

Barriers in Venturing Home-based Food Business Among Urban B40 Women in Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, home-based businesses emerge as one of the most enticing paths for entrepreneurial endeavors. This paper attempts to identify the barriers faced by urban women from the B40 demographic in the Selangor, Malaysia. A group of 25 participants in a one-day pastry-making workshop was conveniently chosen to partake in this study. A post-event survey was conducted to gain deeper insights into the hurdles these participants faced in their efforts to establish home-based pastry businesses. Only two participants managed to launch their pastry businesses following the workshop. The barriers highlighted by most participants revolved around initial capital to initiate their home-based businesses, a shortage of suitable equipment and utensils, and the unsuitability of their homes for running food-related business activities.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the food business sector stands out as one of the most attractive avenues for entrepreneurial ventures. This popularity can be attributed to several key factors that make it an appealing choice for many. Firstly, it boasts a low-risk entry point, making it accessible to a wide range of individuals. The relatively low capital requirements for setting up a food business further contribute to its allure, allowing entrepreneurs to dip their toes into the industry without substantial financial investments. Additionally, the ease and convenience of establishing a food business in Malaysia cannot be overlooked. The streamlined process of setting up operations ensures that entrepreneurs can get started quickly and efficiently, reducing the barriers to entry. Furthermore, food businesses have the potential to generate rapid sales, offering the promise of a swift return on investment. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a significant shift in the landscape of the food business sector. Home-based food businesses began to proliferate as people sought alternative sources of income in the wake of economic uncertainties (The Star, 2021). This trend continues to gain momentum, attracting individuals looking to earn supplementary or primary incomes from the comfort of their homes.

Culinary training programs have long served as a gateway for individuals seeking to augment their culinary knowledge and skills, with the goal of establishing small-scale food ventures. To support this growing interest in culinary entrepreneurship, a plethora of culinary short courses and training programs have been introduced by both government agencies and private training centers (MalaysiaKini, 2020). While private organizers often charge premium fees for their programs, which can be a deterrent for individuals with limited incomes, many government agencies and public learning institutions have stepped in to bridge this gap. They offer culinary classes free-of-charge to the public, ensuring that aspiring culinary entrepreneurs from all income brackets have access to the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the thriving Malaysian food business landscape. This inclusive approach not only fosters entrepreneurship but also contributes to the overall growth and diversity of the micro food entrepreneurship in Malaysia.

Despite encouraging factors to operate home-based food business, this initial step to start this business is not easy as we thought. Past studies show that food business could fail in the first 5 years of operation (Perry Group International, 2016). According to Sorgule (2021), many culinary training programs struggle to foster food entrepreneurship due to several factors, including a failure to accurately tap industry needs, a lack of clear program objectives, and an inability to sustain continuous education initiatives. Thus, this study aims to identify the barriers faced by urban B40 women in the Selangor who took part in a culinary training program with the intention of starting a home-based food business but were unable to realize this goal.

Adult hands-on training is an essential component of effective learning experiences for adults, as it allows learners to actively participate in their learning process and apply new knowledge to real-world situations.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory, also known as andragogy, is a set of guiding principles that explain how adults learn, in contrast to how children learn. It was developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1968 and is based on the premise that adults have unique learning needs and preferences that differ from those of children and adolescents. The theory emphasizes the importance of relevance and practicality in adult learning, as adults are more likely to engage in learning that is directly applicable to their lives and work. It also highlights the self-directed and motivated nature of adult learners, as well as the significance of their existing knowledge and life experiences in the learning process. Adult learning theory provides a framework for designing effective adult education programs that meet the distinct needs and preferences of adult learners

Adult learning theory plays a crucial role in community training programs. It helps trainers understand the unique needs and characteristics of adult learners, enabling them to design and deliver effective and engaging training sessions (Kiely et al., 2004). The most dominant perspectives used to understand adult learning and guide the practice of adult education continue to be those that focus on learning as an individual endeavor with little regard for the sociocultural environment (Dzubinski et al., 2012). It is essential for trainers to be aware of the various adult learning theories in order to design effective community training programs. Andragogy theory emphasizes the self-directed nature of adult learning. This theory suggests that adult learners are motivated to learn when they see the direct relevance and applicability of the knowledge or skills to their lives or work. Knowles et. al (2014) believed that adults are motivated to learn by internal factors such as the desire for self-improvement, career advancement, or personal fulfillment. Educators can leverage these intrinsic motivators by creating learning experiences that are engaging, relevant, and aligned with learners' goals and aspirations.

