International Journal of Academic Management Science Research (IJAMSR)
ISSN: 2643-900X
Vol. 10 Issue 1 January - 2026, Pages: 154-163

Mentorship And Entrepreneurial Success Of Small And Medium Enterprises In Rivers State, Nigeria

Enarukapo, Ejeneeha Edith Nkechi[1] and B. Chima Onuoha[2]

1. Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt.

2. Professor of Management, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt.

ABSTRACT: *This research explores the relationship between mentorship and the entrepreneurial achievements of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State, Nigeria. This research examines the difficulties encountered by small and medium-sized enterprises in sustaining their competitiveness, profitability, and reputation amid a fluctuating and uncertain business landscape. The study employed a survey methodology. The sample consisted of 1,300 proprietors and administrators of small and medium-sized enterprises in Rivers State. The determination of the sample size, comprising 297 respondents, was conducted utilising the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for the calculation of sample sizes. Data were gathered through a meticulously designed questionnaire that included five items for each dimension of mentorship (apprenticeship and business seminars) as well as measures of entrepreneurial success (profitability and organisational reputation). The Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was employed to analyse the data and evaluate the hypotheses of the study. The findings revealed significant positive correlations: apprenticeship and profitability (r = 0.745), apprenticeship and organisational reputation (r = 0.708), business seminars and profitability (r = 0.574), as well as business seminars and organisational reputation (r = 0.667). The research findings indicate that mentorship plays a vital role in enhancing both the profitability and the organisational reputation of SMEs in Rivers State. It is recommended that owners of small and medium enterprises implement well-organised apprenticeship programs and engage in relevant business seminars to improve their long-term performance and bolster their brand reputation.*

***Keywords*:** Apprenticeship, Business Seminars Entrepreneurial Success, Mentorship

Introduction

The entrepreneurial spirit significantly amplifies economic growth, fosters innovation, and creates new job opportunities, manifesting in both industrialised and developing nations. Entrepreneurship encompasses the discernment of market opportunities, the orchestration of resources, and the generation of value through the initiation of new enterprises or the reconfiguration of pre-existing ones (Hisrich, Peters & Shepherd, 2017). In countries such as Nigeria, entrepreneurship serves as a crucial mechanism for achieving self-sustainability and plays a significant role in alleviating poverty and unemployment (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). Considering the significant impact of entrepreneurship on job creation and wealth generation, particularly in underprivileged areas, attaining success in this domain is crucial for the socio-economic advancement of communities. Nevertheless, these accomplishments are often hindered by limitations in resources, inadequate managerial competencies, restricted access to financial support, and fragile institutional structures (Obomeghia & Onuoha, 2023). Consequently, there is an increasing emphasis on deliberate strategies designed to elevate entrepreneurial performance through the enhancement of human capital, including the role of mentoring, in current dialogues. Tshehla and Costa (2021) contend that entrepreneurship is fundamental to economic liberation and national development, as it promotes the establishment of small and medium enterprises. Consequently, fostering entrepreneurial achievement, particularly within small and medium enterprises (SMEs), necessitates a supportive ecosystem that enhances access to financial resources, specialised knowledge, networking opportunities, and, crucially, high-caliber mentorship (Fatoki, 2014).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play an essential role in national economies, as they are responsible for a considerable share of employment and make significant contributions to gross domestic product. Studies indicate that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in economic development, enhancing income equality, operational efficiency, and overall economic stability, especially in times of recession (Abdullah & Manan, 2011). Their adaptable organisational framework has amplified the significance of small and medium-sized enterprises globally (Kayadibi et al., 2013). The capacity of these firms to adjust is of paramount importance to the economy, as they represent a significant share of overall production within a swiftly changing global environment. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in fostering the advancement of national economies, ensuring political stability, and promoting societal progress. Their capacity for adaptability enables the creation of a variety of commercial enterprises, highlighting their importance as essential components of the national economy (Amini, 2004; Radamet al., 2008).

Nigerian SMEs are integral to the economy, yet they face considerable challenges, such as restricted access to financing, a lack of vital business competencies, insufficient infrastructure, and vulnerability to market volatility (Ariyo, 2005; Eniola & Entebang, 2015). The acknowledged limitations heighten the susceptibility of small and medium-sized enterprises, highlighting the necessity of supportive initiatives, such as organised mentorship, to promote growth and sustainability within a competitive market environment. Mentorship embodies a developmental relationship in which a more knowledgeable or experienced individual provides guidance and support to foster the personal and professional growth of a less experienced entrepreneur (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Advisory support enriches the decision-making process in entrepreneurship, cultivates confidence, and aids in addressing complex business challenges. In Eastern Nigeria, especially within Igbo communities, the concept of mentorship has traditionally taken the form of organised apprenticeship systems. These systems facilitate the transfer of entrepreneurial competencies across generations via structured training and the mentorship of seasoned entrepreneurs (Nwangwu, 2006). This traditional approach to mentoring has produced a significant number of successful local business proprietors, illustrating the profound influence of mentorship in cultivating entrepreneurial development. The evolution of structured business methodologies and the expansion of small and medium enterprises across various sectors have heightened the necessity for systematic and formal mentorship initiatives to ensure entrepreneurial achievement in contemporary Rivers State.

