



The role of culture and gender in women entrepreneurs based on McClelland's theory

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Abstract

This study examines how cultural heritage and gender roles shape achievement motivation among 12 women entrepreneurs in the batik and songket industries in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu and Kota Bharu, Kelantan, East Coast Malaysia, using McClelland's theory of needs as a conceptual framework. The study operationalizes the constructs of need for achievement (nAch), power (nPow), and affiliation (nAff) to analyze how family attitudes, socialization, inherited skills, and personal interests influence entrepreneurial motivation in heritage business contexts. A qualitative case study design was employed, with participants selected through purposive and snowball sampling from a population of 458 registered entrepreneurs. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically to identify patterns linking cultural and gender factors to motivational drives. Findings show that intrinsic achievement motivation (nAch) predominates over profit motives, while nAff and nPow are expressed through collaborative networks and leadership in business operations. The study's original contribution lies in linking family heritage and gender roles with McClelland's motivational constructs, providing a framework to support women-led heritage entrepreneurship and preserve Malaysia's cultural crafts.

Keywords Culture and gender · Women entrepreneurship · McClelland's theory · Need for achievement

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is recognized globally as a vital driver of economic development, growth and innovation, making it a central agenda for economists, researchers, and policymakers alike (Rubio-Bañón & Esteban-Lloret, 2016). Through entrepreneurial activities, individuals not only create profit but also generate job opportunities that stimulate wider socioeconomic progress. In Malaysia, the growth of entrepreneurial ventures has been shaped by multiple stakeholders, including the government, private sector, higher education institutions, the community, mass media, and corporations (Yusof, 2009). This dynamic ecosystem reflects the increasing importance of entrepreneurship in reducing dependence on imports and in promoting the use of local resources for domestic production and export (Raof, 1989; Mohd Balwi, 2008).

Women's involvement in entrepreneurship has gained prominence as their participation extends beyond traditional household roles to include active contributions to family income and national development. Entrepreneurship has

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been increasingly promoted as an alternative career pathway for women, enabling them to balance family responsibilities while enhancing financial independence (Mutalib et al., 2015; Eib & Siebert, 2019). However, gender-related challenges remain, as women entrepreneurs often face socio-cultural expectations that limit their access to resources and support networks. The entrepreneurial ecosystem, ideally, assumes equality of access regardless of gender (Brush et al., 2019), yet women continue to encounter barriers that complicate their ability to fully realize opportunities. Balancing economic activity with familial obligations highlights the complex intersection of gender roles and cultural expectations (Muntean & Ozkazanc-Pan, 2015).

Culture plays a fundamental role in shaping entrepreneurial behavior, encompassing values, customs, practices, and social roles that structure everyday life (Geertz, 1973; Schaefer, 2011). Gender, meanwhile, reflects socially and culturally constructed roles and attributes that distinguish men and women (Renzetti & Curran, 2000; Lindsey & Beach, 2003). These cultural and gendered expectations directly influence women's entrepreneurial activities, shaping the types of businesses they pursue, the networks they form, and the strategies they employ to balance household and market responsibilities. McClelland's theory of achievement motivation provides a useful lens for analyzing these dynamics, emphasizing motivation and personality traits as central to entrepreneurial success (Zeffane, 2013). Within this framework, "push" factors drive women into entrepreneurship out of necessity, while "pull" factors emphasize the appeal of emerging opportunities (Pine et al., 2010). Previous research suggests that women may demonstrate higher motivation than men (Solesvik et al., 2019), and their entrepreneurial behavior is often embedded in private or community-based networks shaped by cultural norms (Schott & Cheraghi, 2015).

In Malaysia, scholarship on women's entrepreneurship has grown in recent years, yet much of it has centered on broad challenges or general success factors. For instance, Azis et al. (2023) highlight the barriers faced by rural women entrepreneurs, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, training gaps, and socio-cultural biases, and propose targeted strategies and multi-stakeholder cooperation for their empowerment. Rahman et al. (2024) investigate women's micro-enterprises and demonstrate the importance of motivation, family support, entrepreneurial skills, networks, and financing in shaping participation, with implications for policy and economic growth. Likewise, Anthonysamy (2024) examines women's entrepreneurial success in Malaysia by exploring how government initiatives in training, education, and empowerment help break gender stereotypes while drawing comparisons with international contexts.

While these studies offer valuable insights, they often treat women's entrepreneurship as a homogeneous phenomenon, overlooking the influence of cultural settings, industry-specific contexts, and intergenerational family heritage. In Malaysia, this gap is especially evident in traditional industries, where heritage preservation and economic activity intersect, demanding distinct skills and networks not captured in generalized studies. The East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, particularly Terengganu and Kelantan, provides a unique context for such analysis, as these states are renowned for their cultural industries of songket and batik, which are both economically significant and central to Malaysia's cultural identity. Women entrepreneurs dominate these sectors, relying on specialized skills gained through long apprenticeships and knowledge passed down across generations. Family heritage is not merely motivational but a structural foundation for business survival, as reputations, networks, and skills are inherited and sustained intergenerationally. This study, therefore, applies McClelland's approach to examine how cultural factors and gender roles shape the entrepreneurial drive and motivation of women entrepreneurs in the songket and batik industries of Terengganu and Kelantan, with the aim of offering new insights into the intersection of gender, culture, and entrepreneurship and informing more effective, context-specific strategies to empower women entrepreneurs.

Literature review: McClelland's theory

David McClelland's Need for Achievement theory, introduced in *The Achieving Society*, has been widely applied in entrepreneurship and other studies as a psychological explanation of why some individuals pursue and persist in business ventures (Runge et al., 2025; Rodjanatham & Badir, 2025). According to McClelland, individuals with a high need for achievement are motivated by personal excellence, moderate risk-taking, feedback on performance, and a preference for tasks where outcomes are attributable to their own effort. Unlike those driven by power or affiliation, high need for achievement individuals tend to set challenging yet attainable goals and value personal responsibility for results. Subsequent research has reinforced the role of achievement motivation in entrepreneurial orientation, risk behavior, and venture creation (Baum et al., 2014; Dede-kuma & Akpor-Robaro, 2014; Mia et al., 2025).

