tangerang and Tanjung Balai North Sumatera. The Program looks for areas where the needs of the community are high, for example in areas that are busy but the number of salons is very minimal. This means that many people are looking for these salons but cannot find them, and there are also no trained personnel. The BFBL Program therefore works with local NGOs who have their own maps and guide them in selecting the area and participants. The NGOs then submit a regional proposal for funding support. This initiative fosters good industry-NGO linkages in reducing poverty and unemployment.

“We look at areas where the needs of the community are quite high, for example, in areas that are still busy, salons are still minimal, and there are lots of people looking for them but there are no human resources. This is what the NGO is checking, then they submit a regional proposal for funding” (L’Oreal Head of Department, BFBL Program).

Participants of the BFBL attest that the Program had improved their human resource skills to conduct training and development for other women. The Program is part of L’Oreal CSR initiative and hence it is delivered free and at no cost to the recipients even if it’s a 2-month long training. This is an added bonus to them. Free training for maximum skills benefits. One participant believed that the Program has raised “women’s independence to build their own careers” (BFBL Participant #1, Tangerang). The skills learned were in the areas of understanding facial shapes, eyebrow formulas, skin types and various cosmetic products. Additional skills where in basic, advanced and glamour make up. One participant said it increased her confidence to take part in the beauty industry “I got a lot of knowledge where bridal make-ups are sought after and expensive. I get to open my own beauty salon” (BFBL Participant #1, Tangerang).

The BFBL Program helps change women’s mindset to seek other alternative business opportunities

The BFBL Program was found to have created in these participants a renewed mindset to look for opportunities outside their regular jobs which made them decide to open their own beauty business. One participant said she worked as a nurse but the pay was low and not enough to support her growing family. She cannot rely on this one job alone. She needed to assess her capabilities and look for other ways to add extra income. But before joining the Program she lacked skills. She states thus:

"Before joining the BFBL, I worked as a nurse. But the income wasn’t enough. Now I have children, I will definitely need a lot of money. If you only rely on one job, you are afraid that you won’t have enough for everything. If you want to find additional income before joining the Program, it will be difficult because you lack skills (BFBL Participant #5, Lombok)."
However, after joining the Program, her mindset has changed and she is willing to venture more into undertaking more jobs than before. She has fired up her courage to take opportunities as they are presented to her in the beauty business:

After joining the program, there will definitely be a change in your mindset. What was initially kept in place can now be applied little by little. There are many opportunities out there for the make-up sector and the results are not disappointing. The increase in income after participating in the Program has doubled, for example, in just one month you can make up 3 jobs, or 4 jobs (BFBL Participant, # 6, Lombok)

The BFBL Program has encouraged women to become MSME entrepreneurs because it enabled them to learn other skills above and beyond those offered in other informal training institutes. A training course in Payas Agung - a Balinese traditional dress worn specifically for weddings. This traditional dress can be a symbol of luxury for the bride and groom – had earned participants the coveted certificate of completion that has increased their value as specialist hairdressers.

One participant from Bali expressed her joy at receiving such a certificate:

We are getting the certificate and we already know the basics and we know the steps better, we have a lot of knowledge, so the opportunity is really big. People are more confident if we already have a certificate, after that we will be braver in taking customers, so yes, the income is not as big as others, but we have the courage to start getting new customers (BFBL Participant #13, Bali).

The BFBL Program gives young women and girls the chance to make their dreams come true

The Beauty for Better Life program is also open to young people so they can play a role in helping the family’s economy and increase their self-confidence and resilience in in taking future opportunities. A young female participant from Bali commented that the program had given her “training experience, pride, and dreams fulfilled” (BFBL Participant #11, Bali). The Program further opened opportunities for young girls to work with celebrities and models, or customers with money. She further commented:

“Now I have the courage to do make up for people like bridal models. After I joined BFBL, I became more motivated at a young age to want to have a nail extension makeup studio. If people want makeup, just go to the studio. Now I can be a top model's personal MUA (make up assistant). I happen to be trusted by one of the top models in Bali to be their personal makeup artist. It's an honour for me, there are always customers who are happy with my makeup, so basically, I never get bored.” (BFBL Participant #11, Bali).

