

The Impact of Mentor Characteristics on the Entrepreneurial Success of Adult Learners

Dr. Sarah Ogah Aduwari

Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education
Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State
Sarahogahadu@gmail.com 08025448651

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Abstract

Mentorship plays a vital role in fostering entrepreneurial success among adult learners, who often embark on entrepreneurial ventures later in life or amidst career transitions. This paper explored the impact of mentor characteristics on entrepreneurial success among adult learners. Systematic Literature Review was adopted in the study. Drawing on existing literature, the analysis examines the interplay between mentor characteristics, mentorship dynamics, and support mechanisms, highlighting key factors that contributed to successful mentorship outcomes. Factors such as trust, expertise, accessibility, and empathy are identified as crucial components of effective mentorship. The paper provides three recommendations aimed at enhancing mentorship programs for adult learners: prioritizing mentor matching, providing mentor training and development, and fostering a diverse mentor pool. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can optimize mentorship experiences for adult learners, thereby increasing their likelihood of entrepreneurial success in today's dynamic business landscape.

Keywords: *Impact, Mentor Characteristics, Entrepreneurial Success, Adult Learners*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has gained significant attention as a means to foster innovation, economic growth, and individual empowerment in today's dynamic global economy (Rasmussen et al., 2011). Within the realm of adult education, mentoring has emerged as a crucial component of entrepreneurship programs, offering guidance, support, and experiential learning opportunities to aspiring entrepreneurs (Allen et al., 2008). While the importance of mentorship in entrepreneurial development is widely recognized, there remains a need to understand the specific characteristics of mentors that contribute to the success of adult learners in entrepreneurship education. This introduction aims to explore the impact of mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners, highlighting key research questions and objectives in this area of inquiry.

Research suggests that mentorship plays a significant role in shaping the entrepreneurial mindset, skill set, and network of adult learners, thereby enhancing their capacity to identify and capitalize on business opportunities (Kolvereid & Moen, 2007). However, the effectiveness of mentorship relationships may vary depending on the characteristics and qualities exhibited by mentors (Allen et al., 2008). For instance, mentors with relevant industry experience, entrepreneurial background, and coaching expertise may provide valuable insights, resources,

and support to adult learners navigating the complexities of starting and managing a business (Lumpkin & Lichtenstein, 2005). Conversely, mentors lacking these characteristics may struggle to connect with mentees and offer meaningful guidance (Rasmussen et al., 2011). Moreover, the compatibility between mentors and adult learners is considered essential for fostering trust, communication, and mutual understanding within mentorship relationships (Kram, 1983). Research indicates that compatibility in terms of personality traits, communication styles, and shared values can significantly influence the effectiveness of mentorship in entrepreneurship education (Allen et al., 2008). Additionally, mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms, such as the frequency of interactions, the provision of emotional support, and the promotion of critical thinking, play a crucial role in shaping mentee outcomes (Chen et al., 2018). Understanding how these factors interact and contribute to the entrepreneurial success of adult learners is paramount for designing effective mentorship programs and support initiatives in the field of adult education.

In light of the growing interest in entrepreneurship education and the pivotal role of mentorship in this domain, it is imperative to delve deeper into the impact of mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners. By identifying key mentor attributes, assessing mentor-mentee compatibility, examining the role of mentor experience, and evaluating mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms, this research seeks to advance our understanding of effective mentorship practices in entrepreneurship education for adult learners. Ultimately, the findings of this study have the potential to inform the development of evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at enhancing the entrepreneurial capabilities and outcomes of adult learners in diverse educational contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding the impact of mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners is crucial yet underexplored. While mentorship has been recognized as a significant factor in entrepreneurial success, there is limited research specifically examining its effect on adult learners entering entrepreneurship. Studies such as that by Aduwari-Ogah (2023) suggest that adult learners may have unique learning needs and preferences compared to traditional students, which could influence the effectiveness of mentorship programs tailored to their requirements. Moreover, research by Allen et al. (2018) and Aduwari-Ogah (2023) highlights the importance of mentor characteristics such as empathy, adaptability, and coaching skills in fostering adult learners' confidence and self-efficacy, which are critical for entrepreneurial success. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these mentor characteristics interact with the unique challenges and opportunities faced by adult learners pursuing entrepreneurship, particularly in non-traditional educational settings or career transitions.

While existing literature offers insights into mentorship in entrepreneurship and adult education separately, there is a need for integrated research that explores the intersectionality of these domains. For instance, studies by Redmond et al. (2019) highlight the importance of mentorship in supporting adult learners' career transitions and skill development, but there is limited understanding of how specific mentor characteristics impact entrepreneurial outcomes in this context. This gap is essential for designing mentorship programs that effectively cater to the needs of adult learners embarking on entrepreneurial endeavors, ultimately contributing to their success in the rapidly evolving landscape of entrepreneurship.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

- i. To determine the specific characteristics and qualities exhibited by mentors that are perceived as most influential in facilitating entrepreneurial success among adult learners.
- ii. To explore the impact of mentor experience, including industry knowledge, entrepreneurial background, and mentoring expertise, on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners.
- iii. To investigate how mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms influence the effectiveness of mentorship relationships in promoting entrepreneurial success among adult learners.

