

A Conceptual Framework on Empowering Women's Co-Op Success: Government Influences in Malaysia

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Abstract

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest among researchers in the field of women's empowerment. In the current Malaysian context, the government has shown a strong commitment to enhancing inclusivity and providing equitable opportunities for all Malaysians, with a particular focus on women. This commitment is reflected in both the Twelfth Plan for 2021-2025 and the National Entrepreneurship Plan 2030. These plans align with the multi-dimensional approach of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by placing women at the forefront of development efforts. Women in Malaysia are increasingly joining cooperatives, as these organizations offer access to vital resources, training, and markets, and create a supportive environment for members to develop their skills, confidence, knowledge, and networks. However, despite the potential benefits of women's cooperatives, they face numerous challenges that impede their performance and sustainability. Furthermore, while past studies have identified various factors related to women's empowerment, there has been a limited focus on understanding women's empowerment from a resource-based perspective and exploring cooperative performance through the lens of board members in women's cooperatives. As a result, this study aims to investigate the relationship between empowerment and women's cooperatives. The research will take a quantitative approach and involve the distribution of expert-validated questionnaires to seven selected board members from a pool of 234 women's cooperatives in Malaysia. Subsequent analysis will explore the impact of structural empowerment on cooperative performance. The outcomes of this study will shine a light on the challenges women encounter in accessing economic resources, and opportunities, and participating in decision-making processes. It underscores the significance

of addressing these challenges and creating an enabling environment to promote women's empowerment.

Keywords: Structural Empowerment, Government Effectiveness, Co-Operative Performance

Introduction

Women's empowerment is about increasing their ability to participate fully in economic, social, and political aspects of life, as defined by the United Nations in 2015. This concept is so significant that it has been made into Goal Five of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This aim includes not just minimizing gender-based violence and supporting the equitable representation of women in leadership posts but also encouraging states to offer economic assistance to women and girls.

Structural empowerment, as defined by Pathania in 2017, involves the process of equipping women with the necessary resources, opportunities, and support to enable their full participation in economic, social, and political spheres of life. Recently, Malaysia has committed to incorporating women's empowerment into its economic plans and the National Entrepreneurship Plan 2030, demonstrating a strong dedication to this agenda, as announced by the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives in 2021. The Malaysian government has allocated substantial resources to support women's economic empowerment through various initiatives like DANANITA (under the Majlis Amanah Rakyat), TEKUNITA (under TEKUN Nasional), MyKasih Kapita, and the ASEAN-JAPAN Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program (AJWELP), as reported by the Economic Plan Unit in 2020.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these programs in promoting women's entrepreneurship and cooperative performance is influenced by various factors. One crucial aspect that needs closer examination is the role of government effectiveness as a moderating factor. These empowerment programs may offer initial support to women entrepreneurs, but their ability to foster long-term success and sustainability presents challenges. Government effectiveness, as a mediating factor, holds the potential to significantly impact the outcomes of empowerment programs. The competence of government agencies in implementing and overseeing these initiatives, as well as their capacity to adapt to the unique needs and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, plays a central role in determining the success or limitations of these programs. Consequently, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the role of government effectiveness in moderating the relationship between empowerment programs and the performance of women's cooperatives. This analysis is essential for the development of targeted strategies that can ensure sustainable empowerment.

Structural empowerment holds significant relevance in the realm of women's empowerment, particularly within the context of women's cooperatives. In the cooperative setting, structural empowerment entails granting women's cooperatives access to essential resources such as credit, markets, and training, as highlighted in studies by Rohaya, Idris, Kunci (2019), Saha, Sangwan (2019), and Waithera Kiaritha (2015). Cooperatives serve as a potent means for fostering women's economic empowerment, as they are characterized by democratic ownership and operation by their members. This participatory structure ensures that profits are reinvested into the business or distributed among the members. The utility of cooperatives extends beyond empowering women to encompass the transformation of women's socio-economic roles and contributing to a country's economic development, as recognized in studies by Latini (2020), Karaphillis and Duguid (2017), Lecoutere (2017), Duguid

(2016), and Majid et al. (n.d.). Cooperatives, by their nature, are centered around people and are managed democratically, with each member having an equal say (one person, one vote). In Malaysia, cooperatives are established to promote the sustainability and long-term viability of businesses, as underscored by research from Jelani, Shafiai, and Mohd Noor (2021). Notably, as of December 31, 2022, Malaysia had 15,315 registered cooperatives, among which 256 were women's cooperatives. These women's cooperatives accounted for 29,455 memberships and generated RM17 million in turnover, representing only 0.03% of the overall RM45 billion turnovers of cooperatives in Malaysia (Utusan Malaysia, 2023). Hence, the promotion of cooperatives emerges as an effective strategy for advancing women's economic empowerment, a critical driver of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and economic growth, as articulated by Pathania (2017).