A diverse array of specialists has examined the relationship between entrepreneurship and mentorship from multiple perspectives. St-Jean (2012) emphasises the significance of mentorship in cultivating entrepreneurial skills and business planning, which ultimately leads to enhanced venture performance. Cull (2006) posits that entrepreneurs who engage with mentors are more likely to secure financial resources, expand their professional networks, and reduce risks associated with nascent ventures. In contrast, Ghosh (2013) explored the elements that lead to entrepreneurial success, emphasising internal motivators such as innovation, risk tolerance, and leadership, alongside external enablers including policy and financial resources. Research conducted by Ibidunni et al. (2020) indicates that mentorship plays a significant role in bolstering the resilience and competitiveness of SMEs in Nigeria. While there is an increasing scholarly focus on this domain, the current body of literature frequently examines entrepreneurial success and mentorship in isolation from one another. This research highlights a deficiency in the existing body of work concerning the correlation between mentorship and entrepreneurial achievement within small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Rivers State, Nigeria. Previous studies have highlighted the significance of mentorship and examined the factors influencing the performance of SMEs in Nigeria. Nevertheless, an absence exists in the examination of the relationship between structured mentorship and entrepreneurial success, which this study seeks to investigate.

Statement of the Problem

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have undeniably played a significant role in alleviating unemployment and fostering economic growth across numerous industrialised nations (Murad et al., 2020). Although small and medium-sized enterprises play a crucial role in the advancement of developed economies, this positive impact has not been consistently observed in Nigeria (Akhigbe & Onuoha, 2020). Entrepreneurship is acknowledged as a vital factor in fostering economic development in Nigeria; nonetheless, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) face considerable challenges that hinder their sustainability, especially in Rivers State. Despite a variety of policy interventions and support initiatives, a significant number of SMEs persist in facing high failure rates due to insufficient managerial skills, limited access to funding, and poor strategic prioritisation (Ariyo, 2005). Past investigations have highlighted the significance of mentorship in remedying gaps in entrepreneurial competencies. Olowu and Aliyu (2015) underscored the importance of mentorship in providing entrepreneurs with essential experience, strategic insights, and the capacity to manoeuvre through intricate business landscapes. In numerous regions of Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, there exists a significant lack or inefficacy of established mentorship frameworks. As a result, proprietors of small and medium-sized enterprises frequently find themselves devoid of the crucial guidance and support necessary for the expansion of their operations and the effective management of business challenges (Ekanem, 2017).

Ihugba et al. (2014) observed that entrepreneurs in Nigeria, especially those engaged in small and medium enterprises, contend with difficult environments that impede their growth and innovation. The lack of mentorship constrains entrepreneurs' opportunities to acquire wisdom from experienced professionals, forge essential connections, and gain critical market insights. Akinyemi and Adejumo (2017) noted that more than half of small-scale enterprises fail to endure past their first five years, reflecting a persistently low rate of entrepreneurial achievement. A considerable aspect of this failure can be ascribed to suboptimal business decisions that could have been circumvented with suitable counsel. Olorunshola (2003) noted that Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem lacks cohesion and is marked by a deficiency in a supportive framework that includes mentorship, incubation, and training. Consequently, small and medium-sized enterprises exhibit a notable vulnerability to fluctuations in the market, regulatory challenges, and strategic miscalculations. This deficiency presents a considerable threat to the stability of business operations, employment generation, and comprehensive economic progress, especially in oil-rich regions such as Rivers State, where small and medium-sized enterprises play a crucial role in fostering economic diversification. Overlooking the mentorship gap may result in enduringly low success rates for SMEs, which could obstruct economic development initiatives, intensify unemployment, and reduce the overall contribution of SMEs to national GDP. This research investigates the relationship between mentorship and the accomplishments of small and medium-sized enterprises as entrepreneurial ventures in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyse the correlation between mentorship and the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives are to analyse the relationship between;

i. Analyse the relationship between apprenticeship and profitability of Small and Medium Enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.
ii. Determine the connection between apprenticeship and organizational reputation of Small and Medium Enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.
iii. Examine the link between business seminars and profitability of Small and Medium Enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.
iv. Investigate the correlation between business seminars and organizational reputation of Small and Medium Enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were put forward:

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between apprenticeship and profitability.

Ho_2: There is no significant relationship between apprenticeship and organizational reputation.

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between business seminars and profitability.

Ho_4: There is no significant relationship between business seminars and organizational reputation.

