



INFLUENCE OF MENTORSHIP ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF SMALL-SCALE BUSINESSES OPERATORS IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the influence of mentorship on career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. The study adopted descriptive survey design using 982 small scale business operators with a sample size of 98 selected using simple random sampling techniques. Questionnaire was used for data collection and was structured on a four point rating scale of Very High Influence (VHI), High Influence (HI), Moderate Influence (MI) and Low Influence (LI). The instrument which was validated by 3 experts from the Department of Business Education yielded a reliability coefficient of .75 with test retest and PPMC statistics. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation for answering research questions and simple linear regression for testing the null hypotheses at .05 levels of significance. Findings of the study revealed that technical skills development, leadership development and networking as mentorship variables highly influence career advancement of small scale businesses. In addition, findings indicated that there is significant influence of technical skills development, leadership development and networking on career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. It was recommended among others that Small and Medium-Scale Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeira in collaboration with business experts should provide training and support for business owners that will aid the development of leadership skills for enhanced business relationship.

KEYWORDS: Business, Career Advancement, Mentorship, Small Scale

INTRODUCTION

The development of small-scale businesses require mentorship, which can be provided by experienced business operators.

Small-scale businesses (SSBs) are types of corporations, partnerships, or sole proprietorships which have a small number of employees and/or less annual revenue than a regular-sized business or corporation.

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Businesses are defined as "small" in terms of being able to apply for government support and qualify for preferential tax policy (Ojoye, 2017). Small scale businesses include services or retail operations such as convenience stores, small grocery stores, bakeries, barbers, hairdressers, trades (for example mechanics, plumbers, carpenters, electricians), car dealerships, dry cleaners, restaurants, photographers, computer shops, etc.

Many SSBs are sole proprietor operations consisting only of the owner, but many have additional employees. Some SSBs that offer a product, process or service, do not have growth as their primary objective. In contrast, some businesses are created to become firms and often times these businesses aim for growth and offer innovative products, processes, or services. Entrepreneurs of these businesses typically aim to scale up their enterprises by adding employees, seeking international sales, and so on, a process which is often but not always financed by venture capital and angel investments. Successful entrepreneurs have the ability to lead a business in a positive direction by proper planning, adapting to changing environments, and understanding in their own strengths and weakness (Patriotta, 2019).

Career advancement is a multifaceted concept that resonates with virtually every profession, regardless of the industry or role. Career development is essentially a progression from a lower cadre to a higher and esteemed level. It involves personal and professional growth, expanding the horizons, and increasing one's impact within a chosen area. According to Emire (2024), career advancement is the process through which an individual makes significant progress in their career. It is a holistic concept that encompasses not just the vertical movement in an organizational chart, but also the expansion of one's knowledge, skills, and attitude. Therefore, to advance in one's career sometimes comes with moving sideways; switching to a different department, role, or industry to broaden one's experience, develop new skills, or reigniting passion for work. It also includes the acquisition of new knowledge and competencies that enhance one's value to current and future employers, and not just being confined to a job. It is a critical aspect of professional development, enables individuals to progress in their careers, enhance their skills, and increase their earning potential.

In SSBs, career advancement can be particularly challenging due to unique challenges such as limited opportunities, resources, and infrastructure, as well as intense competition, and a need for continuous innovation (Williams, 2024). Mentorship can help bridge this gap by providing guidance, support, and valuable insights to help individuals navigate their careers. Mentorship is a vital component of career development, particularly in SSBs where resources may be limited. The concept is a collaborative relationship between an experienced individual (the mentor) and a less experienced individual (the mentee) where the mentor offers advice and guidance to help the mentee achieve his/her career goals. It is more than just a relationship between two individuals'; it is a vital exchange of knowledge, experience, and insights that fosters personal and professional growth (Gupta, 2024).

Mentorship is a time-honoured concept and can take various forms, including formal programmes, informal relationships, and peer mentoring. Research has shown that mentorship can have a significant impact on career advancement in SSBs (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021; Shen, et al., 2021). Mentees who receive guidance and support from experienced mentors are more likely to: develop good leadership skills, improve their decision-making abilities, enhance their communication skills, increase their confidence and self-esteem, expand their networks, stay up-to-date with the industry trends and best practices, overcome challenges and obstacles, achieve their career goals, among others. This study will be considering only a few of these benefits in relation to career advancement thus: technical skills development, leadership development and networking.