However, the need for achievement is also related to the family atmosphere in which an individual is raised. This family atmosphere shows the value and appreciation of parents has a great impact on the growth and development of children's thinking. McClelland argued, the need for achievement will exist when children are trained to take

care of themselves from an early age. They also get proper guidance and support to face the public. Therefore, children will adapt the nature of the need for high achievement if they get proper and perfect training. Among the main keys in the development of the need for achievement is the continuous support from the family in the face of any challenge. Accordingly, to produce entrepreneurs who have an attitude of need towards achievement, elements of children's independence and expertise as well as the support of a family environment need to be emphasized (Kerr et al., 2017; Runge et al., 2025).

In addition, McClelland also explains the priority to entrepreneurial behavior is directed to the motivation of success. The need for achievement is the key to success. Individuals who prioritize success will emphasize doing things better. McClelland identified these individuals as different from other individuals and considered them as the group that works hard to achieve success (Dedekuma & Akpor-Robaro, 2014; Guo & Ayoun, 2023). The group is also considered to be able to bear the risks that will be faced at an unexpected time. In addition, they are willing to take risks to achieve success even when faced with uncertain situations (Baum et al., 2014).

While influential, McClelland's theory has limitations when applied uncritically across cultures and gender contexts. His original studies were rooted in Western, individualistic societies and primarily examined male entrepreneurs, which raises concerns about its universality. Scholars have noted that need for achievement may manifest differently in collectivist settings, where family obligation, social harmony, and community expectations influence entrepreneurial decisions (Kerr et al., 2017). Similarly, feminist entrepreneurship scholars argue that women's entrepreneurial motivations are often shaped not only by individual drive but also by structural barriers, gender roles, and cultural norms (Jennings & Brush, 2013). These dynamics complicate a direct application of McClelland's framework, which centers on individual agency.

It can be concluded that the need for achievement as emphasized by McClelland has a close relationship with the individual's own family background. The element of family atmosphere stated by McClelland shows that if an entrepreneur comes from a background consisting of a family that owns a family business, he will show behavior like an entrepreneur as well. This is because they have been taught how to respond to people since childhood through solid support from their parents. Therefore, the family atmosphere that drives the need for achievement in the entrepreneur can be connected to the elements of socialization in the family found in gender roles in the context of this study.

The need for achievement emerges when children are trained to be independent from an early age. They also

receive proper guidance and support in social interactions. As a result, children are more likely to develop a strong achievement drive if they receive adequate and structured training. One of the main factors in developing this need for achievement is the continuous support of the family, which helps individuals overcome challenges. According to McClelland, in order to cultivate entrepreneurial traits, it is crucial to emphasize children's independence, skill development, and a supportive family environment (Kerr et al., 2017).

Additionally, McClelland explains that entrepreneurial behavior is strongly linked to the motivation for success. The need for achievement is a fundamental driver of success, as individuals who prioritize achievement tend to focus on continuous self-improvement. McClelland identifies these individuals as distinct from others, considering them part of a group that works diligently toward success (Dedekuma & Akpor-Robaro, 2014). This group is also characterized by its ability to take calculated risks in uncertain situations, demonstrating a willingness to face challenges in pursuit of success (Baum et al., 2014).

For the present study, McClelland's theory provides a useful lens for understanding motivational aspects of women's entrepreneurship but cannot fully account for the cultural and gendered dimensions of the East Coast Malaysian context. Here, entrepreneurial motivations often emerge from a blend of personal ambition and social expectations, such as maintaining family reputation, religious obligations, or fulfilling community roles. Thus, while the need for achievement construct highlights the importance of achievement-driven behavior, it must be complemented by perspectives that address how cultural and gendered structures interact with entrepreneurial identity. Recognizing these theoretical gaps ensures that the study situates women's entrepreneurial experiences within both psychological motivation and the broader socio-cultural environment.

Methodology

Research design

This research applies qualitative methods with a focus on a case study approach to analyze cultural factors and gender roles in women's entrepreneurial activities in Malaysia, which are concentrated in the states of Terengganu and Kelantan in the East Coast area of Peninsular Malaysia. A qualitative case study approach is used to analyze complex issues in depth using a small sample. It also provides guidance to the researcher to understand an issue and further add to existing knowledge about the issue (Noraini, 2013). Qualitative case studies are also known as multiple case

studies, i.e., a variety of cases are studied, discussed and compared to provide answers to an issue (Stake, 1995). The qualitative case study used in this study was a case study conducted on women entrepreneurs who run batik and songket businesses. In addition, 12 research participants who were also women entrepreneurs in two areas, namely Kuala Terengganu and Kota Bharu, were used as research participants to be interviewed in a semi-structured. Information such as family background, reasons for their entry into business, and gender role factors and cultural roles that influence involvement in business were asked to answer the research questions.

This study employs qualitative methods with a case study approach to analyze cultural factors and gender roles in women's entrepreneurial activities in Malaysia, particularly in the East Coast states of Terengganu and Kelantan. A qualitative case study approach allows for in-depth analysis of complex issues using a small sample size. This method provides structured guidance for researchers to understand the issue better and contribute to existing knowledge on the subject (Noraini, 2013).

Research area

This study chose Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu and Kota Bharu, Kelantan as the study area. The selection of the two study locations was made because each has a large market named Pasar Besar Kedai Payang and Pasar Besar Kedai Siti Khadijah, which are the focus for sellers to conduct sales and carry out economic activities (Nor'Aini, 1996; Salwati et al., 2009). In both markets there are also business forms that continue the family business and newly started businesses such as songket and batik businesses which are the focus of this study. In terms of involvement in entrepreneurship, the two districts are dominated by female entrepreneurs (Wan Ibrahim et al., 2011) as in the research of Nor Aini (2008) which revealed that women try to help their husbands to obtain a more stable income in life. Not only that, women are slowly controlling and dominating the economy in Terengganu and Kelantan until they create an entrepreneurial nature in themselves.

