

Business Mentoring As a Strategy for Entrepreneurship Growth in Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Due to the perceived contribution of business mentoring on entrepreneurship growth especially in Abia State Nigeria, government, professionals and stakeholders have taken a number of business mentoring initiatives to increase the growth of entrepreneurship in the State. However, despite these strategies and policy initiatives aimed at growing entrepreneurship businesses in Abia State; Nigeria by policymakers, entrepreneurship business in that area continued to perform below expectation. Therefore, this study examined business mentoring as a strategy for entrepreneurship growth in Abia state, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The study's population was 911 registered entrepreneurs in Aba and Umuahia, Abia State. The study employed Yamane (1967) sample size determination to select 278 entrepreneurs as the sample size for the study. Data for the study were collected through closed-ended questionnaire. Regression was used to analyze the stated hypotheses in the study. The study revealed that knowledge sharing has negative and insignificant effect on entrepreneurship growth, while psychological support and knowledge transfer have strong positive effects on entrepreneurship growth in Abia state, Nigeria. The study concludes that knowledge sharing has no effect on entrepreneurship growth in Abia state, Nigeria and recommends among others that the torch must be metaphorically passed from one person to the other or from one generation to the other for business perpetual existence.

Keywords: *Abia State, Business Mentoring, Entrepreneurship, Growth and Strategy*

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I. Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, one of the main causes of failure of new businesses and poorly diversified ones is lack of experience and incompetence on the part of entrepreneurs occasioned by poor or lack of mentorship. Most entrepreneurs in developing and underdeveloped countries venture into new businesses without prior knowledge, feasibility studies or detailed idea into such businesses. The new entrepreneurs normally taste the depth of the water with their two legs at same time. Abdul (2020) posits that poor or lack of mentorship has actually contributed to their lack of vision and inability to find a gainful niche for their businesses. An entrepreneur's skills, knowledge and input into the business within the first years of a firm's life determines its eventual survival or otherwise as mentors strategically position the entrepreneurial mindset of their clients for the task ahead (Benosca, 2019).

Onu(2019) claimed that entrepreneurial mentorship is a major factor that influences business growth in Nigeria today. According to Tsebam (2020), mentorship is a strategic tool used by leader and managers in developed countries to navigate out of trouble waters of business. Abel (2019) opined that mentoring is tailored to help a novice entrepreneur develop business management skills and innovative ideas that will help to develop, grow and sustain a business venture from start to maturity. In circumstances where there is insufficient time for training in the work place, interaction and exchange of ideas between a mentor and the mentee will certainly facilitate a quick, efficient and effective transfer of experience into productive output (Daniel, 2019).

Igwebuike and Isaac (2020) ascertained that for entrepreneurs to increase the chances of survival in a new business there must be a proper coaching of business skills, business ethics and investment procedures. However, the education and vocational knowledge acquired by new entrepreneurs do not appear to be adequate in seeing them through in their entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurs still complain that the training they acquired in school is not geared towards their entrepreneurial needs, thereby suggesting that a more close monitor and personalized mentoring process may be a square peg in a square hole and more appropriate in dealing with the situation.

In the opinion of Chidi (2019), business mentoring is today considered as one of the most effective and efficient ways of supervising, directing and structuring business activities of entrepreneurs and business leaders in every sphere of the economy for optimal performance. Mentoring has helped entrepreneurs, and business leaders to acquire good and required managerial skills needed for the growth and survival of their firms recently. Ojemba(2020) noted that mentoring entrepreneurs helps break down business barriers that all new entrepreneurs and business leaders normally experienced when starting a new business or expanding already existing ones. This helps to restore hope and confidence in new entrepreneurs that it can actually be possible.

The importance of business mentoring to an entrepreneur as an individual cannot be overemphasized as it helps to increase opportunities, efficiency and innovativeness (Daniel, 2019). To the organization, mentoring is rewarded with higher level of employee productivity, engagement, improved business skills and knowledge sharing as business mentors can as well improve their skills from the ideas and strategies gotten from their mentees.