Problem Statement

Structural empowerment is a pivotal tool for promoting women's empowerment. It encompasses the systematic facilitation of women's access to vital resources, opportunities, and support, enabling their active engagement in economic activities. Notably, sustainable development and sustainability cannot be achieved without equitable distribution, as emphasized by Pathania (2017). The Malaysian government has introduced various programs for women's economic empowerment, such as DANANITA under the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), TEKUNITA under TEKUN Nasional, MyKasih Kapita, and the ASEAN-JAPAN Women Entrepreneurs' Linkage Program (AJWELP), involving substantial financial allocations (Economic Plan Unit, 2020). Despite these efforts to foster women's participation in entrepreneurship, these programs have predominantly focused on the startup phase, offering limited support for women to thrive and sustain their presence in the industry. A 2021 study by the International Labour Organization identified a critical gap in providing targeted support or empowerment efforts by the government to help women progress into higher value-added sectors and expand their businesses, despite equal access to government support services and training programs. This raises questions about the effectiveness of these efforts and whether they are adequate in supporting women. Structural empowerment can play a crucial role in ensuring that women have equal opportunities to engage in higher value-added sectors and expand their businesses. The current absence of structural empowerment may result in unequal opportunities for women entrepreneurs compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, gender-specific challenges and priorities differentiate women entrepreneurs from their male counterparts, exacerbating the constraints faced by women in entrepreneurship (Isa, Jaganathan, Ibrahim, 2019). Gender inequality is also evident in the representation of women in entrepreneurship or as business owners in Malaysia, as highlighted by Isa et al. (2019). This gender disparity is mirrored in the underperformance of women's cooperatives, as illustrated by a study conducted by Jelani et al. (2021). The study revealed that 61% of single-mother cooperatives in Peninsular Malaysia are inactive, compared to 39% that are active. Recent statistics from Utusan Malaysia (2023) indicate that out of the 256 registered women's cooperatives in Malaysia, 30% were inactive. The contribution of women's cooperatives as of December 31, 2020, amounted to only RM5.6 million, representing a mere 0.03 percent of the total turnover of cooperatives, which stood at RM21.2 billion (Bernama, 2021). This not only underscores the scarcity of women-owned enterprises but also the deficiency in the establishment of women's cooperatives, resulting in a negligible contribution to the economy. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between structural empowerment and the performance of

women's cooperatives in Malaysia. The study aims to identify specific structural factors contributing to the challenges faced by women's cooperatives in the country.

Literature Review

Underpinning Theories

The concept of women's empowerment, introduced by Naila Kabeer in 1999, defines it as "the expansion of women's assets, agency, and achievements, and the transformation of gender relations, in ways that promote social and economic justice." In simpler terms, women's empowerment involves increasing women's access to resources and opportunities while challenging and changing the unequal power dynamics between men and women in society. True empowerment is achieved when women can access these resources and make strategic decisions about them. A study by Raudeliuniene, Dzemdya, and Kimpah (2014) suggests that the examination of women's empowerment should be conducted on a case-by-case basis in various societies, at organizational and individual levels, and with diverse measurement instruments across different countries. This is because no single instrument can fit all organizations, communities, or nations.

Another theory delves into the organizational level of member empowerment within a collective group. Kanter (1977) developed the structural empowerment theory, which posits that the perceived level of empowerment is shaped by the organization's structure and how power is distributed within it. This theory identifies four key factors of structural empowerment: access to information, access to resources, support from leaders and colleagues, and learning and growth opportunities, which will be further elaborated in the following section. Access to these structural empowerments contributes to enhancing overall organizational effectiveness and fostering positive employee attitudes (Kanter, 1977, 1993; Sharma & Kaur, 2008).

Supporting Kanter's claims, the resource-based view (RBV) theory by Barney (1991) categorizes resources as physical capital, human capital, and organizational capital, and it has been extended to encompass other resources such as financial capital, technological assets, and reputational capital (Grant, 1991). Scholars in the field of big data predictive analysis have explained that organizational capabilities can be created by combining strategic resources like information sharing and human skills, which, if leveraged effectively, can enhance operational performance and competitive advantages (Srinivasan & Swink, 2018; Gunasekaran et al., 2016).