The study was conducted in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, and Kota Bharu, Kelantan. These locations were chosen because they house two major markets, namely Pasar Besar Kedai Payang in Kuala Terengganu and Pasar Besar Siti Khadijah in Kota Bharu, which serve as key economic hubs for local entrepreneurs (Nor'Aini, 1996; Salwati et al., 2009). Both markets feature a mix of family-run businesses and newly established enterprises, particularly in songket and batik production, which are the focus of this study. These districts have historically been dominated by female entrepreneurs (Wan Ibrahim et al., 2011). This situation can

also be linked to the level of education possessed by the majority of women involved in the informal economy (Nor 'Aini, 1994).

Sample selection

The sample was selected through purposive sampling, based on criteria that became the selection criteria for the study. Among the characteristics of the main research participants in the selected sample is that they have their own factories or workshops producing their own products and have their own business premises (they are registered with the Malaysian Handicrafts Corporation). In addition, the sample was also selected through snowball sampling. Through this snowball-based sampling, previous research participants introduce to the researcher new research participants who have the characteristics required. For this study, the research participants consisted of 12 women songket and batik entrepreneurs, six in Terengganu and six in Kelantan. Of these, five research participants are songket-based entrepreneurs while seven research participants are batik-based entrepreneurs. According to Othman (2009), in qualitative research the size of the research participants cannot be determined from the beginning of the study as in quantitative research. The selection of research participants and data analysis are continuous until reaching a saturation point. Data saturation occurs when no new elements are found and the addition of new information is no longer needed, because it does not change the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Nascimento et al., 2018; Guest et al., 2020). Therefore, the number of research participants of 12 people is considered sufficient when the last research participant gives repeated answers like the previous research participant. This situation is called data saturation which indicates that the number of study participants is sufficient.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 study participants to obtain additional information in analyzing the role of culture and gender in women entrepreneurs based on McClelland's Theory. The selection criteria for the 12 study participants were based on three aspects, namely, having started a business five years and above, having their own factory or workshop (place) for product production, and having their own business premises. Therefore, any female entrepreneurs who started a business less than five years ago and do not have a place for product production and do not have a place of business were not taken into account for semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the 12 study participants who only met the specified criteria will be interviewed based on questions that have been prepared in advance. All 12 study participants are entrepreneurs or batik and songket owner in their business areas. This in-depth interview was conducted openly and lasted 10 h 10 min

Table 1 List names of research participants

No.	Name of the informant*	Type of entrepreneur	Age	State
1	Che Yah	Songket	42	Terengganu
2	Ani	Batik	29	Terengganu
3	Che Tom	Songket	53	Terengganu
4	Puan Ma	Songket	36	Terengganu
5	Puan Non	Songket	50	Terengganu
6	Puan Idah	Songket	32	Terengganu
7	Kak Ta	Batik	38	Kelantan
8	Kak Dah	Batik	35	Kelantan
9	Che Na	Batik	54	Kelantan
10	Puan Sham	Batik	30	Kelantan
11	Zita	Batik	29	Kelantan
12	Puan Mas	Batik	56	Kelantan

*The informant's name is not her real name

with the aim of obtaining the information required to complete the study objectives. The interview questions will be determined in advance but the answers to the questions are open-ended and can be developed at the discretion of the researcher and the research participant.

The sample was selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the study. The primary characteristics of the selected participants included ownership of factories or workshops where they produce their own products. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed, allowing existing participants to introduce the researcher to new participants who met the study's selection criteria. The total population of songket and batik entrepreneurs in both study locations is 458 individuals—330 in Kuala Terengganu and 128 in Kota Bharu. For this study, 12 female entrepreneurs were selected, with six from Terengganu and six from Kelantan. Among them, five participants specialized in songket, while seven focused on batik production.

Data collection

Data was collected through a semi-structured interview technique to allow two-way communication to occur. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006) and Mathers et al. (2002), semi-structured interviews give research participants the opportunity to explain more deeply from their point of view. This two-way communication can open a space for detailed exploration of questions from researchers. The questions that are constructed are based on the objectives that have been set and adapted to the dialects of the states of Terengganu and Kelantan.

The data were collected through a semi-structured interview technique to facilitate two-way communication. According to Cohen and Crabtree (2006) and Mathers et al. (2002), semi-structured interviews provide research participants with the opportunity to elaborate on their perspectives

Table 2 Cultural factors and sub-themes

Cultural factors	Sub-themes
Attitude	Seize The Opportunity Entrepreneurial Spirit
Family heritage	Heritage Culture Disclosure In Business Activities Current Situation

Source: Author's Data

Table 3 Gender roles and sub-themes

Gender roles	Sub-themes
Socialization in the family	Nurturing Social Learning Family Background
Family skills	Inspiration Personal Preferences
Interest	Opportunity Owned

Source: Author's Data

in greater depth. This interactive communication creates a space for detailed exploration of the researchers' questions. The questions were designed based on the study's objectives and adapted to the dialects of the states of Terengganu and Kelantan (Table 1).

Thematic analysis

Thematic data analysis was used to analyze cultural factors and gender roles in women's entrepreneurial activities through McClelland's approach. The findings of this thematic analysis have obtained two themes and four sub-themes in the context of cultural factors while in the context of gender roles have obtained three themes and five sub-themes in women's entrepreneurial activities. Two themes based on cultural factors are the theme of attitude (sub-theme of seizing opportunities and entrepreneurial spirit) and family heritage (sub-theme of heritage culture, exposure in business and current conditions). While the three themes obtained through gender roles cover the theme of socialization in the family (sub-theme of nurturing and social learning), family skills (sub-theme of family background and inspiration) and interest (sub-theme of personal preferences and opportunities) (Tables 2 and 3).