Culinary Skills Training Workshop

Numerous cooking workshops have been organized by training providers on various goals. Cooking workshop among international students showed that their sense of community has improved (Luongo et al. 2016). Cooking skills training programs have been found to have a positive impact on food literacy, confidence, and healthy eating behaviors, particularly in low-income communities (Garcia et. al. 2016). Community-based initiatives that offer life skills and culinary training to adults with high barriers to employment have been successful in targeting and reaching low-income individuals (Thomas & Irwin, 2011). Providing the low-income group a cooking workshop will enhance their confidence in preparing the meals (Driver & Friesen, 2016) The effectiveness of community cooking skill programs varies, and most of the literature lacks clarity in the plans, implementation, and evaluation of the programs Garcia et. al. 2016). Apart from gaining knowledge and skills, attending cooking workshop expands

the social networks among the participants (Driver & Friesen, 2016; Luongo et al. 2016).

Previous research has highlighted the implementation of culinary training as a means to address deficiencies in participants' skills, knowledge, and confidence. Various culinary training has demonstrated their influence on chefs' attitudes toward healthful food preparation (Hu et al., 2005). Integrating culinary medicine training into the core curriculum for medical students has been shown to enhance their nutrition knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence in patient nutrition counseling (D'Adamo et al., 2022). Collaboration between medical students, faculty, and local teaching kitchens, as well as wellness centers, has yielded positive outcomes, including improvements in students' nutrition knowledge, confidence in lifestyle counseling, and personal culinary skills (Pang et al., 2019). Additionally, a sensory science and methods course incorporated into culinary arts education has led to significant enhancements in students' sensory vocabulary, knowledge, and skills (Damsbo-Svendsen et al., 2022). In Indonesia, learning resources in the form of PDFs, videos, and an online platform called "kulinera training" have been utilized to enhance the culinary knowledge and skills of HORECA industry managers in the Tengger region (Nurjanah et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, culinary workshops encompass a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from international cuisine and local dishes to pastry-making, traditional delicacies, cookies, and more (Food Institute of Malaysia, 2024). These workshops, primarily aimed at the community, are typically organized by associations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, or private culinary academies. However, they are often conducted on an ad hoc basis and offer specific and limited modules due to the challenges of high costs, transportation logistics, personal commitments and time constraints faced by adult participants. Adult training courses come with a high price tag, making them inaccessible to many. For instance, HRD Corp, a national training provider, which demands around RM5,800 for a comprehensive food safety and quality training course (HRD Corp, 2023).

Typically, participants in these culinary workshops are drawn from various segments of society, including those who are unemployed, housewives, individuals with low incomes, school dropouts, and even former convicts. These workshops serve as inclusive platforms, providing opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to enable them to acquire valuable culinary skills that can empower them to start micro-businesses and generate decent incomes. The demand for continuing professional development opportunities in culinary studies is becoming more complex and challenging for both learner and teacher (Jooste, 2007).

Home-based Food Business in Malaysia

Operating a home-based food business is a well-established practice in Malaysia. The necessity brought about by lockdown orders compelled numerous individuals to initiate food businesses from their residences. Even after the pandemic, the trend of conducting business from home persists due to its minimal startup costs. Essentially, a home-based food business entails the production and sale of food items from one's own dwelling. Establishing such a venture necessitates thorough attention to legal matters, including understanding the regulations governing food preparation in a home kitchen, selecting an appropriate business framework, securing the requisite permits and licenses, maintaining food safety standards, and obtaining insurance coverage.