Conversely, Aydiner, Tatoglu, Bayraktar, Zaim, and Delen (2019) argue that organizations failing to adequately respond to external forces and environmental demands cannot achieve the necessary level of performance. Given that cooperative establishments are bound by the Co-operative Societies Act of 1993 and other existing laws in Malaysia, all cooperatives are required to operate within the framework of Malaysian government laws and policies. Therefore, the institutional theory proposed by Meyer and Rowan (1970), which focuses on how organizations fit into, relate to, and are shaped by their local, regional, national, and international environments, provides a suitable framework to explain the influence of government as an external force shaping cooperative operations. Institutional theory examines the external factors, including laws, regulations, norms, and values, that influence organizational behavior and shape the broader socio-cultural context in which organizations operate.

This study aims to integrate these four different perspectives to examine the relationship between structural empowerment and cooperative performance, with the moderating effect of government effectiveness (see Figure 1).

Cooperatives' Performance

Cooperatives are traditionally perceived as economic entities with a significant social responsibility to their members and the broader society. Therefore, their performance is often evaluated based on their success or failure in contributing to society. In a business context, performance is typically assessed through two dimensions: effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness focuses on how well a company achieves its goals, while efficiency pertains to a company's ability to utilize its resources effectively to achieve its objectives.

Effectiveness involves measuring the outcomes and impact of a cooperative's decisions and actions. On the other hand, efficiency evaluates a cooperative's capability to minimize resource wastage, reduce operating costs, and enhance productivity. A cooperative is considered effective when it efficiently allocates resources, implements strategic plans, and delivers quality products or services that meet the expectations of its members and the wider community. Conversely, a cooperative is deemed efficient when it can produce the expected output using the least amount of resources, time, and effort.

To gauge cooperative performance, financial ratios, liquidity, and profitability are commonly used, as they can be computed using financial data from statements. These metrics provide a straightforward way to assess performance. For instance, the financial performance of cooperative banks can be measured by owned funds, working funds, deposits, investments, loans issued, growth in business, net worth, and capital-to-risk assets ratio. Furthermore, leveraging financial performance indicators such as leverage ratio, cash inflow ratio, and debt coverage ratio derived from primary data is used to compare the performance of commercial and cooperative banks. It has been observed that cooperative banks focus more on short-term loans, while commercial banks emphasize long-term loans, which impacts their profit generation. Key factors influencing cooperative performance encompass financial ratios, liquidity, and profitability.

However, cooperatives can also be evaluated based on their capacity to achieve non-financial goals, such as serving members' social needs and practicing good governance. Regular education and training programs are essential to accomplish these objectives. The competence and planning acumen of board members play a crucial role in influencing cooperative performance, both financially and non-financially. Board members' competencies are essential, and they should be provided with the necessary resources, information, training, support, and growth opportunities to enhance their capacities and competencies to run cooperatives effectively. In Malaysia, the Malaysia Co-operative Societies Commission (MCSC) provides the INDEX 100 Best Cooperatives of Malaysia, recognizing cooperatives that meet satisfactory financial performance, business, management, and legal compliance standards set by the MCSC and the criteria established by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). The assessment process for the INDEX 100 includes a quantitative and qualitative evaluation conducted annually. Non-financial cooperative performance is gaining importance, and it is measured through factors such as members' participation, impact on the environment, and governance. While standardized tools for measuring non-financial performance are lacking, there is a focus on social sustainability elements such as members' participation, environmental impact, and governance. Cooperative partnerships and farmer participation have a significant impact on

cooperative performance, including quality improvement, environmentally friendly practices, adoption of science and technology, and sustainable community empowerment implementation.

In conclusion, non-financial cooperative performance can be assessed based on factors like members' participation, good governance, board members' competency, quality improvement, and sustainable practices. These objectives can be achieved through empowerment programs such as regular training and educational initiatives.