Literature Review

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) delineates the mechanisms through which individuals acquire new behaviours, attitudes, and skills via observation, social interaction, and imitation. This perspective posits that learning involves not just behavioural and cognitive elements, but also incorporates a social dimension. Knowledge is gained not solely through personal experience but also by observing the behaviours of others and the outcomes that follow (Bandura, 1977). The theory focusses on the importance of modelling, suggesting that individuals, particularly those with minimal experience, can acquire new behaviours by observing and imitating a model or guide. The learning process consists of four critical components: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The individual must initially analyse the behaviour of the model. The documented behaviour should be preserved in memory. The learner is required to subsequently exhibit the capability to reproduce the behaviour. Ultimately, sufficient motivation to adopt and execute the behaviour is essential, frequently shaped by perceived rewards or the effectiveness of the model (Bandura, 1986).

This theory is crucial in mentorship, as the mentor serves as a model for the mentee. Mentees gain valuable insights by engaging with authentic experiences, analysing decision-making processes, evaluating problem-solving strategies, and examining leadership approaches through regular interaction, observation, and feedback. These significantly contribute to the mentee's development in both behavioural and strategic aspects. Effective mentors provide technical knowledge and also cultivate important soft skills such as resilience, self-confidence, ethical behaviour, and adaptability, which are vital for achieving success in any endeavour. Bandura (1989) emphasised the importance of self-efficacy in the contexts of learning and performance, defining it as an individual's belief in their ability to execute specific tasks or achieve goals. Mentorship improves self-efficacy by offering supportive feedback, positive reinforcement, and effective role modelling for mentees. The observation of successful mentors who demonstrate diligence and goal-oriented behaviour serves to bolster mentees' confidence in their capabilities, thus strengthening their commitment to achieving success. This confidence is crucial for individuals who are emerging or facing challenges and may struggle with self-assurance.

Conceptual Framework

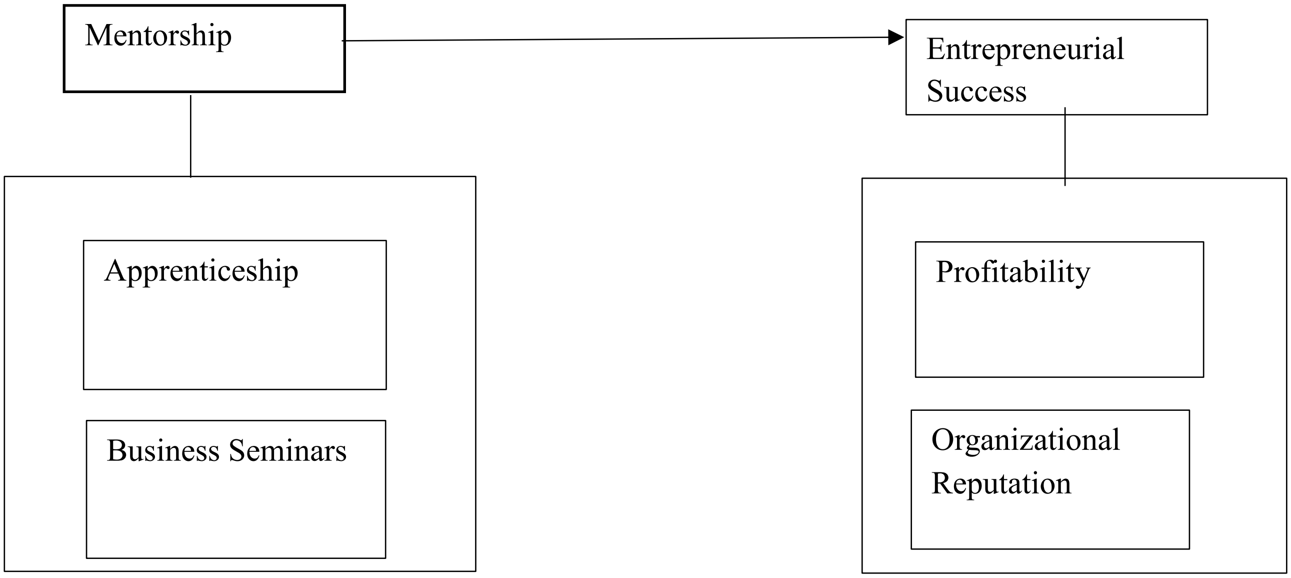

Figure 1: A conceptual framework showing the link between mentorship and entrepreneurial success.

Source: Dimensions of Mentorship adapted from Michael, (2021); measures of Entrepreneurial Success adopted from Obomeghia and Onuoha, (2023).