Technical skills in business education such as development is at the center of changes happening in an individual's career. Possessing the right technical skills can set one apart from other contemporaries. Mentors often identify areas where the mentee can improve and provide guidance on skill development. Whether it is technical skills, leadership abilities, or soft skills like communication, a mentor can help the mentee hone these talents, making them more valuable in their field (Karnataka, 2023). According to River (2024), the journey of career development, skill enhancement is a cornerstone that mentors can significantly influence. This means skills development is an integral part of achieving one's career aspirations.

So much can be learned from mentors; Verasai (2016) opined that, one can develop some skills that are relevant to their field and helpful to their career ahead through mentorship. Moreover, technical skills are of paramount importance in today's market.

Leadership development is another aspect of mentoring that holds so much significance. Mentoring plays a crucial role in leadership development by providing individuals with the guidance and support they need to overcome challenges, develop new skills, and improve their performance. Future leaders can learn from the experiences of others, gain valuable insights and perspectives, and develop new strategies for success (Lee, Sunerman & Hastings, 2020). The changing nature of work means that, in order for today's leaders to be effective, competence and authority are no longer enough; they need to be able to lead through trusted relationships. But as the demands of leadership have evolved, so must the methods for developing leaders. River (2024) submitted that, long-term mentorship can significantly influence career trajectories, foster leadership qualities and pave the way for future generations.

One often overlooks benefits of mentorship in the opportunity to expand an individual's network. Mentors usually introduce their mentees to key contacts, open doors to new opportunities, and provide access to valuable resources within the chosen field or area of interest. Building strong relationships with the mentor's network can significantly enhance the mentee's career prospects and broaden their horizons (Gupta, 2024). Mentors typically have extensive professional networks (Shen, et al., 2021). Being mentored by someone well-connected can provide access to a broader range of opportunities, from job openings to partnerships and collaborations. This expanded network can be a powerful asset in career advancement (Shen, et al., 2021).

The importance of mentorship cannot be overemphasized. However, many SSBs lack formal mentorship programmes, leaves employees to seek guidance and support on their own. This can lead to missed opportunities, decreased productivity, and increased turnover rates (Karnataka, 2023). The influence of mentorship on career advancement in small scale businesses is a critical topic that warrants further exploration. More so, SSBs are an integral part of

the global economy that account for a significant portion of employment opportunities and Gross Domestic Product. This study therefore sought to investigate the impact of mentorship on career advancement of SSBs, identifying the benefits and challenges of mentorship, as well as providing recommendations for implementing effective mentorship programmes in SSBs.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the recognized importance of mentorship in career development, SSBs often lack formal mentorship programmes, leaving employees without guidance and support. The seemingly low and poor recognition results limited career advancement opportunities, reduced job satisfaction and engagement, increased turnover rates, decreased productivity and efficiency, difficulty attracting and retaining top talent, limited development of leadership and management skills, inadequate preparation for succession planning, and so on. This gap in mentorship opportunities hinder the growth and development of SSBs, leading to a significant loss of potential revenue, talent, and competitiveness in the market. Calabar Municipality is the nerve centre and business hub. The development of SSBs should be of utmost concern due to its power to accelerate the pace for the development of the economy. Therefore, it is essential to carry out this study to proffer remedial solutions that support operators' development and business growth.

1. Determined the influence of technical skills development on career advancement in small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality
2. Determined the influence of leadership development on career advancement in small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality.
3. Determined the influence of networking on career advancement in small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality.

RESEARCH METHODS

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Calabar Municipality. The population comprises 982 registered small-scale operators with a sample size of 98 using purposive sampling technique. Data for the study was obtained using a researcher made questionnaire tagged "Mentorship and Career Advancement Questionnaire (MCAQ)"

structured under a Four-point rating scale of: Very High Influence (VHI), High Influence (HI), Moderate Influence (MI) and Low Influence (LI). The instrument was validated by three experts from Business Education Department, University of Calabar. The instrument yielded reliability co-

efficient of .75 using test retest method and PPMC analysis. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation was used for answering research questions while simple linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 levels of significance. Decision for the research questions was based on real limits as presented below:

Very High Influence	4	3.50 – 4.00
High Influence	3	2.50 – 3.49
Moderate Influence	2	1.50 – 2.49
Very Low Influence	1	0.50 – 1.49

For the null hypotheses, the decision for accepting or rejecting a null hypothesis was if $p > .05$, there is no significant influence which means the hypothesis was retain, but if $p < .05$ there is significant influence, which implies that the hypothesis was rejected.