The Ministry of Health in Malaysia requires food businesses to register with FoSIM (Food Safety Information System of Malaysia) to ensure compliance with regulations. FoSIM registration is separate from other licenses such as the Business Registration Certificate from the Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM) and local authority business licenses. It specifically pertains to food premises and involves registering with the Ministry of Health to ensure adherence to food safety regulations. Any food premises engaged in activities such as manufacturing, catering, food preparation for sale, and selling food from vehicles must register with the Ministry of Health. Failure to do so is considered a violation under the Food Hygiene Regulations 2009, punishable by fines and imprisonment.

FoSIM registration is crucial for food business operators to demonstrate compliance with food safety standards and to ensure the legality and credibility of their operations. Safety requirements for operating a home-based food business in Malaysia include maintaining a clean and sanitary food preparation area, proper storage and handling of ingredients, adherence to safe food preparation and cooking guidelines, and appropriate labeling and packaging to provide information about allergens and expiration dates (MyHealth Ministry of Health Malaysia (2017). Therefore, it is imperative to provide knowledge training on food handling hygiene in culinary workshops. In accordance with this necessity, the workshop utilized in this study offered a module specifically focusing on food safety and hygiene in preparing pastry products.

Urban B40 Women

In Malaysia, household income groups are categorized into three primary segments: the Bottom 40% (B40), Middle 40% (M40), and Top 20% (T20). These classifications are established on a household basis rather than individual salary incomes. A report from the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, outlines the monthly income ranges for each household group. Specifically, the B40 group comprises households with a monthly income below RM6,338, as indicated in Table 1 (The Star, 2023). This classification system provides a framework for understanding income distribution across different socioeconomic strata within Malaysian society.

Table 1. Monthly Income Range by Household Group

Household Group	Income Range 2023 (RM)
T20	> 10,960
M40	6,339 - 10,959
B40	< 6,338

Income inequalities are significant among the B40 group members as they struggle to bear the cost of living (Samsudin & Nadzrulizam, 2020). According to a report by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2023), underprivileged women globally face significant challenges. These reports underscore the disparities in poverty, hunger, discrimination, and limited access to resources, which disproportionately affect women compared to men. The United Nations notes that women are more likely to experience extreme poverty, encounter food insecurity, and confront barriers to economic opportunities due to factors such as gender pay gaps and limited access to jobs and resources. Furthermore, women are disproportionately vulnerable to maternal mortality, violence, and legal constraints in many parts of the world. Despite advancements in areas like education, women still face substantial obstacles, including inadequate sanitation facilities in schools and discriminatory laws.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women have highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating these inequalities, with projections indicating that millions of women and girls are being pushed into poverty. The pandemic has underscored the systemic flaws in societal and economic structures that disadvantage women, leading to increased poverty rates and emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive policy actions to address these disparities. These reports advocate for concerted efforts to achieve gender equality, empower women, and ensure that women have equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights. The United Nations is actively working towards advancing gender equality through various initiatives and partnerships to address the systemic challenges faced by underprivileged women worldwide.

Interestingly, the number of single mothers in Malaysia has been on the rise in recent years. In 2010, there were approximately 235,240 single mother families, compared to 130,249 in 2000. Additionally, the census in 2000 revealed 620,389 single mothers in the country, which increased to 831,860 in 2010, representing 2.9% of the population. These statistics underscore the increasing prevalence of single motherhood in Malaysia and emphasize the necessity for targeted support and empowerment initiatives for this demographic group (Malaysia Population Research Hub, 2023).

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This study utilized a four-step data collection approach, comprising the development of the survey instrument, recruitment of respondents, data collection, and data analysis.

Developing the Survey Instrument

The creation of the post-event survey was designed to address the primary objective of this study: to gain insights into the obstacles encountered by urban women in the B40 group when initiating their home-based food enterprises. The survey was structured into two main sections: demographic data and business-related information. The demographic survey included questions regarding background and experiences in business. For business-related questions, the survey incorporated a dual approach: structured multiple-choice queries and open-ended prompts. These inquiries aim to ascertain participants' prior engagement with home-based businesses and identify their motivations for attending the culinary workshop. Additionally, the survey seeks to gain insights into participants' prospective planning subsequent to their completion of the culinary training program.