Mentorship

Mentoring is perceived as an ongoing relationship between two distinct entities: the mentor and the mentee. The objective is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and enhance the mentee's professional development and accomplishments in their business pursuits. As articulated by Okurame and Balogun (2013), mentoring is defined as an intimate, developmental connection in which one individual gains from the advanced knowledge, insights, abilities, or status of another, encompassing a wide array of human endeavours. Sachdeva and Malhotra (2014) contend that mentoring involves components such as companionship, active listening, the sharing of professional insights, the cultivation of personal understanding, and the process of learning through introspective analysis. Business mentorship encompasses the provision of guidance to individuals (mentees) in recognising their unique skills and aspirations, while also aiding them in devising strategies to attain those objectives. Uchenna and colleagues (2015) emphasise mentorship as a commonly referenced strategy for attaining business continuity, success, and sustainability. In less industrialised nations, mentorship emerges as a significant non-formal educational approach for conveying vital business knowledge and skills. This approach frequently utilises apprenticeship frameworks, emphasising the development of essential skills and competencies vital for employability. The employment landscape in Nigeria encounters considerable obstacles, primarily arising from a lack of practical skills among graduates. This deficiency impedes their capacity to function proficiently in professional capacities, despite their possession of theoretical understanding.

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) describe mentoring as a developmental relationship in which a more experienced individual, termed the mentor, provides guidance, support, and assessment to a less experienced individual, identified as the mentee, with the objective of promoting both personal and professional development. This engagement is perceived as a dynamic exchange that provides mutual benefits, emphasising the development of competencies, the cultivation of self-assurance, and the promotion of career advancement. Mentoring can be categorised into two distinct forms: structured and unstructured. Structured mentoring takes place within formally established initiatives that have clear objectives and timelines, while unstructured mentoring develops organically from interpersonal relationships (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Both modalities are essential in disseminating knowledge, enhancing emotional connections, and advancing professional networks. Mentoring provides access to the mentor's specialised knowledge, unique perspectives, and methodologies for addressing complex issues, which may be difficult to obtain through traditional educational avenues (Clutterbuck, 2004). The responsibilities of a mentor include instruction, advocacy, exemplification, and the provision of psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). The functions promote the cultivation of skills in mentees, empowering them to make well-informed decisions and enhance their self-assurance. Effective mentoring relationships demonstrate a foundation of mutual dependence, transparent dialogue, and a dedication to collective educational objectives (Allen & Eby, 2010).

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship serves as a method of experiential learning that facilitates the development and dissemination of specialised skills from an experienced practitioner, commonly referred to as a master or mentor. Apprenticeship programs combine hands-on work experience with academic learning, enabling trainees to develop the essential knowledge, skills, and professional conduct required for competence in a particular field (Smith, 2010). This dual methodology facilitates the cultivation of specialised skills while simultaneously fostering contextual understanding and the practical application of those skills (Fuller & Unwin, 2011). Apprenticeships have served as a crucial method for the transfer of skills throughout history, tracing back to ancient artisan guilds, where experienced professionals guided newcomers over extended durations of engagement in their craft (Stephenson, 2001). Apprenticeship mentoring serves as a systematic approach to convey expertise and skills from the seasoned professional to the trainee. This improves the sustainability of the business over the long term when executed effectively. Individuals aiming to acquire crucial professional knowledge through pertinent and practical apprenticeships can take advantage of training programs that provide avenues for development (Anyakora, et al., 2015, cited in Ezenwakwelu, Egbosionu, & Okwo, 2019).

Business Seminars

A business seminar serves as a structured occasion designed to equip nascent entrepreneurs with the insights and tools essential for converting concepts into sustainable ventures and securing funding. The emphasis lies on the methodology of cultivating groundbreaking concepts, transforming them into feasible business ventures, and ultimately realising them as functioning enterprises, fostering stimulating dialogue. Business seminars cultivate creativity and innovation among entrepreneurs by presenting frameworks or novel methodologies that significantly transform their perspectives on commerce and the utilisation of environmental opportunities. These seminars serve as platforms for emerging entrepreneurs to engage with seasoned professionals, exploring fundamental business topics and developing the competencies necessary to transform concepts into actionable business strategies and their execution. Every entrepreneur navigates an environment rife with uncertainty; therefore, achieving success necessitates a proactive approach that involves anticipation and meticulous strategic planning (Etuk, 2009). The primary obligation of each entrepreneur is to fulfil predetermined objectives, often termed as goals, purposes, or a mission. Realising this requires the judicious allocation of all organisational resources and the adept implementation of essential functions (Inyang, 2004). Developing novel ideas or approaches is a crucial and essential pursuit for entrepreneurs. Business seminars cultivate entrepreneurial acumen, fostering efficient and strategic planning that is crucial for developing strategies aimed at realising the entrepreneurial vision. The necessity of strategic planning is underscored by the work of Topinos, Dyson, and Meadows (2005).