The Performance of Women Cooperatives

In Malaysia, women's involvement in cooperatives continues to show limited progress when compared to the total number of cooperatives. Table 1 provides a snapshot of the numbers and performance of women's cooperatives in Malaysia from 2018 to 2022. Over this period, the number of members experienced slight fluctuations, varying between 243 and 256. Membership shares or subscriptions remained relatively stable with minor variations, ranging from RM17.93 million to RM19.12 million. On the positive side, the assets of these cooperatives have shown steady growth, increasing from 60.62 in 2018 to 75.75 in 2022. However, the turnover has exhibited fluctuations, reaching its peak at RM16.67 million in 2021 and dropping to a low of RM11.28 million in 2019. Interestingly, even with 256 new cooperatives established in 2022, the turnover was lower compared to 2021. This data underscores the fact that women's participation in cooperatives in Malaysia is not experiencing significant growth. The yearly increase of 4 to 10 new cooperatives, and a turnover of only 4.5% (less than RM17 million), falls far short of the average total cooperative turnover of RM40 billion per year. Although the number of members and membership shares/subscriptions has shown fluctuations without a clear linear pattern, the overall trend indicates a general upward trajectory in terms of assets and turnover.

Table 1

Performance of Women Cooperatives in Malaysia (Suruhanjaya Koperasi Malaysia, 2018-2023)

Year	Number	Membership	RM (Million)		
			Share/Subscriptions	Assets	Turnover
2018	247	19,049	18.33	60.62	12.51
2019	252	18,984	17.93	60.63	11.28
2020	243	27,071	18.36	75.55	12.18
2021	247	28,216	18.15	77.41	16.67
2022	256	29,455	19.12	75.75	13.53

Structural Empowerment

The concept of structural empowerment, initially introduced by Kanter (1977), is a comprehensive framework that underscores the importance of organizational structures and resources in empowering employees to make meaningful contributions to their work and the organization. This empowerment is realized when employees have access to four crucial dimensions: information, resources, learning and development opportunities, and support. These dimensions collectively foster a nurturing environment in which employees can flourish and make valuable contributions (Echebiri et al., 2020).

Access to Information

Access to information encompasses the privilege of obtaining essential data and technical knowledge to facilitate effective operations within an organization, as noted by Kanter (1993) and Taibah & Ho (2023). Open communication systems, as emphasized by Laschinger (2012) and Kanter (1977, 1993), play a pivotal role in providing employees with the necessary knowledge to comprehend their roles, responsibilities, and organizational objectives. When employees can access pertinent and up-to-date information, they are empowered to make informed decisions and take ownership of their work, as highlighted by Kagucia (2023). This access to information not only cultivates a sense of empowerment but also contributes to transparency and trust within the organization, following the insights of Tyagi & Shah (2018).

Access to Resources

Resources include materials, equipment, time, and financial support that are essential for the attainment of organizational goals, as identified by Kanter (1977). In cooperative settings, such as cooperatives, the significance of resource availability is magnified. Access to these resources plays a crucial role in empowering employees to efficiently achieve both their personal and organizational objectives, in line with the insights of Cayaban et al. (2022a). Organizations must ensure that their employees have the necessary tools and resources to excel in their roles, thereby fostering a sense of empowerment, as emphasized by Ahandani, Shakibaei, and Ashouri (2023).

Access to Opportunities (Learning and Development)

Another essential aspect of structural empowerment involves granting employees opportunities for learning and growth. As underlined by Kanter (1977), these opportunities allow employees to enhance their skills and knowledge, subsequently fostering career progression within the organization. When employees perceive that they can access training and development programs, it boosts their confidence in their capabilities, leading to heightened self-efficacy and motivation, according to the insights of Aggarwal et al. (2022).

Access to Support

Support is a critical component of structural empowerment and encompasses feedback and guidance from colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors, as highlighted by Kanter (1993). When employees are provided with constructive feedback and guidance, it enhances their skill development, enables informed decision-making, and instills a sense of empowerment in their positions, aligning with the findings of Aggarwal et al. (2022). Establishing supportive relationships within the organization contributes to a favorable work environment, reducing burnout levels and elevating job satisfaction, as suggested by Nwachukwu et al. (n.d.).

Outcomes of Structural Empowerment

Previous research in this field suggests that structural empowerment leads to a variety of favourable outcomes for both individuals and organizations, as described by Pedro, Koentjoro, and Meiyanto (2020), Kim & Kim (2019), and Laschinger (2012). Among these outcomes are:

1. Enhanced Self-Efficacy: *Members who have access to knowledge, tools, and assistance are more likely to feel confident in their skills to complete tasks and overcome obstacles.*
2. High levels of motivation: *Members who have a feeling of ownership and responsibility for*

their job are frequently more driven to achieve in their professions.