However, there are factors that are associated with business mentoring and strategically positioning entrepreneurship growth in Abia State Nigeria. Noble and Ruth (2019) identified those factors as knowledge sharing, psychological support and knowledge transfer. Knowledge sharing is increasingly being seen as a crucial strategy associated with organizational productivity, growth and success. It is an activity through which knowledge is exchanged among people, firms, within or between organizations. In a saturated business environment like Nigeria, entrepreneurs grow and succeed in business due to a cooperative linkage among them which are considered strategic because resources and skills are intentionally shared or combined to benefit one another (Anoke, 2019)

Psychological support is another strategic factor that has impact on the entrepreneurship growth in Abia State Nigeria. It focuses on human behavior to evaluate how a firm and its employees can execute outlined strategies in the company to increase engagement, boost growth and drive profits (Idem, 2018).

Knowledge transfer is yet another vital factor that contributes to business mentoring. According to Martinand Peter (2018), knowledge transfer (KT) is gradually becoming an increasingly central process of knowledge management due to its ability and the roles it plays in helping the governing body to benefit from different available knowledge.

In view of the perceived contribution of business mentoring on the entrepreneurship growth especially in Abia State Nigeria, government, professionals and policymakers have taken a number of business mentoring initiatives to increase the growth of entrepreneurship in Abia State. However, despite these strategies and policy initiatives aimed at growing entrepreneurship businesses in Abia State; Nigeria by policymakers, entrepreneurship business in that area continued to perform below expectation and the need to investigate its relevance to entrepreneurship growth becomes imperative. The objective of the study is to investigate business mentoring as a strategy for entrepreneurship growth in Abia State, Nigeria.

According to Okeke (2020), Abia State is the entrepreneurial hub of Nigeria and is generally referred to as the Japan of Africa; accounting for about 45% of the entrepreneurial activities in Nigeria. Therefore, the choice of Abia State in this study is a research in the right direction.

In the course of this study, answers were provided to the following questions:

- i. what influence does knowledge sharing has on entrepreneurship growth in Abia State ?
- ii. What effect doespsychological support has on entrepreneurship growth in Abia State?
- iii.How hasknowledge transfer strategy affected entrepreneurship growth in Abia State?

II. Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Business Mentoring

Recently, the speed at which entrepreneurial businesses decline in Nigeria is worrisome. This is because entrepreneurs operate in an environment that is surrounded by high business risk, vagueness, unethical business practices, rigid competition, unfriendly government policies, poor or unregulated business environment and partial or total ignorance/ negligence to the roles played by mentors' in achieving business growth in Nigeria. Mentoring is gradually becoming a managerial tool for economic growth, development and sustainability globally as a highly effective and efficient human resource development method (Abel, 2021). Through mentoring, experienced entrepreneur provides the needed assistance to the mentee with high degree of trust, respect and mutual understanding which will enable the beneficiary to achieve what he aspires to be by realizing his or her hidden potentials (Uka, 2018). Mentoring has being recognized as an important influence in entrepreneurship growth in Nigeria. The major function of mentoring is to encourage and promote the mentee's developmental abilities in specific areas and facilitate achievement in entrepreneurial creativity (Dennis, 2019).

As the business environment is dynamic, individuals and organizations are conscious of that fact that they needed to be trained, nurtured and mentored to navigate across the ever changing business world (Omabe,

2019). Damilola(2017) noted that entrepreneurs tend to react positively and succeed better when they are well directed, coached and mentored from the beginning of a business venture than when allowed to locate their business bearing all alone

In Nigeria today, the global fall in the oil prices and the current insecurity caused by herders-farmers frequent crashes which resulted to a drastic drop in Nigeria's agricultural earning, innovation and creativity becomes the only alternative (Adebowale, 2019). To meet this challenge, business mentoring practices should be freely and willingly practiced to meet the increasing developmental and business challenge of today's knowledge based worker.