A young housewife from Lombok who did not have any home business or any means of additional income source attested that, despite the poor internet connection in their village, she did not want to miss the learning opportunity with BFBL because it allowed her to graduate from this class at low cost. It further added some professional credentials for her because she only “graduated with a vocational degree, and had difficulty looking for a job” (BFBL Participant #5, Lombok). Now she is a freelance make-up artist, and plans to slowly build her own make up studio.

When the COVID – 19 pandemic hits, many young women lost their jobs. A participant who resorted to selling traditional food and delicacies in the local market for 2 years was thankful to the program because she realized that she can monetize what she has learned because her local contexts provided her with the opportunity to earn money. With no skills before she joined the program, she did not know how to start with the make-up business:

Before joining the BFBL program, I was a worker in the tourism sector. I saw an opportunity in Bali where very often there are ceremonies that require make-up. Bali has lots of ceremonies, religious ceremonies, and traditional ceremonies. Balinese women like to dress up in beautiful customs and make up. Yes, I'm grateful for this BFBL; now I have not returned to tourism and instead find that the cosmetology industry has more economic impact for me (BFBL Participant #13, Bali).

Domestic responsibilities and time for family, as well as lack of access to strong internet connectivity are obstacles to the Program

The BLBF has encountered many challenges in program implementation due to the difficulty of reaching women MSME in remote areas. If they are accessed, many of the women recipients have difficulty connecting to a strong internet connection, making it difficult to keep pace with the training. The program is very open and ready to support the participants so that they experience optimal training results. One solution that was implemented was to organize the training during the children’s school hours (9:00 – 12 noon) with the hope that there will be no distractions and the participants can focus. Participants have more free time while their children are still in school. They are then given a break after lunch to pick up their children from school.

With this obvious distraction, the BFBL team took the initiative to suggest that after picking up their children, the mothers would continue to participants by leaving their children in a makeshift day care centre organized by the program. An empty classroom is used as a day care area while children wait for and do their homework. The Head of the BFBL program comments thus:

“We provide a solution so that the mother can take the course. We look for an empty classroom and use it as a day care centre. The mothers become comfortable knowing their children are within proximate distance.” (Head of BFBL Program)

Remote training locations and industry image can dissuade participants to fully engage in the program

Another challenge experienced when running the BFBL program was the location of the training centres which can be quite far from the participants’ homes. According to the Program Head, participants often come from remote villages. Sometimes their motorbikes
break down. Thus, to overcome this problem, the BFBL team suggested a car-pooling system by renting motorbikes or a share-riding system. Theresa explained that if the participants go to the training location using their own motorbikes, these can be pooled in a dedicated terminal so that the BFBL Team can take the participants as a group to the training centre location. Providing this solution has been found helpful by many participants who often experience.

“Thank God everything went smoothly, only sometimes the distance was quite far, not to mention that sometimes my motorbike broke down. Everyone gave solutions to be brought to the workshop and sometimes delivered home.” (BFBL Participant # 2, Riau)

Some of the participants must be accompanied by their spouses or partners because of a prevailing implicit belief that women who are involved in the beauty industry might get involved in inappropriate or immoral activities. There is also a belief that the world of beauty is synonymous with the image of an industry occupied by women with unscrupulous morals. However, not all regions in Indonesia have this belief.

Participants often lack self-confidence and communication skills

Participants in this program are mentally trained to get used to speaking in public. However, there were still many participants who felt embarrassed when speaking in public. In Indonesia, there is often fear or shame that one would muck up a presentation. Therefore, many refuses to speak and present their work:

“We still have problems in terms of the communication skills of the participants, there is a culture in some areas that women don't talk much, which makes them afraid to communicate so their communication skills are minimal. But not all areas are like that, only some areas” (Head of School, BFBL).

Therefore, part of the training program was a program on marketing communication. Gradually the participants were encouraged to be more confident through better socialization and networking and how to bring in clients. One participant attested thus:

“Apart from being taught makeup, we were also taught to communicate, several times people who were competent in communication were brought in, we were taught before and after photos, taught to share on social media” (BFBL Participant # 2, Bali).

According to the Beauty Coach in Bali, participants often faced situations where their ability to graduate from the Program is hampered by domestic duties, lack of economic support, scheduling and classes, or maybe illness. Yet the Program endeavours to provide these women all the support they need to be able to complete the Program despite many limitations:

“We have a flexible policy that participants who are unable to join the program due to acceptable reasons are given remedial activities so they can catch up. For example, in the middle of the training process the participant has to take care of parents, or they have a conflict with their college schedule. We’ll provide a solution. Like yesterday, there was a participant, a high school student was allowed to join the training during the holidays, so they could still attend their classes in the morning. Now the school has started again. We're making afternoon classes for them, so they can keep following training program and still go to school, too.” (BFBL Trainer, Bali).