Information obtained from research participants was analyzed thematically. Thematic data analysis was used to examine cultural factors and gender roles in women's entrepreneurial activities through McClelland's approach. Thematic analysis is one of the qualitative data analysis techniques. Therefore, all qualitative information obtained from semi-structured interviews is arranged according to specific categories. The thematic data analysis process is divided into six phases, namely, (a) organizing data, (b) generating categories, themes and patterns, (c) coding

data, (d) testing emerging understanding, (e) searching for alternative explanations and (f) writing a report (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Therefore, the qualitative data analysis in this study was made based on these six phases. The findings of this analysis identified two themes and four sub-themes related to cultural factors, while three themes and five sub-themes emerged in the context of gender roles. The two themes related to cultural factors are attitude (with sub-themes of seizing opportunities and entrepreneurial spirit) and family heritage (with sub-themes of heritage culture, exposure to business, and current conditions). Meanwhile, the three themes related to gender roles are socialization in the family (with sub-themes of nurturing and social learning), family skills (with sub-themes of family background and inspiration), and interest (with sub-themes of personal preferences and opportunities) (Tables 2 and 3).

Results and discussion

Results

The research participants who are the focus of this study are aged between 27 and 56 years old (Table 1), namely five entrepreneurs as songket entrepreneurs including one batik entrepreneur in Terengganu while six are female entrepreneurs working on batik in Kelantan.

The research participants in this study are aged between 27 and 56 years (Table 1). They consist of five songket entrepreneurs, including one who also produces batik, based in Terengganu, and six female batik entrepreneurs from Kelantan.

There are two research participants with degrees, one with Diploma education, one with STPM, six with SPM and two with PMR. The location of the informant's business consists of six research participants located in the state of Terengganu while the state of Kelantan also involves six research participants. All research participants have run songket and batik companies between seven and 37 years. Based on the 12 research participants, five are songket entrepreneurs and the rest are batik entrepreneurs. In terms of the origin of the business, there are research participants who run businesses as a result of inheritance from the previous generation, which is a business inherited from their mother or father-in-law. Research participants who inherited a business from their father-in-law were two people while seven people inherited a business from their mother. The research findings show that there are two factors in the context of cultural factors and three aspects in gender roles that create women's entrepreneurial activities based on McClelland's approach. There are two factors in the cultural context

which are attitudes and family heritage while socialization in the family, family skills and interests are elements found in gender roles. Therefore, the elements of attitude, family heritage, socialization in the family, family heritage and interest become the basis for the development of women's entrepreneurial activities in the context of cultural factors and gender roles in Terengganu and Kelantan.

Among the 12 research participants, two hold degrees, one has a diploma, one completed STPM, six completed SPM, and two have PMR qualifications. In terms of business location, six participants operate in Terengganu, while the other six are based in Kelantan. All participants have been managing songket and batik businesses for between 7 and 37 years. Of the 12 participants, five are songket entrepreneurs, and the remaining seven are batik entrepreneurs. Regarding the origins of their businesses, some participants inherited their enterprises from the previous generation, specifically from their mothers or fathers-in-law. Two participants inherited businesses from their fathers-in-law, while seven inherited from their mothers. The research findings identify two cultural factors and three gender role aspects that influence women's entrepreneurial activities, based on McClelland's approach. The cultural factors are attitudes and family heritage, while the gender role aspects include socialization within the family, family-acquired skills, and personal interests. Thus, the elements of attitude, family heritage, family socialization, family-acquired skills, and personal interest form the foundation for the development of women's entrepreneurial activities within the cultural and gender role contexts in Terengganu and Kelantan.

Cultural factors

Attitude

The attitude observed in women's entrepreneurship reflects deliberate actions taken to achieve personal satisfaction or specific goals. This study highlights two key aspects of the attitude demonstrated by the informants: the ability to seize emerging business opportunities and the embodiment of an entrepreneurial spirit.

Seize the opportunity

Women entrepreneurs involved in business ventures must be proactive in identifying and capitalizing on available opportunities. Five of the twelve participants indicated that their principal motivation for initiating a business was the presence of opportunities in their environment, facilitated by peer networks, government initiatives, or the expanding market for batik and songket. Recognizing and responding

to such prospects plays a crucial role in achieving business success. Often, the achievements of fellow entrepreneurs serve as motivation and inspiration for aspiring women entrepreneurs to pursue their own ventures. The success stories of peers' act as a catalyst, encouraging women to take confident steps toward realizing their ambitions of becoming entrepreneurs. For instance, Puan Mas, who has been involved in the batik industry in Kelantan since the age of 19, stated that:

I have many friends who have been successful in their businesses. The success of these friends gave me a positive response to own and open my own business. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Mas).

This excerpt demonstrates that peer influence acts as a catalyst for opportunity. It is not solely an expression of individual aspiration, as highlighted in McClelland's Need for Achievement theory; rather, it represents a form of social encouragement, wherein the success of the community acts as both a model and a source of inspiration. This indicates that in the collectivist Malay context, entrepreneurial motivation frequently arises from social interaction rather than solely from individual ambition.

A comparable trend is evident among younger entrepreneurs, exemplified by Ani (29 years old, batik, Terengganu), who highlighted that the training opportunities offered by KRAFTANGAN instilled in her the confidence to initiate her own business. This contrasts with participants who inherited their businesses, as opportunities were accessed through family legacy rather than through the pursuit of new markets. McClelland posits that achievement motivation is defined by an inherent drive for success. The findings of this study indicate that "opportunity seeking" among women entrepreneurs in the batik and songket industries is primarily influenced by social and cultural factors.

Entrepreneurial spirit

The entrepreneurial spirit refers to a strong inner drive to achieve the aspiration of becoming a successful female entrepreneur. This inner drive fosters self-confidence in one's ability to manage and grow a business. Entrepreneurship inherently involves risk, requiring women to compete alongside male entrepreneurs in identifying and capitalizing on viable business opportunities to enhance their ventures. Despite the lack of a fixed monthly income, many women find entrepreneurship to be more fulfilling than conventional employment. They view it as a rewarding pursuit that offers greater satisfaction and personal growth. The entrepreneurial spirit demonstrated by Puan Non reflects these values, as illustrated in the following:

I started doing business because I learned from my mother. Because my mother was the first to do business. So from the beginning I didn't like working with people, I preferred doing business. Self-work. If I work with people I don't feel free. After all, working alone is not tied down. Because I am the second generation in the family after my mother. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Non).