3. Increased Organizational Commitment: *The availability of resources and possibilities for advancement generates a sense of loyalty and dedication to the business.*
4. Reduced levels of burnout: *Members may feel more suited to handle the demands of their professions if they work in supportive workplaces and have access to resources.*
5. Increased Independence: *Employee empowerment encourages them to take the initiative and make decisions on their own, giving them more autonomy in their positions.*
6. Reduced Occupational Stress: *Members who are empowered can better manage stress.*

In essence, structural empowerment is a broad framework that includes access to knowledge, resources, chances for learning and development, and assistance. It is a significant contributor to great results for both individuals and businesses. Organizations may empower their workers or members by creating an atmosphere that prioritizes these characteristics, resulting in higher job satisfaction, motivation, and general well-being, as well as increased productivity and commitment. Future studies in this field should focus on the complex ways by which structural empowerment affects many elements of organizational life.

Government Effectiveness

According to management literature, effectiveness comprises the ability to achieve desired goals despite limited resources (Duho, Amankwa & Musah-Surugu, 2020). According to recent research, government effectiveness is defined as the government's capacity to successfully formulate and implement particular programs (Dubey, Bryde, Dwivedi, Graham, Foropon & Papadopoulus, 2023). Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobaton (1999) collected survey-based data on "perceptions of the quality of public service provision, the quality of bureaucracy, civil servant competence, civil service independence from political pressures, and the credibility of the government's commitment to policies" (Kaufmann et al., 1999, p. 8). High economic growth, foreign direct investment, social infrastructure, public investment, a quality procurement system, less corruption, and lower infant mortality are the results of a successful administration (Garcia-Sanchez, Cuadrado-Ballesteros, & Frias-Aceituno).

It was advised that the government create a more specific strategy or develop various methods to stimulate private engagement to effectively meet the objectives provided by the policies (Taghipour, Akkalatham, Eaknarajindawat, & Stefanakis (2022)). This involves encouraging people who favour the policy to invest in research, tax breaks, and infrastructure (Taghipour et al., 2022). Markus (2016) claimed that the government should be more responsive to cooperatives by having a thorough grasp of cooperative difficulties before introducing any support programs, as their ignorance would contribute to the ineffectiveness of any programs that are implemented. Because cooperatives rely on external stakeholders such as the government (Markus, 2016), this may be accomplished by holding focus groups, interviews, and town halls for cooperatives to determine what cooperatives truly require at this time. The perceived efficacy of the government in executing co-operative-related policies and entrepreneurship policies by board members of women cooperatives will be the focus of this study.

Structural Empowerment and Co-operative Performance

Aggarwal, Dhaliwal, and Nobi (2018) discovered that structural empowerment has a beneficial influence on organizational commitment, confirming Kanter's argument on the

significance of structural variables in every organization. Mundia, Nkonde, Simui, and Imasiku (2022) discovered that the poor performance of agriculture cooperatives was related to a lack of training, lack of government oversight, a scarcity of personnel, a lack of logistical support, and insufficient financial aid. Md. Sum, Omar, Ishak, and Othman (2022) Members' support, internal commitment and cooperation, legal obligation fulfillment, and maintaining a good reputation with the responsible authority were identified as catalyst factors for cooperative performance, while high-risk avoidance among cooperative board members, disagreement among board members, market competition, and uncertainty of production were identified as constraint factors for cooperative performance. Buthelezi (2020) proposed that members' dedication, cooperation, and technical abilities are predictors of cooperative operational performance. Furthermore, whereas Proenca, Torres, and Sampaio (2016) discovered that structural empowerment increases perceived customer satisfaction, Fragkos, Makrykosta, and Frangos (2021) discovered that structural empowerment has a substantial association with firm performance. Finally, greater empowerment leads to improved organizational performance.

Laschinger (2012) created the "Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire (CWEQ) I and II" based on Kanter's theory to assess the amount of empowerment experienced by each employee or member of an organization. Past studies revealed that this questionnaire has been widely used in nursing (Agarwal, Daliwal & Nobi, 2018; Gholami, Saki, & Hossein Pour, 2019; Fath-Elbab, 2020; Cayaban, Valdez, Leocadio, Tuppal, Labrague, Maniago, & Francis, 2022), education (Ahadi & Suandi, 2014), and banking (Jaffery & Farooq, 2015) but rarely in the co-operative sector. Only one study used the instrument in a comparative study of urban and rural cooperatives in Indonesia, which discovered that, despite urban cooperatives providing more empowerment support to their members than rural cooperatives, members in rural areas felt more structural empowerment than members in urban areas (Pedro, Koentjoro, & Meiyanto, 2020). These findings indicate a lack of clarity as a result of the small number of research that used the CEWQ-II in the context of cooperatives.