Discussion

Research points out that in many Asian countries gender inequality in the field of education continue to persists and is a significant hindrance in a nation’s over-all development. In Indonesia, this inequality often results in the distribution of educational resources favoring boys, while girls face various restrictions on educational opportunities. Gender inequality in education results in widespread educational gaps that not only affect individuals but have far-reaching consequences for society as a whole. Due to limited educational opportunities, girls are often unable to complete secondary and tertiary education, which directly limits their future earning potential. When a large number of women are unable to realize their full economic potential due to educational inequality, this will inevitably affect the per capita income level of the entire country (Munir and Kanwal, 2020).

Findings in this study shows that BFBL program undertaken by L’Oreal is a notable solution to this problem. It provides women participants with a three-pronged approach in crafting their own entrepreneurship journey and the skills they have learned give them the courage to pursue an entrepreneurial career. In the first approach, namely general knowledge and skills development, the program was successful in teaching these women how to be make up artists (MUA). In the second stage, they learned higher level of expertise in the sub-categories of cosmetology. In this stage, they learned how to open a MUA business. In the third stage, they learned how to plan, design, seek funding, marketing, and controlling their business. They have transformed from being ordinary women and young girls with dreams into becoming professional MUA and cosmetologists. This program provided women opportunities to rise above individual and institutional deficits that previous studies (Arquisola, et.al, 2020; Arquisola and Rentschler, 2023; Airini et al., 2011; Fitzgerald, 2014) have documented to be a profile of low-income women, stating they lack self-confidence, self-esteem, competitiveness, and have a fear of failure (Jogulu & Perkins, 2012; Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

It is clear in this study that the BFBL program has carried out empowerment initiatives and have elevated the economic lives of its participants. The study results add to the findings earlier made by Atwell (2006) which documented that women are brave to initiatives that will enable them to rise above this admonishment of gender, for example, making financially-productive ventures or businesses that greatly improves self-confidence and self-belief. The program has enriched their welfare and that of their families.
The training gave them useful skill that they could sustainably use in the future. Empowerment provides the beneficiaries with the resources, knowledge and skills needed to determine their future and participate in the development of their community (see Ramdani, 2021). In this program, women and young girls were given a structured approach to learn, understand, design, and plan the making of their own businesses (Marthalina, 2018). In this case, they chose the cosmetology industry because of the obvious economic gains they can obtain.

A successful human capital intervention possesses several indicators such as providing its recipients with experience, skills, innovation and insight (Winardi, 2014). Participants were encouraged to be as creative and innovative as they could in being a make-up artist without losing sight of the local culture and customs (kearifan lokal). The results are consistent with studies by Rapii and Wahdatussippia (2020) that entrepreneurship interventions have the capacity of changing women’s attitudes to entrepreneurship, e.g. creating a sense of cooperative attitudes, knowledge sharing, encouraging innovation, and self-directed learning. These changes in attitudes result in successful human capital development for beneficiaries and the benefactor agency.

Cubillo and Brown (2003) and Shah (2010) argued in their studies that self-esteem and desire for self-actualisation increase if women undertake activities that are financially-productive could inspire women to rise above the perceived glass ceiling and have their voices heard. The experiences documented in the BFBL program align with Cubillo and Brown’s argument. The participants were able to show independence in making decisions to engage in this activity and put up their own business, either as a salon owner, or as freelance make-up artists. This independence to make their own decisions without spousal interference or being prohibited by their spouses from doing so is an example of how far Indonesian women have gone in so far as gender equality is concerned.

Gender equity studies in Indonesia (Arquisola, et al, 2020; Arquisola and Rentschler, 2023) have documented that women aspiring career success and leadership are very much characterized by tenacity, seriousness of purpose, and sincerity to pursue their passions. They continue to develop their abilities and provide good performance to every activity they pursue or clients they work with. Such tenacity helps them to expand their branding in society.

The experiences of BFBL women in this study point to their desire to excel in the world of beauty by continuing to learn so that they can provide various services in this industry that are economically-beneficial to them. After the training concluded many of the participants have decided to put together their own financial capital to expand their business by purchasing equipment for their salon or studio. Due to the benefits of this program, it will be wise for the government to support programs like this, by way of encouraging CSR-based programs like BFBL. Industries can be given more tax-incentives if they embark on poverty-alleviation programs like BFBL.