Four out of twelve participants identified an intrinsic motivation to pursue entrepreneurship, despite the associated income uncertainties. This finding indicates that entrepreneurial spirit is not solely an individualistic drive; it is also influenced by maternal role models. This spirit arises from a blend of individual interest and familial influence. Younger participants, specifically those under 35 years old, underscored the importance of independence and self-directed work, while older participants focused on the significance of maintaining family legacy. In this context, entrepreneurial spirit signifies a combination of personal aspirations for autonomy and shared family values, rather than solely an intrinsic motivation.

Family heritage

Women who are born into families with a legacy of entrepreneurship are typically exposed to business activities from an early age. They grow up observing the strategies and efforts of previous generations in building and sustaining the business. In particular, industries such as *songket* and *batik* production are closely associated with women, further reinforcing their early involvement. As a result, individuals from entrepreneurial family backgrounds are often perceived as having more practical experience compared to those who begin their entrepreneurial journey independently. This study discusses the influence of family heritage on women entrepreneurs through three key aspects: cultural inheritance, early exposure to business practices, and the current business environment.

Heritage culture

Family heritage culture refers to business practices that are passed down from one generation to the next. Women who come from families with a history of entrepreneurship, whether through their mother or father, often exhibit similar traits and characteristics as the original business founders. In many cases, the entrepreneurial culture within the family is regarded as the primary source of income.

A business that has been central to a family's legacy for generations is often inherited informally, with each new generation taking on the responsibility of sustaining it.

This continuity is a key reason why many women become involved in entrepreneurial activities, to preserve and uphold the family's business tradition. Maintaining this business culture not only honors the legacy of past generations but also contributes to the long-term survival of family enterprises. For Puan Idah, managing her family's business became second nature. She embraced the songket-based business as her career, stating:

My involvement in this entrepreneurial activity is not just to fill my free time or for fun, but to continue the family legacy business that was first run by my mother so that it can last for a long time until my grandchildren. And still want to fulfill the desire to do business as a trader like mother. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Idah).

According to the research participant, entrepreneurial activities are not merely undertaken to fill free time, but rather to continue the family heritage business established by the first generation. Furthermore, women who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs are often driven by both intention and ambition, not only to follow in the footsteps of their mothers but also to preserve the family's entrepreneurial legacy for future generations.

Seven of the twelve participants indicated that they inherited their businesses from their mothers or mothers-in-law. Family inheritance serves as a crucial factor in maintaining the continuity of songket and batik enterprises. In this context, inheritance encompasses not only economic motivations but also social and cultural responsibilities. For example, an only child, such as Puan Ma, demonstrated a heightened sense of obligation, while participants with several siblings characterized inheritance more as a choice than an obligation.

Disclosure in business activities

Exposure to business activities serves as an early foundation for parents to introduce and adapt their children to entrepreneurial practices. This long-standing involvement often cultivates interest among women to eventually establish their own businesses. Some women gain firsthand knowledge of the business world through their mothers, who involved them in business operations from a young age often by bringing them along to the workplace. The experiences of the research participants related to early business exposure are as follows:

The origin of how I could be involved in business started after getting early exposure from my mother since I was a child when I was 12 years old. At that

time, my mother was hired to weave songket at home. Coincidentally it happened during the school holidays, mom asked for help. So get some money, that is the wages of weaving songket. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Yah).

The research participants noted that women who are introduced to the business world at a young age are more likely to become capable entrepreneurs with in-depth knowledge of various aspects of entrepreneurship. This early exposure provides them with a significant advantage, particularly when entrusted with the responsibility of managing their family's legacy business. Consequently, family background emerges as a crucial factor influencing an individual's decision to pursue entrepreneurship. Moreover, individuals from entrepreneurial families often have the opportunity to inherit and continue the family business (Chin, 2003).

Current situation

The current situation reveals that some women enter the *songket* and *batik* business due to their role as the only child in the family. In such cases, they often bear the responsibility of continuing the family legacy to ensure that the inherited business knowledge and skills are preserved. Thus, the family heritage business becomes a key factor influencing women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities. This perspective was shared by one of the informants as follows:

I am the only child in the family. There are no other siblings. At the age of 20, I inherited the songket business from my mother because I was the only child in the family. So I feel responsible to take over the business because if I don't continue my family business, who else will? (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Ma).

The subject of this study identified their position as the only child in the family as a key reason for becoming involved in entrepreneurship. He expressed that a deep sense of responsibility compelled him to take over the family's heritage business, which specializes in *songket* production, from his mother. According to him, the family enterprise requires a successor to lead, make strategic investment decisions, and ensure that the products align with customer preferences. Similarly, being the only child is a significant factor influencing women's involvement in *songket* and *batik* entrepreneurial ventures. The absence of siblings often creates a heightened sense of duty to preserve and continue the family legacy. As a result, the entrepreneurial culture and business skills embedded within the family are sustained across generations.

Gender roles

Socialization in the family

Teaching and nurturing within the family plays a crucial role in socializing individuals and encouraging them to become involved in the same business. Some women begin by working in the family business to gain a comprehensive understanding of its operations before eventually taking over the business after the founder's departure. The concept of socialization within the family in this study is explored through two key elements: nurturing and social learning.

Nurturing

The upbringing received from a family with an entrepreneurial background helps foster a desire to engage in *songket* and *batik* business activities among women before they take over the family business. This is particularly significant because gender roles often shape the types of work considered suitable for men and women. Research findings suggest that handicraft-based businesses, such as *songket* and *batik*, are predominantly run by female entrepreneurs, either inheriting businesses from their families or starting their own. The nurturing aspect refers to the guidance provided by parents from an early age, instilling an interest in the business world. Additionally, the promise of rewards for helping with the family business can further stimulate interest in entrepreneurship. This suggests that children exposed to business at a young age are more likely to follow in the footsteps of their parents and pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Moreover, the potential for profitability in business is an attractive factor for women to consider entrepreneurship. The importance of nurturing is further demonstrated by Puan Yah, as illustrated in the following statement:

Since I was little, my mother taught me. Since the age of 12. Until now I still remember what my mother told me before. Mother asked me, do you want money? If you want money, you have to help me do business (while thinking in my head) If you don't help, you can't get money. I also help my mother do business. While helping mother do business, while mother tells me the right way to do business. Want to manage business well. I take as a guide what my mother told me. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Yah).