This study tackles this gap by investigating several empowerment elements among board members of women's cooperatives operating in various economic sectors in Malaysia, as well as its relationship to cooperative performance. The goal is to get a better understanding of the empowerment process provided by cooperatives, as well as the role of government effectiveness in moderating the link between structural empowerment and cooperative performance.

This study intends to achieve the following research objectives

RO1: To investigate the relationship between structural empowerment and women's cooperative performance in Malaysia.

RO2: To study the influence of structural empowerment and women's cooperative performance in Malaysia.

RO3: To study the moderating effect of government effectiveness on the relationship between structural empowerment and women's co-operative performance in Malaysia.

The research questions for this study are based on the aforementioned issues and gaps

RQ1: Is there any relationship between structural empowerment and women's co-operative performance in Malaysia?

RQ2: Does structural empowerment influence women's cooperative performance in Malaysia?

RQ3: Does government effectiveness moderate the relationship between structural empowerment and women's cooperative performance in Malaysia?

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework that will be employed in this research.

Conceptual Framework

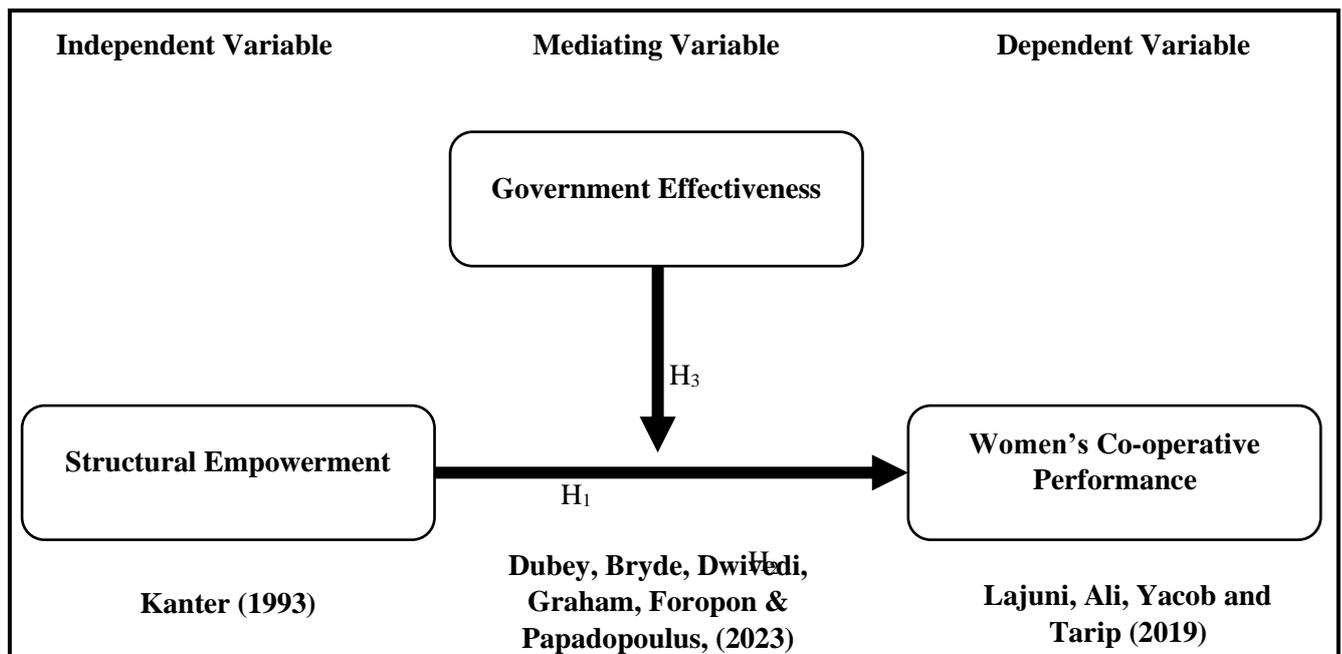


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework adapted from Kanter (1993), Dubey, Bryde, Dwivedi, Graham, Foropon, and Papadopoulos (2023), and Lajuni, Ali, Yacob, and Tarip (2019)