Recruiting the Respondents

Purposive sampling was employed in this study to specifically target respondents belonging to the B40 demographic group of women residing in urban areas. This method involves the deliberate selection of participants based on the researchers' expertise and judgment, ensuring the precision of sample collection. Particularly suited for studies with smaller sample sizes, purposive sampling facilitates the thorough examination of distinct characteristics, enhancing the quality of the data analysis (Vijayamohan, 2023). Participants in this research were recruited from a one-day culinary workshop fully funded by the University Community Transformation Centre (UCTC) at Universiti Putra Malaysia, under the KTGS@PTJ Grant scheme.

Before the commencement of this workshop, the president of the MyRatu reached out to the researcher, extending an invitation to oversee the organization of the event. MyRatu is a registered association open to all women who aspire to become therapists for postpartum mothers. To secure funding for the workshop, the researcher successfully applied for a community grant from the university. All participants were registered and active members of MyRatu, an association exclusively open to women. Notably, MyRatu's mission centers on uniting and overseeing nearly 200 female massage therapists in Selangor, specializing in postpartum massage services for mothers and other massage services catering solely to female clients. The workshop garnered enthusiastic participation, with a total of 25 MyRatu members signed up.



Picture 1. Participants of Culinary Workshop with the Instructor, Dr. Khairatun

The primary aim of the workshop was to empower MyRatu members who have an interest in establishing home-based food businesses by providing them with fundamental knowledge and practical skills essential for a startup in this food business. It's worth noting that a considerable number of MyRatu members hold occupations as part-time massage therapists, operating under an on-call arrangement with their clientele. In this capacity, they are readily available to travel to clients' residences, where they deliver massage services tailored to the specific packages offered. This approach allows them to cater to the individual needs and preferences of their clients within the comfort of their own homes.

Hence, participation in this culinary workshop presents MyRatu members with an additional avenue to augment their income during periods when they do not have massage appointments scheduled. This culinary workshop offers them the chance to diversify their skill set and broaden their professional repertoire, thereby enabling them to capitalize on their downtime effectively. With the newfound culinary knowledge and expertise gained from the workshop, they can leverage their spare time to engage in food-related endeavors, potentially generating supplementary earnings to supplement their existing income from massage therapy services. In essence, this workshop serves as a valuable opportunity for MyRatu members to maximize their earning potential and enhance their financial stability by harnessing their culinary talents alongside their established massage therapy practice.

On a brief note, the culinary workshop was developed to provide participants with immersive, hands-on learning across three modules. These modules covered aspects such as food safety and hygiene during pastry preparation, hands-on techniques for baking a variety of bread and pastries, as well as the baking of different types of cakes. The workshop commenced at 8:30 am with participant registration, concluding at 5:00 pm. Throughout the day, participants were served with breakfast and lunch. Upon completion of the workshop, participants received an e-certificate to commemorate their participation.

Collecting Data

The process of collecting data began one month after the workshop, allowing participants a generous timeframe to get ready for their businesses and put the newly acquired skills into practice within their home enterprises. To conduct the survey, Google Forms was utilized, and the survey link was disseminated to all participants via WhatsApp messenger. This method of using WhatsApp for survey distribution proved to be extremely effective, as it enabled swift responses while also keeping costs to a minimum. The survey remained accessible for responses for a period of one week before it was closed. Finally, a total of 25 responses were gathered, all of which were deemed usable for descriptive analysis.