Interest in entrepreneurship often arises from family members who are already involved in business. Women from entrepreneurial families are typically nurtured by the founder of the family business, who plays a key role in instilling entrepreneurial values. The business founder is

the individual who initially established the family business and is responsible for ensuring that potential successors are adequately prepared to carry on the family legacy. Consequently, continuous nurturing is aimed at providing exposure to the business world and teaching the necessary skills to effectively manage the enterprise. This ongoing exposure is crucial in equipping potential successors with the knowledge and competencies required to steer the family business into the future.

Half of the participants articulated the influence of maternal upbringing on their burgeoning interest in the field of business. This upbringing transcended mere economic training; it served as a familial mechanism for socializing daughters, thereby ensuring that the ownership and continuity of business remained firmly within the purview of women.

Social learning

Social learning refers to the process by which children observe their mothers engaging in daily business activities. Five out of twelve participants indicated that their daily observations of their mothers involved in business provided a direct avenue for learning. This observation typically occurs when children are adolescents, providing them with the opportunity to develop an interest in entrepreneurship and aspire to follow in their mother's footsteps. During this process, children can also ask questions and gain a deeper understanding of the business world. The initial interest and ambition to continue the family business legacy are often sparked by this early exposure. The social learning process has a significant impact on women's entrepreneurial development. For instance, Puan Idah, who inherited the *songket* business from her mother, described how this learning process shaped her entrepreneurial journey:

I have always seen how my mother managed her songket business since my teenage years. Sometimes I ask my mother what I don't understand about business management. I consider this to be a direct social learning process. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Idah).

This process of social learning occurs through prolonged observation, consistently repeated over time, until it becomes routine for the children who are observing. As they grow older, they often develop the same interest as their mothers and pursue the same entrepreneurial ventures. This aligns with the findings of Fairlie and Robb (2007) and Matthews and Moser (1996), who noted that family commitment to business plays a significant role in influencing an individual's tendency to engage in entrepreneurship. Continuous observation facilitated the assimilation of entrepreneurial

values and competencies, aligning with Bandura's social learning theory.

Family skills

In this study, family skills refer to the business expertise passed down within the family, whether inherited from the mother, father, or even grandparents. Many families involved in business transfer these entrepreneurial skills to their heirs with the aim of preserving and sustaining the family enterprise. The inheritance of business skills can span several generations, as long as there are heirs willing to continue the business. Consequently, individuals from business families are often well-positioned to become entrepreneurs due to their early exposure to and experience with business operations. Moreover, gender plays a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurial activities, particularly in relation to family backgrounds and their initial entry into the world of entrepreneurship.

Family background

A total of eight out of twelve participants highlighted that their competencies in business management were developed within the family context, encompassing methods such as weaving, batik dyeing, and customer management strategies. Children who grow up in families involved in business are more inclined to pursue similar entrepreneurial ventures. This often occurs because they have observed how the business operates from a young age. Additionally, parents who are entrepreneurs may take their children to their business locations after school, providing them with firsthand exposure to the business world. When this process is repeated over time, children who witness their parents working in the business environment are more likely to be influenced in their decision to become entrepreneurs and continue the family legacy. This is exemplified by the case of Puan Idah, who has been managing her family's *songket* business in the heart of Kuala Terengganu since 2008. She shared:

Has been in the songket business for 20 years after being established by my mother. I want to see this family business continue forever. If I don't take over, who else can be expected. Because I am the only child in the family. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Idah).

This study revealed that women from entrepreneurial families consider their family background to be the most significant factor influencing their involvement in business. Their frequent exposure to daily business activities within the family provides them with the opportunity to take over

and further develop the business their family has built. Having close family members, such as parents, siblings, grandparents, or cousins, engaged in business helps foster entrepreneurial traits through their close connection to the existing business environment (Bates, 1990). The influence of familial skills and background is paramount in determining women's entrepreneurial inclinations, surpassing the impact of formal education.

Inspiration

The inspirational aspect in this study highlights that women are motivated to pursue entrepreneurship through the influence of family members who have successfully established themselves as entrepreneurs. This means that the female entrepreneurs in this study draw inspiration from the achievements of their successful family members, using their success as a catalyst to start their own businesses. The inspiration and enthusiasm sparked by these family successes serve as a key trigger, motivating them to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations.

At the beginning, I helped my brother. After all, my brother has his own shop that sells jewelry. Every school holiday, I will help my brother to manage his shop. Because at that time many customers came to shop. Over time, I find it fun to do business. Getting that much money became my inspiration from my brother's success. After that, I managed to open my own shop by sharing with my sister. My shop is managed alternately between me and my sister. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Ta).

The success of family members who have established their own businesses serves as a source of inspiration and motivation for women interested in pursuing entrepreneurship. The desire to become an entrepreneur empowers them to successfully establish their own ventures. Initially, the informant helped her brother, who owned a business, and it was through this experience that her interest in entrepreneurship grew. Over time, she realized that the business field had the potential to generate significant profits. Her brother's success, which enabled him to open two jewelry stores, acted as a stimulus for her to pursue her own entrepreneurial ambitions.

Interest

In this study, interest refers to the inclination to engage in business activities. Women who have a strong interest in entrepreneurship demonstrate a high tendency towards entrepreneurial endeavors, believing that they can achieve

their goals as successful entrepreneurs. Interest also reflects confidence in one's ability to manage a business. The element of interest comprises two components: personal preference and opportunity.

Personal preferences

Personal preference represents the desire to pursue entrepreneurship, which arises from various motivating factors. This desire often develops from the aspiration to own a business. Such aspirations are frequently shaped by prior experiences, particularly work experiences with individuals involved in the same field. When women acquire sufficient knowledge of business management, the process of establishing and running their own business becomes more comprehensible. Puan Ta expressed her personal preference for entrepreneurship in the following words:

When I was 28 years old (2005), I decided to open my own business starting as a partner with my sister. So I thought I wanted to have my own store after four years of working in my brother's jewelry store. While I was studying at university, I was interested in business and interested in opening my own business. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Ta).