Knowledge Sharing and Entrepreneurship Growth

Knowledge sharing is a means through which information, skills, ideas and experience are traded among friends, coworkers, families within an organizational setting. In an organization, knowledge sharing aids and smoothens decision- making process by cutting through the noise, building organizational trust by making learning a custom where people continually assess their input and looking forward for a better ways to improve their traditional ways of doing things thereby stimulating cultural changes and innovations through the free flow of positive ideas(Rita,2019). As more entrepreneurs seek to gain competitive edge over their competitors by maximizing their knowledge assets, a good number of firms in most countries of the world have started implementing or integrating knowledge sharing as part of their strategy to achieve improved business growth. Entrepreneurs in Abia state, Nigeria are not left out of this drive (Egbo, 2019)

Psychological Support and Entrepreneurship Growth.

For an entrepreneur to be productive and successful, the mind, soul and spirit must work together. Psychological factor focuses on entrepreneurs and their mental and emotional rudiments that drive entrepreneurial mindset. Objective managers' select, support, motivate and mentor employees for the growth of the organization. Recently, researchers (Okafor, 2019; Opusunju, Anoke & Onu 2020) have acknowledged the significance of psychological support in entrepreneurs' business growth because entrepreneurship is essentially personal and is considered a vital asset to manipulate attitudinal and behavioral characteristics of entrepreneurs. Management experts in Abia state are now shifting their attention by developing a positive psychological support towards their clients believing that the idea will be more productive than managing a distressed entrepreneur (Lydia, 2020).

Knowledge Transfer and Entrepreneurship Growth

Knowledge transfer (KT) refers to the process where an experienced entrepreneur shares or dish out his acquired knowledge, ideas, skills, attitudes and even behaviors to an intending entrepreneur who might replace him in later days. In an organization, KT is the act of sharing or disseminating gained knowledge and information from one part of the organization to the other in an attempt to providing inputs, ideas and experience in solving organizational problem (Tende, 2020)

Barde(2019) postulated that through KT, the organization is able to keep all her significant lesson learned, maintain core organizational values and ethics, synergize her workable planning pattern and action, and have strategic idea on how to draw the organizational map and projection for the organizational growth. Edward (2018) argued that persistent and consistent strategic implementation of the world human experience, talent and successful transfer of knowledge from one generation to the other enhances firm performance. Entrepreneurs in Abia state have since keyed into this common situation where transfer of specialized information and acquired knowledge is the order of the day and knowledge implementation continues from one person and or group to the other as they complete their tasks cycle.

Entrepreneurship Growth and Strategic Mentoring

Entrepreneurial business survival, sustainability, profitability and improvement depend largely on the access to different skills, information, knowledge and experiences from one experienced entrepreneur to the other. Being able to learn, exposed to new techniques, sectors and important flash perspective in the business cycle is what mentoring for growth is all about (Orji, 2019). Aliko Dangote, the African richest man 2020, according to Forbes magazine(2021); was not only supported by his uncle Dantata financially, he the latter mentored the former in business ethics, skills, and investment directives and today, that action paid off for not only Dangote but for Nigeria and Africa in general. In Abia state especially in Aba and Umuahia, many entrepreneurs have mentored the younger ones to an enviable position as their business empires have grown to international repute (Igodo, 2018).

Empirical Studies

Ilesanmi and Lasisi(2015) investigated the roles of mentoring in business development in Nigeria. The study focused on key characteristics of mentoring, fundamental objectives, and keys to mentoring successful

entrepreneur. The study used content analysis to quantify and analyze the relationship that exists between variables in the study. It was revealed that mentorship and business development are inseparable as the union offers benefits such as high productivity, satisfaction, and feeling rejuvenated in career by the mentee, while becoming acquainted with business issues and ethics. The study concluded that business mentoring aids business development. The study recommended that mentoring should be based upon total encouragement and frank advice to the mentee, which will help him acquire the needed skills, information, technical and personal competencies in order to operate optimally in the ever dynamic business environment.