Entrepreneurial Success

The hallmark of entrepreneurial success lies in the attainment of distinct organisational objectives, such as profitability, growth, enhancement of market share, innovation, and enduring sustainability (Adejumo, 2020). It involves more than mere financial gains; it reflects an entrepreneur's capacity to create value, sustain organisational stability, and innovate responsively to evolving market dynamics (Onuoha, 2013). The evaluation of entrepreneurial success generally encompasses both measurable indicators, including revenue growth, return on investment, and workforce expansion, alongside qualitative elements, such as personal fulfilment, the attainment of strategic goals, and contributions to society (Ogunyomi & Ojikutu, 2014).

Prior investigations have delineated various elements that affect entrepreneurial achievement, including innovative competencies, access to capital, strategic marketing methodologies, and proficient managerial abilities (Akinlabi, 2015). The recognition and utilisation of entrepreneurial prospects, coupled with resilience and flexibility, are crucial for achieving organisational goals (Nwachukwu, 2012). In emerging economies like Nigeria, entrepreneurs encounter obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure, fluctuating policies, and unpredictable market conditions. As a result, creativity, novel approaches, and strong professional connections are essential elements for achieving success (Okpara, 2011). The accomplishment of entrepreneurship is a multifaceted concept influenced by inherent abilities and external contextual elements (Adejumo, 2020). It embodies a fluid continuum of creativity, adjustment, and value generation amidst competitive and fluctuating business landscapes.

Profitability

Profitability signifies an organization's ability to generate financial returns from its operations within a specified period and serves as an essential metric for evaluating business performance and sustainability. This signifies the extent to which revenue surpasses expenses, illustrating operational effectiveness, resource allocation, and market standing (Pandey, 2021). Methods for evaluating profitability typically encompass financial ratios such as gross profit margin, net profit margin, and return on investment (ROI), which provide valuable insights into the efficacy of managerial decisions and strategic direction (Gitman & Zutter, 2019). Heightened profitability empowers organisations to reinvest in growth strategies, reward stakeholders, and endure economic fluctuations. Profitability is influenced by a multitude of elements, such as pricing strategies, cost-reduction initiatives, product quality, innovation, and the dynamics of the market (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The optimisation of financial stewardship, the satisfaction of clientele, and the efficiency of operations are paramount in augmenting profitability. Furthermore, it is crucial to draw in investors, obtain capital, and achieve enduring stability within competitive landscapes (Brigham & Ehrhardt, 2020). Profitability extends beyond a mere accounting figure; it represents a company's capacity to create value over an extended period. This highlights the balance between revenue generation and cost efficiency, making it an essential instrument for strategic planning and performance evaluation.

Organizational Reputation

In light of extensive academic inquiry into organisational reputation, a definitive consensus on its precise definition continues to elude scholars. Definitions and applications frequently diverge, and the concept is often indistinctly differentiated from related notions such as projection, esteem, authorisation, and status. This conceptual ambiguity presents difficulties for scholars aiming to delineate and examine the importance of reputation and its governance in both commercial and governmental domains. The intricacies of the situation are heightened by the multifaceted character of reputation research, which spans diverse domains including corporate communication, strategy, management, marketing, economics, and organisation studies. Each of these fields examines different facets of the subject through unique research methodologies and analytical frameworks. A variety of methodologies exist for the stewardship of organisational reputation. Economists characterise standing through various attributes or indicators. From a game-theoretic viewpoint, standing functions as a defining attribute that enables organisations to set themselves apart in a competitive landscape. Proponents of signalling theory emphasise the informative nature of status. Consequently, both game theorists and signalling theorists concur that standing fundamentally embodies the perceptions held by external constituents (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997).

The stature of an organisation significantly influences its engagements with diverse stakeholders, thereby impacting employee retention, customer satisfaction, and overall patronage. Consequently, chief executives regard an organization's reputation as a crucial intangible asset (Institute of Directors 1999). Organisations that maintain a favourable reputation tend to draw in talented individuals, foster customer loyalty (Markham, 1972), and exhibit enhanced financial outcomes (Robert & Dowling 1997; Vergin & Qoronfleh 1998). The standing of an organisation embodies a complex and nuanced notion. The dimensions of an organisation exhibit a positive correlation with its reputation, as larger entities generally enjoy more advantageous standings (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). The performance of accounting and the assessment of organisational risk exert a favourable impact on standing (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Furthermore, promotional campaigns, organisational citizenship, and civic engagement have demonstrated considerable impacts on reputation (Bromley, 1993; Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Sabate and Puente, 2003).

Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Success

Mentorship is an essential component for the entrepreneurial success of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). This guidance, often realised through mentorship, entails an experienced business professional or expert sharing their knowledge with a less experienced business owner. It provides vital information, practical skills, and professional networks necessary for advancement (Ekanem, 2015). Owners of small and medium enterprises participating in mentorship programs acquire practical knowledge that assists in resolving operational challenges, preventing financially harmful errors, and recognising potential growth opportunities (Akinwale, 2021). Mentors offer guidance in strategic development, market expansion, financial management, and the implementation of innovative practices, which are essential for entrepreneurial success (Abiodun & Amos, 2020). This support strengthens entrepreneurs' confidence and improves their decision-making abilities, leading to more favourable business outcomes. In the Nigerian SME landscape, restricted access to funding, insufficient infrastructure, and intense competition hinder growth; therefore, mentorship is a crucial resource for enhancing resilience and competitiveness (Onugu, 2015). Furthermore, mentorship cultivates essential entrepreneurial skills, including leadership, relationship building, and problem-solving, which are crucial for the long-term sustainability of businesses (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). Mentors facilitate access for SMEs to new markets, investment opportunities, and increased earnings by leveraging their experience and networks. Effective mentorship partnerships improve survival rates and facilitate long-term organisational growth in SMEs, serving as a vital strategy for promoting entrepreneurial success.

Empirical Review

Eze and Nwankwo (2020) explored the impact of structured mentorship programs on the developmental paths of micro and small enterprises in Port Harcourt and its surrounding local government areas. The researchers employed a cross-sectional survey design, distributing questionnaires to 320 entrepreneurs involved in formal or informal mentorship arrangements. They received and analysed 287 valid responses through descriptive statistics and multiple regression techniques. The findings demonstrate that mentees who engaged in structured, goal-oriented guidance experienced notably higher sales growth, enhanced financial record-keeping, and an increased probability of business survival beyond three years when compared to those who did not participate in mentoring. The study found that formal mentorship interventions, especially those focused on business planning and financial management, significantly improve entrepreneurial success in the context of Rivers State.

Okpara, et al., (2019) examined the correlation between mentor accessibility and market expansion within small enterprises in the apparel and retail sectors of Rivers State. The authors employed a mixed-methods approach by distributing 250 questionnaires to business owners and conducting 20 in-depth interviews with experienced mentors, resulting in the return of 212 questionnaires. The analysis indicated a positive correlation between the frequency of mentor contact and the firms' capacity to enter new markets. Additionally, the narratives highlighted that mentors played a vital role in facilitating introductions to suppliers and clients. The research suggested the establishment of mentor networks to enhance access to market connections and expedite entrepreneurial achievement. A quasi-experimental study conducted by Ukoha and Bassey (2021) evaluated the effects of mentorship training on managerial competence and the profitability of service-based enterprises in Rivers State. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were allocated to a twelve-week mentor-led capacity building program (treatment group, n = 60) or placed in a waitlist control group (n = 60). Comparative analysis following the program indicated that firms receiving treatment experienced notable enhancements in budgeting practices, customer retention, and net profit margins within a six-month period, implying a direct influence of mentorship on immediate financial outcomes. The authors presented a case that mentorship integrating technical coaching with business advisory results in quantifiable profitability improvements.

Ibeh et al., (2018) conducted an analysis of mentorship quality and its impact on the adoption of innovation among entrepreneurs in Eastern Nigeria, specifically focussing on Rivers State as a key sub-sample. A total of 410 survey responses were gathered from three states, with 150 responses originating from entrepreneurs in Rivers State. The findings indicate a significant correlation between the perceived expertise of mentors and the relevance of their advice with the adoption of new products, processes, and digital marketing strategies. The sub-sample from Rivers State specifically emphasised the significance of mentorship in adjusting to urban consumer preferences and utilising digital platforms, establishing a connection between the quality of mentorship and improved entrepreneurial outcomes. Alade and Oti (2022) executed a longitudinal panel study involving 180 start-ups in Rivers State to examine the influence of mentorship on business resilience, particularly in the context of economic shocks. During an 18-month timeframe marked by instances of market disruption, the authors conducted an analysis of firms that had mentorship connections (either formal or informal) in comparison to those that did not possess such ties. The data indicated that firms with mentors demonstrated a greater propensity to adopt contingency plans, diversify their revenue sources, and maintain staff, leading to increased survival rates. The research findings indicate that mentorship plays a significant role in enhancing growth metrics as well as fostering resilience in entrepreneurial success, positioning it as a strategic approach for maintaining ventures in unpredictable settings.

Methodology

This study utilised a quantitative research design, utilising numerical data to draw conclusions. Due to the correlational nature of the study, a deductive approach to inference was employed. The study utilised a cross-sectional design, employing a survey as the main method for data collection. The outcome variable was entrepreneurial success, with mentorship acting as the predictor variable. A systematic questionnaire was created to gather research data from participants. Simple random sampling was conducted, with questionnaires distributed to 288 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), adhering to a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. The statistical analysis utilised Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, which was computed using SPSS version 25.0.