The factor of interest is crucial to achieving an entrepreneur's goals. Although many female entrepreneurs who run their businesses have an educational background up to the SPM level, their strong interest in entrepreneurship is a key driving force. This deep interest motivates them to view entrepreneurship as a viable means of earning a livelihood. The availability of widespread opportunities enhances women's confidence in their ability to manage a business. As a result, they are prepared to face various challenges and obstacles in order to seize the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

Opportunity owned

The opportunities available to women include the chance to inherit the family business, the possibility of increasing family income, and the ability to participate in entrepreneurial activities organized by various parties. Women who initially work for others to gain skills and business training before inheriting a family business are seen as being motivated to pursue entrepreneurship. The situations encountered by the research participants regarding the opportunities they have are as follows:

If there is an opportunity for the good of my business. When KRAFTANGAN organizes a program, I usually

participate. (Source: Field study in 2015 with Puan Sham).

Most women perceive entrepreneurship as a field that offers higher income potential compared to traditional monthly salaries. The substantial income generated from their business activities motivates women to seek additional revenue streams, such as frequently participating in exhibitions organized by KRAFTANGAN across the country and marketing batik products online. This strategy directly benefits their businesses, as batik products are widely popular among people of all ages. The profits earned from these business ventures are considerable, contributing to increased business income. As a result, textile entrepreneurs gain a competitive edge, enhancing their families' quality of life through the financial gains from their businesses. The interrelationship among interest, inspiration, and opportunity suggests that the motivation of women is derived from a synthesis of intrinsic elements and external assistance.

Discussion

A scholar who focuses on entrepreneurship, David McClelland, introduced the McClelland Theory in 1961. McClelland asserts the need for achievement is the triggering factor that shapes an individual. They are assumed to be motivated by the desire to succeed while money and profit are only a unit of measurement for achievement rather than a motivation for entrepreneurial activity (McClelland, 1987). However, the need for achievement depends on how an individual is brought up in his family. The family bond that exists shows that parental care has a significant impact on the growth and development of children's thinking. McClelland argued, the need for achievement will exist when children are trained from an early age and they are given appropriate guidance and support. Therefore, children will grow up following what their parents teach them. The development of an attitude of need for high achievement begins through support from the family to face the challenges of navigating a business. According to McClelland, in order to produce individuals who prioritize the need for achievement, undivided support from the family can make the individual emerge as a successful entrepreneur (Raof, 1989).

The combination of two themes in cultural factors explains that women's entrepreneurship cannot be built in society without encouraging factors such as attitudes and family heritage. Similarly, in the context of gender roles, the role of women is seen to be growing in a society that is trying to increase the source of income in the household. Gender roles are shown through the themes of socialization in the family, family skills and interests. The rapid

development process taking place in the country causes women to also compete with men, especially in the employment sector, causing women to have the same rights and roles as men. However, in certain matters, men still have a more important role than women. For example, in the family and household, the husband still plays an important role as a leader or leader. This situation shows that there is a difference in roles between women and men in various contexts. The difference in roles between women and men leads to the existence of women's power that dominates through certain job sectors where in the context of this study is songket and batik entrepreneurial activities. The situation encourages the increase of female entrepreneurs to increase income in their families. The women who dominate the songket and batik companies also create a force which is the dominance of women in entrepreneurship, especially in the handicraft sector which is increasing in the states on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

The high involvement of women based on entrepreneurial activities in the East Coast states is also helped by the business inheritance system in a family. This system is largely inherited among daughters because they are able to do side jobs in addition to their main duties as a household manager. This is in line with the assumption of McClelland's approach, which states that the need for achievement has a close relationship with the individual's own family background. The element of family atmosphere stated by McClelland shows that if an entrepreneur comes from a background consisting of a family that owns a family business, he will show behavior like an entrepreneur as well. Therefore, the family atmosphere that drives the need for achievement in entrepreneurs can be linked to the elements of attitude and family heritage in cultural factors and elements of socialization in the family and family skills in gender roles. It shows that the approach used by McClelland has the influence of cultural factors and gender roles that shape an individual's identity to become an entrepreneur. Therefore, women's entrepreneurship in the context of this study cannot be formed perfectly without the presence of cultural factors and gender roles.

David McClelland, a prominent scholar in entrepreneurship, introduced the McClelland Theory in 1961. He emphasized that the need for achievement is the key motivational factor shaping an individual's behavior. According to McClelland, individuals are primarily driven by the desire to succeed, while money and profit merely serve as measures of achievement rather than as direct motivators for entrepreneurial activity (McClelland, 1987). However, the development of the need for achievement is strongly influenced by family upbringing. Parental care is crucial in shaping children's cognitive and emotional development. McClelland argued that this need is cultivated when children are

exposed to early training, appropriate guidance, and continuous family support. Consequently, children are likely to internalize the values and attitudes modeled by their parents. The formation of a strong achievement-oriented mindset thus begins within the family, preparing individuals to face entrepreneurial challenges. In this regard, McClelland highlighted that unwavering family support is vital in nurturing individuals who prioritize achievement, ultimately contributing to their success as entrepreneurs (Raof, 1989).

The findings of this study reveal that women's entrepreneurship is primarily influenced by two cultural factors: attitudes and family heritage. Without these supporting elements, the development of women's entrepreneurial activities would be limited. Similarly, gender roles play a significant part, as women's involvement in entrepreneurship often emerges from their efforts to contribute to household income. Gender roles are reflected in themes such as family socialization, acquired family skills, and personal interests. Rapid national development has made women increasingly compete with men in the workforce, granting them broader access to rights and responsibilities. Traditional structures persist, where men often hold family leadership roles. This differentiation illustrates that despite progress, distinct gender roles remain, influencing entrepreneurial pathways. In sectors such as songket and batik, women have emerged as dominant figures, strengthening their presence in the handicraft and entrepreneurial landscape, particularly in the East Coast states of Peninsular Malaysia.