The independent variables in the framework depicted in Figure 1 were the Kanter-adapted structural empowerment elements (1993). These elements were information access, opportunity access, and resource access. The degree to which board members of women cooperatives have access to relevant and timely information regarding their roles, responsibilities, and organizational goals is represented by access to information. Access to opportunities denotes the availability of learning and development possibilities for board members in women's cooperatives. It measures how many employees have access to training and development programs that allow them to improve their talents and skills. The availability of critical resources, such as materials, equipment, time, and financial assistance, required for cooperatives to realize their organizational goals is measured by access to resources. Cooperative performance, which reflects the performance and success of women cooperatives, is the dependent variable. It includes metrics modified from Lajuni et al. (2019) in the context of women cooperatives, such as member satisfaction and member competency. The moderating variable in the context of organizational performance is government effectiveness, which is adapted from Dubey et al. (2023). It denotes the efficacy of government policies, legislation, and support systems in encouraging or impeding cooperative performance. The following hypotheses were established based on the literature reviews:

- H₁: There is a relationship between structural empowerment and women's co-operative performance in Malaysia.
- H₂: Structural empowerment influences women's co-operative performance in Malaysia.
- H₃: Government effectiveness has a moderating effect on the relationship between structural empowerment and women's co-operative performance in Malaysia.

This framework is projected to add to the body of research by validating the association between structural empowerment and cooperative performance by collecting insights from Malaysian women cooperatives. Although earlier studies have thoroughly explored cooperative performance, the literature review on structural empowerment in the cooperative environment has not been fully researched. Although structural empowerment has been shown to have good benefits on work satisfaction, employee engagement, and employee performance, less is known about its influence on cooperative performance. This research will also contribute to closing such gaps by investigating the link between structural empowerment and cooperative performance, as well as the moderating influence of government effectiveness on the relationship. Understanding these linkages may provide important insights into how women's cooperatives might improve their performance by empowering their members, as well as the role of government regulations in helping or inhibiting their success. Finally, our study can help cooperatives survive in a variety of regulatory situations.

Methods

This study will use a quantitative approach and will adopt a positivist paradigm in scientific research. Data will be acquired through the distribution of questionnaires. The questionnaire for structural empowerment will be modified from Laschinger et al., (2012), the questionnaire for government effectiveness from Dubey et al., (2023), and the questionnaire for cooperative performance from Lajuni et al., (2023). (2019). All factors are measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). The board members of Malaysia's 234 women's cooperatives will comprise the study's population. The researchers will invite the chairman of each cooperative to pick 7 board members (actively participating in cooperative management activities), and cooperative managers may also be chosen as responders for this study. A minimal sample proposal will be made.

Conclusion

Finally, this study investigates the elements of structural empowerment and cooperative performance in Malaysian women's cooperatives. It bridges the gap between women's empowerment theory, structural empowerment theory, resource-based perspective theory, and institutional theory, providing practical insights into the obstacles and possibilities that women's cooperatives would confront in the real world. Our research serves as a bridge, linking diverse theoretical viewpoints and providing useful practical insights. It not only adds to intellectual debate but also provides practical insights into how cooperatives might be effective vehicles for improving women's economic empowerment. The major goal of this research is to discover the subtle dynamics of cooperative empowerment activities and their influence on the lives of its members in Malaysia. We investigate how these initiatives will result in more income and improved control over life choices for the women engaged. Furthermore, we assess the perceived efficacy of government policies and programs as

assessed by our respondents, giving light to women cooperative board members' satisfaction levels with the government's participation in their empowerment journey. In practice, the study's findings reveal the enormous hurdles that women will face in gaining access to economic resources, opportunities, and decision-making authority. It also emphasizes the critical need to build an enabling atmosphere that promotes women's empowerment. Cooperatives, as we show, play an important role in this endeavour by increasing women's access to resources, networking opportunities, and information exchange. Furthermore, our findings highlight the critical importance of gender equality in the context of sustainable development. We underline the critical role that women's participation will play in the broader spectrum of sustainable development by explaining how cooperatives may work as catalysts for gender parity and empowerment. In essence, this study connects with the fundamental fabric of Malaysian women's cooperatives and their hopes for a more fair and empowered future. We pave the way for actionable actions toward a brighter, more inclusive, and sustainable future by casting a light on the practical difficulties they will encounter and the potential answers that cooperatives may offer.

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