Results and Discussion

A total of 288 structured questionnaires were distributed, resulting in the return of 240 copies, which accounts for 80.8% of the total issued. The hypothesis test is conducted using a 95% confidence interval, and the decision rule is outlined below.
If $P < 0.05$, then the null hypotheses should be rejected.
If $P > 0.05$, then the null hypothesis is accepted.

Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurship Success
Table 1: Correlation between Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurship Success

			Apprenticeship	Profitability	Organizational reputation
Spearman's rho	Apprenticeship	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.745**	.708**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	240	240	240
	Profitability	Correlation Coefficient	.745**	1.000	.725**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	240	240	240
	Organizational reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.708**	.725**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	240	240	240

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between apprenticeship and profitability.

Apprenticeship and Profitability: The data analysis indicates a significant result with $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$), and a correlation coefficient of rho = 0.745**. This indicates a notable correlation between apprenticeship and profitability. The null hypothesis, Ho_1, is consequently rejected while the alternative is accepted.

Ho_2: A significant relationship does not exist between apprenticeship and organisational reputation. The analysis of the data indicates a significant relationship, with $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$) and a correlation coefficient of rho = 0.708**. This indicates a notable correlation between apprenticeship and the reputation of the organisation. The null hypothesis, Ho_2, is consequently rejected, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Business Seminars and Entrepreneurship Success

Table 2: Correlation between Business Seminars and Entrepreneurship Success

			Business Seminars	Apprenticeship	Organizational Reputation
Spearman's rho	Business Seminars	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.574**	.667**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	240	240	240
	Apprenticeship	Correlation Coefficient	.574**	1.000	.725**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	240	240	240
	Organizational Reputation	Correlation Coefficient	.667**	.725**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	240	240	240

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Ho_3: There is no significant relationship between business seminars and profitability.

The analysis of the data pertaining to business seminars and their impact on profitability indicates a statistically significant result, with $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$) and a correlation coefficient of rho = 0.547**. This indicates a noteworthy correlation between business seminars and profitability. The null hypothesis, Ho_3, is consequently dismissed, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Ho_4: A significant relationship does not exist between business seminars and organisational reputation.

The analysis of the data pertaining to business seminars and organisational reputation indicates a statistically significant result, with $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$) and a correlation coefficient of rho = 0.667**. This indicates a noteworthy correlation between business seminars and the reputation of organisations. The null hypothesis, Ho4, has been rejected, and the alternative has been accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The results derived from the various hypotheses indicate a notable and affirmative relationship between the variables examined, as evidenced by their correlations from the SPSS table, which were *0.745, *0.708, *0.847, *0.547, and *0.667. The results clearly indicated that all aspects of mentorship exhibited a robust positive correlation with the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria. In a similar vein, Okoye and Nwankwo (2020), through their examination of mentoring strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria, noted that practical training plays a crucial role in enhancing the administrative capabilities of entrepreneurs. This advancement, consequently, results in enhanced financial benefits and a more robust organisational reputation. Ibrahim and Soufani (2002) present empirical evidence suggesting that the combination of business training and mentorship support significantly enhances operational outcomes and bolsters the organisational reputation of emerging companies within fiercely competitive industries. Nwachukwu and Chladkova (2019) posited that organised business seminars significantly enhance the entrepreneurial capabilities of small and medium-sized enterprises in emerging economies, leading to increased profitability and the establishment of a positive reputation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the provision of mentorship through apprenticeship programs and business seminars is essential for the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Rivers State, Nigeria.

In light of the study's findings and its conclusions, the subsequent recommendations are proposed:

i. SME owners should create apprenticeship programs that provide practical skills to aspiring entrepreneurs.
ii. Businesses should incorporate brand management, customer service, and ethics into apprenticeship programs. This guarantees apprentices learn technical skills while promoting the company's public image.
iii. Businesses should incorporate brand management, customer service, and ethics into apprenticeship programs. This guarantees apprentices learn technical skills while promoting the company's public image.
iv. SMEs managers should attend seminars to learn about current corporate social responsibility best practices and trends. These practices will make the firm reputable, socially responsible, and trustworthy to customers and stakeholders.

References

Abdullah, M. A., Manan, S. K. A., (2011). Small and Medium Enterprises and Their Financing Patterns: Evidence from Malaysia. *Journal of Economic Cooperation and Development, 32*(2), 1-18.

Adebayo, O., & Kolawole, J. A. (2013). The historical background of entrepreneurial development in Nigeria: Its gains, shortcomings and needful. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences*, *4*(5), 493–500.

Akhigbe, E. A., & Onuoha, B. C. (2020). Environmental Turbulence and Organizational Performance of Food and Beverages Firms in Rivers State Nigeria. *Nigerian Academy of Management Journal*, *15*(3), 29-38.

Akinyemi, F. O., & Adejumo, O. (2017). Government Policies and Entrepreneurship Phases in Nigeria. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research, 7*(2), 1–13.