Women's strong participation in entrepreneurial activities is further reinforced by the system of business inheritance within families. This system often favors daughters, allowing them to manage businesses while balancing their traditional responsibilities as household managers. This trend is consistent with McClelland's assertion that the need for achievement is closely tied to family background. McClelland proposed that individuals raised in entrepreneurial families are more likely to develop entrepreneurial behaviors. Thus, the familial environment that nurtures a need for achievement is closely linked to the cultural elements of attitude and family heritage, as well as gender role elements such as socialization and skill development. This study highlights that women's entrepreneurship in Terengganu and Kelantan is deeply rooted in the interaction between cultural factors and gender roles, affirming McClelland's perspective on the powerful influence of family and societal structures in shaping entrepreneurial identity.

The study's findings have several implications for policy. First, entrepreneurship programs must be designed to integrate cultural strengths with modern business needs. For example, training initiatives should emphasize both preserving traditional craftsmanship and utilizing digital tools for promotion and distribution. This recommendation stems

directly from the finding that family heritage and skills play a central role in women's entrepreneurial identity.

Second, policies should address the gendered inheritance system by providing incentives and resources that support women in formalizing and expanding inherited businesses. This responds to the evidence that daughters often inherit businesses due to their dual role as household managers and entrepreneurs. Support for women's business succession planning could ensure continuity and growth across generations.

Third, market access policies such as support for participation in trade fairs, online marketplaces, and export networks are essential to connect local entrepreneurs with global demand. This aligns with the finding that cultural heritage products like songket and batik have unique potential in international markets but require external facilitation to reach them.

Finally, targeted support for technology adoption among women entrepreneurs is necessary. Given the study's evidence that entrepreneurial motivation is deeply rooted in family and cultural environments, policy must bridge this foundation with external drivers of competitiveness such as digitalization and innovation.

Implications to theory

The findings on cultural factors and gender roles in women's entrepreneurship using McClelland's approach show that it requires high motivation as stated in McClelland's approach. McClelland states that the formation of an entrepreneur requires other elements to achieve success in the field of entrepreneurship. Elements such as seizing opportunities in entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial spirit within can potentially stimulate women to make entrepreneurship as their career. Therefore, the strength within to support the family and the desire to be independent and have interests cause women to have the desire to become entrepreneurs. In addition, the business culture that already exists in a family is able to inject enthusiasm among the women involved to participate in becoming entrepreneurs. Thus, the culture of entrepreneurship obtained from family heritage will allow female entrepreneurs to be more competitive and explore new business opportunities. Women who inherit a business culture from their family should strive to develop the business they inherited so that it can be maintained for several generations. The cultural factor in this study is the business culture inherited from one generation to the next in a society. Women in the East Coast are very famous for their business culture regardless of the size of the business, big or small. If there is an opportunity to start a business, they do not hesitate to venture into it. The existing family

heritage business is also a catalyst and a stepping stone for women who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs. In their opinion, the family heritage business can be used as a cornerstone for them to learn the skills needed in business.

The findings on cultural factors and gender roles in women's entrepreneurship, analyzed through McClelland's achievement motivation theory, highlight the importance of high internal motivation in entrepreneurial success. McClelland emphasized that the formation of an entrepreneur is not based on ambition alone but also requires the ability to seize opportunities and foster an internal entrepreneurial spirit. In this context, women are motivated to pursue entrepreneurship by their desire to support their families, achieve independence, and develop their interests.

Additionally, a strong business culture within families significantly encourages women to engage in entrepreneurial activities. The inheritance of entrepreneurial values from one generation to the next equips women with the enthusiasm and competitive edge needed to sustain and grow their businesses. Women who inherit a family business culture are encouraged to build upon the foundations laid by their predecessors, ensuring the continuity and resilience of these businesses across generations. Family business catalyzes entrepreneurial involvement and provides a vital platform for acquiring essential business skills and knowledge. Thus, family heritage is critical in shaping women's entrepreneurial journeys and sustaining traditional industries in the region.

Conclusion

This study examined how cultural heritage and gender roles influence the achievement motivation of women entrepreneurs in the batik and songket industries in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, and Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Guided by McClelland's theory of needs, the findings indicate that intrinsic achievement motivation, supported by family involvement, early socialization, and inherited skills, is a significant driver of engagement in heritage businesses. The interplay of cultural and gender factors appears to shape how these entrepreneurs develop competencies, resilience, and sustained commitment within the specific contexts studied.

The study's contribution lies in linking family heritage and gender roles with McClelland's motivational constructs, providing a nuanced framework for understanding women-led heritage entrepreneurship in Malaysia. These insights can inform the design of policies, training programs, and financial support mechanisms aimed at fostering entrepreneurship while preserving cultural crafts. Future research could test this framework across other regions and craft sectors and investigate long-term outcomes and strategies

for integrating cultural sustainability with entrepreneurial innovation.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this study provides valuable insights into the role of cultural factors and gender roles in shaping women's entrepreneurship in the songket and batik industries on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study's small sample size of 12 participants, limited to the states of Terengganu and Kelantan, may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or industries. The focus on traditional industries such as songket and batik also means that the findings may not fully capture the experiences of women entrepreneurs in other sectors, such as technology, services, or manufacturing. Future research could address this limitation by expanding the sample to include a larger and more diverse group of women entrepreneurs from different states and economic sectors across Malaysia. Second, as this study relied solely on qualitative interviews, the findings are inherently subjective and based on participants' narratives. While rich in depth, qualitative data may be influenced by participants' perceptions and recall biases. Future research could incorporate mixed-method approaches, combining in-depth interviews with surveys or longitudinal studies, to validate and strengthen the findings through triangulation. Third, the study focused primarily on family influence and cultural inheritance but did not deeply explore external factors such as government policies, market access, technological adaptation, or globalization impacts. Future studies could investigate how these external factors interact with cultural and gender dynamics to influence women's entrepreneurial success, especially in a rapidly changing economic environment.

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Declarations

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