Research question 1

What is the influence of technical skills development on career advancement in small scale business in Calabar Municipality?

Table 1: Mean responses of small scale business operators on the influence of technical skills development on career advancement in small scale businesses

S/N	Items on technical skills development	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Level of technical skills help me with a perfect work life balance	3.35	.62	HI
2	Level of acquisition of technical skills has open up opportunities for me to earn more	2.72	.70	HI
3	Level of acquisition of technical skills can be used to operate more efficiently in new roles and responsibilities	3.18	.55	HI
4	Level of mentorship	2.78	.74	HI
5	Level of mentor-mentee relationship	2.97	.65	HI
	Cluster Mean	3.00		High Influence

N=98

Source: Field Data 2024

The result presented in Table 1 indicates that all the items had their mean values within the limit of 2.50 – 3.49. On the whole, the cluster mean is also with the limit of 2.50 – 3.49. This implies that, technical skills development highly influences career advancement in Calabar Municipality.

Research question 2

What is the influence of leadership development on career advancement in small scale business in Calabar Municipality?

Table 2: Mean responses of small-scale business operators on the influence of leadership development on career advancement in small scale business

S/N	Items on leadership development	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Level of training	2.82	.99	HI
2	Level of leadership responsibilities	2.36	.81	MI
3	potentials	2.77	.62	HI
4	Leadership development has built confidence in my style of leading	2.81	.95	HI
5	Updates in business skills	2.57	.87	HI
	Cluster Mean	2.67		High Influence

N=98

Source: Field Data 2024

The result presented in Table 2 indicates that 4 items had their mean values within the limit of 2.50 – 3.49 and 1 item had its mean value within the value 1.50 – 2.49. On the whole, the cluster mean is also with the limit of 2.50 – 3.49. This implies that, leadership development highly influence career advancement in Calabar Municipality.

Research question 3

What is the influence of networking on career advancement in small scale business in Calabar Municipality?

Table 3: Mean responses of small scale business operators on the influence of networking on career advancement in small scale business

S/N	Items on networking	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Business opportunities are possible through networking	2.51	.69	HI
2	Career aspirations and goals have been greatly influenced through my networks	3.54	.82	VHI
3	Accessing information and resources for my business is enhanced via networking	2.68	.58	HI
4	Joining of professional organizations has help me maintain my professional relationships	2.65	.54	HI
5	Attending networking events such as seminars and meetings exposes me to people within my industry	3.33	.61	HI
	Cluster Mean	2.94		High Influence

N=98

Source: Field Data 2024

The result presented in Table 3 indicates that 1 item had its mean value within the value 3.50 – 4.00 and 4 items had their mean values within the limit of 2.50 – 3.49. On the whole, the cluster mean is also with the limit of 2.50 – 3.49. This implies that, networking highly influence career advancement in Calabar Municipality.

Research hypothesis 1

Technical skills development does not significantly influence career advancement of small scale business in Calabar Municipality.

Table 4: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of technical skills development on career advancement

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F-Cal	Sig.	Decision
Regression	111.4	1	111.4			
Residual	577.3	96	6.01	18.6	.000	Significant
Total	688.7	97				

Table 4 shows that the calculated F-value of 18.6 with a Sig-value (.000) which is less than the level of significance (.05) at 1 and 96 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis, "technical skills development does not significantly influence career advancement of small scale business in Calabar Municipality" was rejected. This implies that technical skills development

significantly influences career advancement of small scale business.

Research hypothesis 2

Leadership development does not significantly influence career advancement of small scale business in Calabar Municipality.