Allen, T. D., & Eby, L. T. (2010). *The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring: A Multiple Perspectives Approach*. Blackwell Publishing.

Amini, A. (2004). The distributional role of small business in development. *International Journal of Social Economics, 31*(4), 370-383.

Ariyo, D. (2005). Small firms are the backbone of the Nigerian economy. *Africa Economic Analysis, 1*(1), 1-5.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist*, 44(9), 1175–1184.

Bozeman, B., & Feeney, M. K. (2007). Toward a useful theory of mentoring: A conceptual analysis and critique. *Administration & Society*, *39*(6), 719–739.

Clutterbuck, D. (2004). *Everyone Needs a Mentor* (4th ed.). Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Cull, J. (2006). Mentoring young entrepreneurs: What leads to success. *International journal of evidence-based coaching and mentoring*, *4*(2), 8-18.

Ekanem, I. (2017). The role of mentoring in the development of successful SMEs in Nigeria. *World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development, 13*(2), 146–161.

Eniola, A. A., & Entebang, H. (2015). SME firm performance-financial innovation and challenges. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *195*, 334-342.

Fatoki, O. (2014). The causes of the failure of new small and medium enterprises in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, *5*(20), 922–927.

Ghosh, S., & Bhandari, A. K. (2013). Microfinance and rural entrepreneurship: An assessment. In *Microfinance, risk-taking behaviour and rural livelihood* (pp. 49-67). New Delhi: Springer India.

Hisrich, R. D., Peters, M. P., & Shepherd, D. A. (2017). *Entrepreneurship* (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.

Ibidunni, A. S., Kolawole, A. I., Olokundun, M. A., & Ogbari, M. E. (2020). Knowledge transfer and innovation performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs): An informal economy analysis. *Heliyon*, *6*(8).

Ibrahim, A. B., & Soufani, K. (2002). Entrepreneurship education and training in Canada: A critical assessment. *Education + Training, 44*(8/9), 421–430.

Ihugba, O. A., Odii, A., & Njoku, A. C. (2014). The Impact of Entrepreneurship Education on Youth Unemployment in Nigeria. *Journal of Business Administration and Education, 5*(1), 1–16.

Kayadibi, S., Polat, R., &Fidan, Y. (2013). Small and Medium-Sized Business in Malaysian Economy: Case of Turkish Entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur. *Business Economy, 31*, 265-281.

Kram, K. E. (1985). *Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life*. Scott Foresman.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Michael, P. O. (2021). Assessment of business mentoring and entrepreneurial development in Calabar metropolis. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, *10*(4), 89-98.

Murad, M., Ashraf, S. F., Syed, N., Munir, M., & Butt, R. S. (2020). Entrepreneurial social identities and nascent entrepreneurial behaviour: Mediating role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, *10*(1), 129-143.

Nwachukwu, C., & Chladkova, H. (2019). Influence of training and development on performance of SMEs. *Management and Economics Review, 4*(2), 303–318.

Nwangwu, I. O. (2006). *Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship in Educational Management*. Enugu: Cheston Agency Ltd.

Obomeghia, A. K., & Onuoha. B. C. (2023) Social structures and entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Rivers State. *International Journal of Business and Economics*, *8*(5), 01- 20.

Olorunshola, J. A. (2003). Problems and Prospects of Small and Medium Scale Industries in Nigeria. *Central Bank of Nigeria Economic and Financial Review, 39*(4), 1–19.

Okoye, C. O., & Nwankwo, S. N. (2020). Mentorship and SME performance in Nigeria. *Journal of Business and Management Studies, 8*(2), 55–64.

Okurame, D. E., &Balogun, S. K. (2013). Role of informal mentoring in the career success of first-line bank managers. *Career Development International, 10*(6/7), 512-521

Olowu, D., & Aliyu, A. (2015). Mentoring and Entrepreneurial Success in Nigeria: A Review. *International Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship Research, 3*(7), 10–22.

Radam, A., Abu, U. M. &Abdullahn, A.M. (2008). Technical efficiency of SMEs in Malaysia: a stochastic frontier production model. *International Journal of Economics and Management, 2*(2), 395-408.

Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007). *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research, and Practice*. SAGE Publications.

St-Jean, É., & Audet, J. (2012). The role of mentoring in the learning development of the novice entrepreneur. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, 8*(1), 119-140.

Tshehla, B., & Costa, K. (2021). *Exploring The Relationship Between Mentorship And Successful Youth Entrepreneurship At Telkom, South Africa* (No. c5r4e_v1). Center for Open Science.

Uchenna, A. C., Gerald, E., & Uche, E. P. (2015). Mentorship and business performance among Igbo entrepreneurs in Nigeria. *World Wide Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, *1*(5), 40-45.