Analyzing Data

The collected data underwent descriptive analysis using Google Form's integrated services, streamlining the processes of gathering, storing, recording, and analyzing information. However, for the open-ended questions, a manual qualitative analysis was undertaken by the researcher. This involved thorough examination and categorization of responses to extract insightful perspectives. Each set of open-ended data was meticulously organized into relevant themes, to enhance understanding of participants' viewpoints. Selected excerpts were extracted to provide meaningful insights into participants' experiences or perceptions, as recommended by Eldh et al. (2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Results

Among the participants surveyed, 11.1% provided an affirmative response when asked if they had commenced a bakery business. In contrast, within the cohort of 22 participants, three individuals indicated that they have yet to embark on their entrepreneurial journey. Based on the results, it is evident that a significant portion of respondents have yet to initiate their bakery businesses. When asked to specify the reasons for this, various factors emerged: 28% cited insufficient capital, 12% mentioned being fully occupied as therapists with demanding schedules, 20% expressed a lack of knowledge and experience in the bakery field, 8% indicated a lack of readiness to embark on such endeavors, 16% noted ongoing learning and skill development, 4% prioritized their focus on therapy, considering baking solely for family purposes, and another 12% mentioned the absence of necessary equipment. These responses collectively

underscore the diverse challenges and considerations influencing participants' decisions to delay the start of their bakery ventures.

Next, the participants were asked which module proved most beneficial during the culinary workshop in aiding their bakery business initiation. Among the respondents, 32% found Module 1, focusing on safety and cleanliness in pastry making, particularly helpful. Module 2, which covered various cake products, was deemed useful by 20% of participants. However, the majority, comprising 48% of respondents, cited Module 3, centered on various bread products, as the most valuable in facilitating their bakery business endeavors. The participants also affirmed that the culinary workshop was effective in assisting them to start a bakery business, with eighty-eight percent of respondents, totaling 22 participants, expressing this sentiment, while 12%, comprising 3 participants, indicated otherwise.

Despite the positive responses to the modules offered in the culinary workshop, participants were further probed about their readiness to initiate on a bakery business following the event. Out of the respondents, 28% confidently declared they were "very ready," constituting 7 participants, while 40% expressed a sense of preparedness, totaling 10 participants. Additionally, 24% conveyed a more tempered readiness, accounting for 6 participants, whereas 8% admitted they were "not ready" to initiate a bakery business at the present moment, represented by 2 participants. The most significant challenge encountered by participants when initiating a bakery business varied considerably. Twenty-eight percent, totaling 7 participants, identified capital as their primary hurdle, while 20%, comprising 5 participants, cited a lack of knowledge as their main challenge. Additionally, 32% of respondents, accounting for 8 participants, struggled with identifying the ingredients used, underscoring the importance of ingredient awareness. Consistency emerged as a challenge for 8% of participants (2 individuals), while inadequate equipment posed a barrier for 12%, representing 3 participants. These diverse challenges highlight the multifaceted nature of starting a bakery business and underscore the importance of addressing various factors to ensure success.

The results indicate that a significant portion of the respondents, specifically 88.9% or 22 participants, have not yet taken the step to start their bakery businesses. Conversely, a smaller fraction, comprising 11.1% or 3 participants, have already begun their bakery ventures. This suggests that the culinary workshop might not have adequately equipped the participants with the necessary skills or knowledge to kickstart their home-based bakery enterprises. The disparity in the numbers between those who have initiated their businesses and those who haven't implies that there may be factors beyond the workshop's scope that hindered the majority from taking action. These factors could include financial constraints, lack of confidence, or insufficient guidance on how to proceed after the workshop (Garbo & Hadikusuma, 2023). Consequently, there might be a need for further support or follow-up sessions to address these challenges and empower more participants to transition from learning to action in their home-based food businesses.

When asked about the reasons for not starting a bakery business, respondents cited various factors. The foremost challenge identified was insufficient capital, mentioned by 28% of participants. Additionally, 12% noted being fully occupied as therapists with demanding schedules, while 20% expressed a lack of knowledge and experience in the bakery field. Another 8% indicated a lack of readiness to start such endeavors. Ongoing learning and skill development were noted by 16% of respondents, and 4% prioritized their focus on therapy, considering baking solely for family purposes. Concerns about the absence of necessary equipment were also raised by 12% of the participants. Detweiler (n.d) highlights the balance that women often find themselves navigating between the demands of business ownership and familial responsibilities. This delicate equilibrium poses a significant challenge as women strive to fulfill their entrepreneurial aspirations while also attending to the needs of their families. The struggle to reconcile these competing priorities can manifest in various ways, from managing time effectively to juggling multiple roles and responsibilities.