Ilesanmi and Lasisi(2015) study did not state the population and sample size where the data for the study was derived from. In addition, the three objectives (key characteristics of mentoring, fundamental objectives, and keys to mentoring successful entrepreneur) the study set out to achieve were not dealt with as the study took a different direction through the findings, conclusion and recommendation.

Martins and Edward (2018) investigated the contextual factors for the growth of entrepreneurial businesses. From a detailed analysis in the study, a good number of contextual factors were identified. The study found that socio-economic environment was responsible for engendering entrepreneurial growth. There were other influencing factors like family, the ability to adopt and adapt to the changing environment. The study also revealed that entrepreneurial ideas may not always create successful long-term result. The study concluded that social-economic factor was responsible for entrepreneurship growth rather than knowledge transfer. The study recommended that entrepreneurs should use their internal factors to influence the external environment.

The study of Martins and Edward (2018), did not state clearly the statistical tool(s) of analysis used in the study as the 'detailed analysis' used therein is vague and unacceptable in research. In addition, the location of the study was not stated.

Marvelous (2019) examined the effect of knowledge sharing and Psychological support on SMEs growth in Rivers state, Nigeria. 1240 registered SMEs operators in Rivers state was used as the study's population. A sample size of 425 was employed using Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula. Questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection in the study. A total of 121 respondents filled and returned their questionnaires from the 425 administered and was used in the analysis of the study. In analyzing the formulated hypotheses, regression was adopted. The study revealed a positive and significant relationship between knowledge sharing and SMEs growth; while psychological support was established to have negative and insignificant effect on SMEs growth in Rivers State. The study concluded that knowledge sharing is responsible for increase in income and growth of SMEs in Rivers state. The study therefore, recommended that people should be encouraged to willingly give out their gained/ acquired knowledge so as to foster vision and strengthen professional unity.

The study of Marvelous (2019), though well constructed with proper statistical tool of data analysis, the proportion of the returned questionnaire (121) to the population (1240) and even the sampled size (425) is grossly inadequate to be a representation and draw a conclusion and recommendation therein from.

Theoretical Framework

This section covers the theoretical supporting from which the study is grounded. The theory that this study is rooted in is the Kram's mentoring theory. The theory suggests that mentoring functions vary from situations, individuals involved and conditions attached. It equally deals with four cardinal points of initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition of character and belief of the mentee. According to Kram(1983) mentoring theory, mentors perform career related duties including financial, moral, personal and technical support. Others include business exposure, entrepreneurial coaching, protection, defending the mentee, counseling and business connection. Uzomma(2019) argued that the economic expansion, explosion and exposure in Abia state today by entrepreneurs is as a result of business connection offered by the mentors to the mentees in the business environment.

III. Research Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aimed at combining relevance to the research intention. The study's population is all registered entrepreneurs in Aba and Umuahia, Abia state; Nigeria. Entrepreneurs in Aba and Umuahia of Abia State were considered in this study because the two cities are measured as the commercial hubs of the state. From the Enterprise Agency of Nigeria Facts book (EANFB) 2020, there are 911 registered entrepreneurs in the respective cities of the state: Aba (532) and Umuahia (379).

Sample size in each of the cities was determined by the proportion of the total in each city to the total population (with slight sample error). Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size in the study. The Yamane sample was based on the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where; n = sample size; N = population size; e = Level of precision required; 1 = constant.

Hence, n = $\frac{911}{1 + 911(0.05)^2} = 278$

To assign the sample size of 279 to the purposively selected cities in the state, the researchers employed the Bourley's proportional allocation formula as follows:

$$nh = \frac{nNh}{N}$$

Where; nh = number allocated each location, n = total sample size, Nh = total population of each location, N = total population.

Applying the formula, we have:

Table 2: Sample of the Selected Abakaliki / Afikpo in Ebonyi State, Women Entrepreneurs

S/N	Location of Operations	Population	Sample
1	Aba	532	$\frac{532 * 278}{911} = 162$
2	Umuahia	379	$\frac{379 * 278}{911} = 116$
	Total	911	278

Source: Researchers' computation, 2021

Questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection. Most of the questions were drafted in simple language to attract the respondents' interest for easy completion of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to respondents in Aba and Umuahia in Abia state. These cities or locations were selected because they have densely populated entrepreneurs with highest business activities in the state.