The BFBL team also received information from participants who wanted to open their own salon, but did not have the capital because the equipment was quite expensive, so the BFBL team would guide them, the BFBL team would be their buddy as long as they wanted to open the business independently. Usually, they are excited because they want to work in a salon, so the BFBL team will give them internship opportunities, or training so that they can hone their skills and mentality.

In implementing the Beauty for Better Life program in Indonesia, L’Oreal collaborates with local NGOs to help map the potential of each region according to the needs of the Beauty for Better Life program. This program specifically targets women who are less fortunate, have physical and skill limitations and they remain enthusiastic about moving forward and developing their potential. Almost all Beauty for Better Life participants felt the benefits of increasing family income, where wives could help their husbands in meeting household needs.

Consistent with Marthalina’s earlier findings (2018), women’s empowerment through the promotion of micro, small and medium enterprises, is a successful effort to provide women with resources, opportunities, knowledge, and skills to enhance their ability to determine their future and to participate in and influence the life of their community (Laksana, Sholih & Naim, 2017; Ramdhani, 2022), where women experience an increase in their self – efficacy by developing their skills and potential, this makes participants more confident, empowered and increases their motivation to continue to increase their knowledge, on average after participating in the Beauty for better program life, the participants go straight to work taking freelance salons or make-up, while they save money to take makeup courses that are not in the Beauty for Better Life program, such as regional Balinese Pakem makeup, nail art or Henna, advanced courses that can support them in their profession as make-up and hairstyling, everything that happens in the field is very much in line with the meaning of women’s empowerment.

Conclusions

The BFBL program is a Loreal program implemented in various countries. This research specifically examines the BFBL program in Indonesia. This program has provided motivation, encouragement, and enthusiasm for women with low-income status to start their small or micro enterprises in the field of cosmetology and beauty services. Although the BFBL program found many obstacles in implementation, the general benefits of providing much-needed opportunity for financial independence is a notable achievement of this program. After attending the course, participants gained useful life-skills that they could not obtain from formal education. Women gained skilful employment and access to economic opportunities.

Many of those who have participated in the Beauty for Better Life training program continue to pursue and deepen this field of the beauty industry as their source of livelihood because of the potential opportunities that are still open. This women’s BFBL program
can be said to be successful, because 90% of the alumni experienced an increase in terms of skills, knowledge, turnover, new acquaintances, it could even be said that all participants enjoyed the learning system taught, because almost all BFBL activities were carried out through direct practice, so that participants can be immediately evaluated to make the next session better and of better quality. This program also builds entrepreneurship for Indonesian women to start opening their own business opportunities, many of them have succeeded in building their own salons or mini makeup studios that provide employment opportunities for the local community.

Women empowerment programs like BFBL can lead to better life experiences as women become brave enough to set their own to achieve dreams in life. If we look at the positive impact, the skills, the expansion of entrepreneurial networks and also promoting community involvement and ownership in programs for the greater good are notable achievements. Together with these are opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing that will result in employment opportunities for all. This program enriches the governments’ poverty alleviation efforts as it distributes wealth gains evenly.

One notable limitation of the study is its geographical scope and coverage. The six areas - Tangerang, Jakarta, Semarang, Bali, West Nusa Tenggara, and North Sumatera - covered by this program are noteworthy locations as these regions may be described within the geographical spectrum of low-income as well as medium-income regions. However, Indonesia has many other low-income regions that need to be covered, especially in the Nusa Tenggara Barat and Papua regions. The study can be expanded using quantitative analysis of the impacts of MSMEs on women’s access to innovation and creativity development in the cosmetology and fashion industries, especially with advances in technology. Digitalization of BFBL training can reach more ground cover.

Practical Implications

The BFBL program has far-reaching implications not only for women but also for spouses who have been documented as supportive networks to their entrepreneur-wives. Gender mainstreaming in this industry must reach out towards the male members of the community as they can find additional income in helping their wives run their salon and beauty businesses in terms of supply and logistics training, as well as digital business training. The beauty business must be a partnership between husbands and wives – husbands can run and manage the beauty business while the wives improve their talent and craftsmanship in this area. It will be a win-win business venture.

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