Further insights from the results shed light on participants' perspectives regarding the most beneficial module during the culinary workshop in aiding their bakery business initiation. Thirty-two percent of respondents found Module 1, focusing on safety and cleanliness in pastry making, particularly helpful. This is supported in a study where the small food enterprises found that the food safety module was helpful to provide them with necessary knowledge when handling food business (Worsfold, 2005). Module 2, covering various cake products, was deemed useful by 20% of participants. However, the majority, comprising 48% of respondents, cited Module 3, centered on various bread products, as the most valuable in facilitating their bakery business endeavors.

The most significant challenges encountered by participants when initiating a bakery business varied considerably. Twenty-eight percent, totaling 7 participants, identified capital as their primary hurdle, while 20%, comprising 5 participants, cited a lack of knowledge as their main challenge. Additionally, 32% of respondents, accounting for 8 participants, struggled with identifying the ingredients used, underscoring the importance of ingredient awareness. Consistency emerged as a challenge for 8% of participants (2 participants), and inadequate equipment posed a barrier for 12%, representing 3 participants. Walls (2023) explains the significant time commitment that women grapple with when embarking on home-based businesses. Particularly in the context of starting a home bakery, the entirety of responsibilities and decision-making rests on the individual's shoulders. While this autonomy can be empowering, it also means that work-life balance can easily tip in favor of work, potentially straining relationships with friends and family and intensifying the pressure associated with launching a new venture. Moreover, the financial aspect adds another layer of complexity. Initially, financial struggles may arise, especially if one chooses to bootstrap their business or opts for minimal personal compensation. In such scenarios, adjusting one's lifestyle and devising a clear financial plan become imperative to mitigate stress and avoid finding oneself in precarious financial

situations. This underscores the importance of thoughtful financial resources before starting a business at home.

These diverse challenges highlight the multifaceted nature of starting a bakery business and underscore the importance of addressing various factors, such as financial planning, knowledge acquisition, ingredient management, and equipment procurement, to ensure the success of such ventures.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the objective of the culinary workshop was to furnish participants with fundamental knowledge and skills requisite for initiating home-based enterprises. Unfortunately, the training proved insufficient in addressing the crucial barrier of capital required for procuring necessary equipment and materials to commence operations. For forthcoming culinary workshops designed to foster home-based food businesses, a more comprehensive approach is warranted. This could involve furnishing participants with financial assistance, as well as implementing ongoing monitoring support, rather than employing a brief workshop approach.

The study conducted on the culinary workshop, utilizing participants as respondents, is subject to limitations primarily stemming from its small sample size and cross-sectional design. This constraint restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the insights garnered may not fully represent the broader population or accurately reflect prevailing trends. The small sample size diminishes the statistical power of the study, potentially limiting the robustness and reliability of the conclusions drawn. Moreover, a smaller sample size may lead to challenges in detecting significant effects or associations within the data, thus compromising the study's validity. Consequently, while the findings offer valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants involved, caution must be exercised in extrapolating these results to wider contexts or populations. Efforts to address this limitation could involve expanding the sample size in future research endeavors to enhance the study's credibility and applicability.

For future recommendation, it is imperative to expand the sample size while ensuring demographic diversity among participants. Longitudinal studies should be considered to track participants' progress over time and evaluate the sustained impacts of the workshops. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies can offer a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and outcomes. Collaboration with stakeholders such as culinary experts, business incubators, and policymakers can enrich the research process and ensure the relevance and applicability of the findings. By implementing these strategies, future studies can mitigate the constraints imposed by small sample sizes and yield more robust insights into the effectiveness and implications of culinary workshops for aspiring entrepreneurs.

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