The instrument was keyed on Bipolar Semantic Differential Scale (BSDS) of 7 point +3; 0; -3.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the initial draft of questionnaire was subjected to content validation. The instrument was given to the staff of Ezie mentoring and consultancy services ltd, Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. These experts were requested to examine each of the items in the questionnaire and make comments/ suggestions on their suitability, clarity of statements, missing information and other observed errors, bearing in mind the aim and objective of the study. Their comments, suggestions and corrections were incorporated in the final copy.

Reliability Test Result

The internal accuracy of the items was calculated using the Cronbach coefficient alpha to assess the questionnaire's reliability. This is a method of calculating test score reliability based on a single test administration. As a result, it offers strong reliability measures since, when other variables are kept constant, the more similar the test material and administration conditions are, the higher the internal accuracy reliability. Items were considered reliable in this analysis if they had a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher. For consistency levels, this number is generally regarded as respectable and desirable. Table 3 shows the preliminary findings of this report.

Table 3: Result of Reliability Test

Variable	Alpha
Entrepreneurship Growth	0.7119
Knowledge Sharing	0.8526
Psychological Support	0.7552
Knowledge Transfer strategy	0.7023
Test to scale	0.7555

Field Survey, 2021

The levels of alpha in this analysis are well above the 0.70 commonly accepted average, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The alpha levels for the different measures averaged alpha coefficient of 0.7555 is greater than 0.70, as shown in Table 3, completely supporting the constructs' reliability.

Goodness-of-Fit Result

The Deviance and Pearson chi-square measures, which are useful for deciding if a model suits the data well, are included in the goodness of Fit table. Non-significant test results suggest that the model is well-suited to the data.

Table 4: Goodness-of-Fit Result

Goodness-of-Fit			
	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Pearson	3065.707	2948	0.064
Deviance	1023.061	2948	1.000

Link function: Logit.

Source: Authors' Computation, 2021 (SPSS-26)

In Table 4 analysis, it could be seen that both the Pearson chi-square test (3065.707, p=0.064) and the deviance chi-square test (1023.061, p = 1.000), both were insignificant. These findings point to a strong model fit.

The statistical tools used are ordinal regression parameter estimate. It was used to determine whether there is an effect relationship between the variables.

The model is expressed as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1x + \dots + \mu \dots \dots \dots 1$$

Where y = dependent variable, α = intercept, β_1 is coefficient and x is the independent variable. However, the above model is expressed as:

$$EG = \alpha + \beta_1BMS + \mu \dots \dots \text{equation 2}$$

Where:

EG = Entrepreneurship Growth

β = Coefficient

α = Intercept

μ = Error terms

BMS = Business Mentoring Strategy (Knowledge Sharing, Psychological support, and Knowledge transfer)

Ordinal Regression Parameter Estimates

The expected or projected shift in log odds of being in a higher (as opposed to a lower) group/category on the dependent variable (while keeping other independent variables constant) per unit increase on the independent variable is simply interpreted as the ordinal regression coefficients.

Table 5: Ordinal Regression Parameter Estimate

Parameter Estimates						
Variables	Coefficients	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Odd Ratio
Knowledge Sharing	-0.187	0.182	1.054	1	0.304	0.650
Psychological Support	0.247	0.083	12.704	1	0.026	1.766
Knowledge Transfer strategy	0.890	0.168	27.958	1	0.000	7.762

Link function: Logit., Dep Var.: Entrepreneurship Growth

Source: Authors' Computation, 2021 (SPSS-26)

The negative coefficient of Knowledge Sharing indicates that for every one unit rise in Knowledge Sharing, the log-odds of being at a higher level on entrepreneurship growth are expected to decrease by 0.187.

The positive regression coefficient for Psychological Support (0.247) suggests that for every one unit increase in 0.247, the log-odds of being in a higher degree of entrepreneurship growth increase by 0.247 (While holding other predictors constant).