Table 5: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of leadership development on career advancement

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F-Cal	Sig.	Decision
Regression	189.5	1	189.5			
Residual	499.2	96	5.2	36.4	.001	Significant
Total	688.7	97				

Table 5 shows that the calculated F-value of 36.4 with a Sig-value (.001) which is less than the level of significance (.05) at 1 and 96 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that was stated leadership development does not significantly influence career advancement of small scale business in Calabar Municipality was rejected. This implies that leadership development

significantly influence career advancement of small scale business.

Research hypothesis 3

Networking does not significantly influence career advancement of small scale business in Calabar Municipality.

Table 6: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of networking on career advancement

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F-Cal	Sig.	Decision
Regression	95.9	1	95.9			
Residual	592.8	96	6.18	15.5	.000	Significant
Total	688.7	97				

Table 6 shows that the calculated calculated F-value of 15.5 with a Sig-value (.000) which is less than the level of significance (.05) at 1 and 96 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis that was stated leadership development does not significantly influence

career advancement of small scale business in Calabar Municipality was rejected. This implies that leadership development significantly influence career advancement of small scale business.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Findings on research question 1 indicated that technical skills development highly influences career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. Findings on null hypothesis 1 also indicated that, technical skills development significantly influences career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. This implies that small scale business operators viewed mentorship programmes as a yard stick for development of technical skills which has the capacity to enhance a perfect work life balance, efficiency at roles/responsibilities, building of confidence, among others. The awareness of this should reposition mentorship in the business world especially among small scale business operators. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Karnataka (2023), a mentor can help the mentee hone talents, technical skills, leadership abilities, or soft skills like communication, making them more valuable in their field. The finding also agreed with the findings of River (2024), in the journey of career development, skill enhancement is a cornerstone that mentors can significantly influence. More over, the findings agreed with Verasai (2016), one can develop some skills that are relevant to their field and helpful to their career ahead through mentorship.

Findings on research question 2 indicated that leadership development highly influences career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. Findings on null hypothesis 2 also indicated that, leadership development significantly influences career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. This implies that mentorship makes provision for less experienced individuals to receive training in relevant areas such as leadership to enable them take up leadership responsibilities with experiencing much difficulty as they toll the ladder of success in business. This has the capacity to also improve their earning potentials and build confidence in them positioning them to stay abreast of current trends/updates in their business endeavours. This finding is in consonance with the findings of River (2024), long-term mentorship can significantly influence career trajectories, fostering leadership qualities and paving the way for future generations. The finding also agreed with the findings of Lee, Sunerman and Hastings (2020), future leaders can learn from the experiences of

others, gain valuable insights and perspectives, and develop new strategies for success.

Findings on research question 3 indicated that networking highly influences career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. Findings on null hypothesis 3 also indicated that, networking significantly influences career advancement of small scale businesses in Calabar Municipality. This implies that connections as a result of networking will positively enhance the business environment. Mentorship programmes which are conscious of the mentees growth should therefore focus on creating avenues that will favour their mentees to continue in the same circle of growth to foster quick growth and development of businesses especially startups. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Gupta (2024), building strong relationships with the mentor's network can significantly enhance the mentee's career prospects and broaden their horizons. This finding also agrees with the findings of Shen, et al., (2021), expanded network can be a powerful asset in career advancement and mentors typically have extensive professional networks.

CONCLUSION

The topic under discourse is a crucial factor in the development and growth of the business, its operators and employees. The presence of mentorship programmes in small scale businesses leads to improved job satisfaction, increased employee retention, and enhanced career advancement opportunities. Mentorship provides employees with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to excel in their roles, leading to increased productivity and efficiency. Small scale businesses that implement mentorship programmes demonstrate commitment of their employees, fostering a positive work culture and contributing to the overall success of the business. This can unlock the potential of employees, drive business growth, and contribute to the overall economic development. Summarily, mentorship is a vital component of career advancement in small scale businesses, and its influence cannot be overstated. Embracing mentorship will therefore create a culture of growth, development, and success, leading to a brighter future for all stakeholders involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion reached on this, it is recommended that:

1. Small and Medium-scale Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria in collaboration with business experts should provide training and support for business owners that will aid the development of leadership skills for enhanced business relationship.
2. Small-scale business association should treat as a matter of necessity to present business development talks to improve their skills establish formal mentorship programmes that pair experienced men.
3. Top management in mentorship programmes should encourage mentees to utilize platforms such as LinkedIn with active participation to enable them expand their networks.

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