Finally, the coefficient of knowledge transfer strategy indicates that with every one unit increase in work-life balance, the log-odds of being at a higher level on entrepreneurship growth are expected to increase by 0.890.

Test of Hypotheses

The study formulated three hypotheses which were approached using Wald test statistics in accordance with statistical science. For either of these experiments, the decision rule for accepting or otherwise the null hypothesis will be based on the Probability Value (PV). If the PV is less than 5% or 0.05 (that is, PV 0.05), the variable in question is statistically important at the 5% level; otherwise, it is not.

Test of Hypotheses One:

H₀₁: Knowledge Sharing has no significant relationship with Entrepreneurship Growth in Abia State

The estimated Wald-value for information sharing and entrepreneurship growth is 1.054, with a p-value of 0.304, based on the ordinal regression result in Table 5. We accept the null hypothesis (H01) and conclude that Knowledge Sharing has no significant relationship with entrepreneurship growth in Abia State because the p-value (of 0.304) is greater than the level of significance (0.05).

Test of Hypotheses Two:

H₀₂: Psychological support has no significant influence on entrepreneurship growth in Abia State

The estimated Wald-statistic value for the relationship between psychological support and entrepreneurship growth was found to be 12.704 and its likelihood value was 0.026, according to the ordinal regression result in Table 5. The second null hypothesis (H02) was dismissed because the likelihood value was less than 0.05 or 5% level of significance (and fell in the rejection region). According to the findings, psychological support has an important impact on the growth of entrepreneurship in Abia State.

Test of Hypotheses Three:

H₀₃: Knowledge transfer strategy has no significant relationship with Entrepreneurship Growth in Abia State

Similarly, the Wald-value for the relationship between knowledge transfer strategy and entrepreneurship growth was found to be 27.958 with a probability value of 0.003 in the ordinal regression result in Table 5. The third null hypothesis (H03) was dismissed because the likelihood value was less than 0.05 or 5% degree of significance. As a result, the study concludes that in Abia State, knowledge transfer strategy has a significant relationship with entrepreneurship growth.

IV. Discussion of Findings

The study's findings showed that knowledge sharing has a negative and insignificant effect on the entrepreneurship growth in Abia State. This implies that knowledge sharing has no effect on the entrepreneurship growth in Abia state. This finding contradicts the findings of Marvelous (2019) who found a positive and significant relationship between knowledge sharing and SMEs growth in Rivers state Nigeria.

The study also revealed that psychological support has a positive and a significant effect on the entrepreneurship growth in Abia State. This implies that emotional attachment of entrepreneurs affects the growth of their businesses. This finding also disagrees with the findings of Marvelous (2019) who found an inverse relationship between psychological support and SMEs growth in Rivers state Nigeria.

Finally, the study's findings showed that knowledge transfer strategy has a positive and a significant effect on entrepreneurship growth in Abia State. This implies that knowledge transfer increases efficiency and productivity of entrepreneurs in Abia state. This finding also contradicts the findings of Martins and Edward (2018) who found that rather than knowledge transfer, socio-economic environment is responsible for fostering entrepreneurial growth.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study critically examined mentoring as a strategy for entrepreneurship growth using knowledge sharing, psychological support and knowledge transfer as proxies for mentoring, towards accessing its effect on entrepreneurship growth in Abia state Nigeria.

The result revealed a positive and significant effect between psychological supports, knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship growth in Rivers state Nigeria. While knowledge sharing recorded an inverse relationship with entrepreneurship growth in Rivers state Nigeria. The study therefore, concludes that knowledge sharing has no effect on the growth of entrepreneurship growth in Rivers state Nigeria. It is recommended that entrepreneurs in Rivers state should share ideas and information so as to stimulate cultural heritage and innovative growth. In addition to financial mentoring, entrepreneurs' emotion must be factored in so that he or she can make informed decisions for the growth of the business. Finally, the torch must be metaphorically passed from one person to the other or from one generation to the other for business perpetual existence

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