Conceptual Clarification

Conceptually, the relationship between mentor characteristics, entrepreneurial success, and adult learners' outcomes necessitates a multifaceted examination. "Impact" in this context refers to the tangible and intangible effects of mentorship on the entrepreneurial journey of adult learners, encompassing factors such as business growth, personal development, and psychological well-being (Allen et al., 2018). These impacts may manifest in various forms, including increased self-efficacy, expanded networks, and enhanced problem-solving skills, ultimately contributing to the overall success and sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures initiated by adult learners (Brockhaus, 1980). "Mentor characteristics" encompass a broad spectrum of attributes and behaviors exhibited by mentors, including experience, industry knowledge, communication skills, empathy, and coaching ability (Klyver, et al, 2016). These characteristics shape the mentor-mentee relationship dynamics and influence the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, guidance, and support provided to adult learners navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship. "Entrepreneurial success" for adult learners refers to the attainment of desired outcomes in their entrepreneurial endeavors, such as achieving business viability, financial stability, personal fulfillment, and societal impact (Redmond et al., 2019). Success in entrepreneurship entails not only the creation of value but also the ability to sustain and grow ventures over time, adapt to changing circumstances, and leverage opportunities effectively within dynamic market environments. Understanding the interplay between mentor characteristics and adult learners' entrepreneurial success is essential for optimizing mentorship interventions and fostering positive outcomes in entrepreneurship education and practice.

Theoretical Review

Social Learning Theory

This theory, proposed by Bandura (1977), emphasizes the role of observation, imitation, and modeling in learning. In the context of mentorship, adult learners observe and learn from the behaviors, skills, and experiences of their mentors. The theory posits that individuals can acquire new knowledge and skills by observing others and modeling their behaviors. In the context of entrepreneurship, mentors serve as role models who demonstrate effective entrepreneurial practices, problem-solving strategies, and decision-making skills (Allen et al., 2018). Mentor characteristics such as industry experience, communication skills, and coaching ability become crucial factors in facilitating observational learning and shaping the entrepreneurial behaviors and outcomes of adult learners.

Social Capital Theory

This theory, rooted in the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), focuses on the value derived from social relationships and networks. In the entrepreneurial context, social capital refers to the resources embedded in social relationships that individuals can access and leverage to achieve their goals. Mentorship relationships represent a form of social capital, wherein mentors provide access to valuable resources, information, and opportunities that can enhance the entrepreneurial success of adult learners (Klyver, Hindle, & Meyer, 2016). Mentor characteristics such as network size, reputation, and industry connections contribute to the social capital available to adult learners, thereby influencing their ability to mobilize resources, navigate challenges, and capitalize on opportunities in entrepreneurship.

Method and Materials

A comprehensive Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted to answer the research questions. SLR is a method of gathering appropriate data on a certain topic that meets pre-determined eligibility criteria (Charles-Owaba, 2024). This study only looked at journal publications published between 2010 and 2024; no older articles were included. The preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) approach analyzed the collected journal articles. PRISMA establishes a standardized, peer-reviewed methodology that employs guideline checklists to contribute to the revision process's quality assurance and replicability (Conde et al., 2020; Moher et al., 2015). PRISMA is based on four steps: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Identification is the first phase. These steps are detailed in the sub-sections that follow. This technique was chosen because it can assist us in synthesizing important journal publications. By following PRISMA guidelines, an accurate search for best practices in impact of mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners was conducted. **Figure 2** displays the PRISMA flow chart in this study adapted and modified from Moher et al. (2009).

Systematic Review Process

Identification

The search took place on ScienceDirect, Scopus, Springer Link, ProQuest, and EBSCO Host. Three main search terms based on our fundamental research topics: mentor characteristics, entrepreneurial success and adult learners. A list of synonyms and alternate terms based on the most popular search terms were compiled.

Therefore, we expanded our search terms and strategies in exploring as many potentially relevant studies as possible. To search, a key word search term that was created by combining the words discovered was used as follows: TITLE-ABS-KEY. Through ProQuest, EBSCOHost, ScienceDirect, Springer, Scopus, 864 results were identified using search strategies, while additional papers (n=20) were identified from other sources. As a result, a total of 909 journal articles had been classified at this stage in the process.

Screening

As displayed the selection process followed the PRISMA principles (Moher et al., 2009). A variety of inclusion and exclusion criteria in this approach was used. There were no systematic review articles or books, book chapters, or conference proceedings included in the selection of literature. Concentrating on English-language journal articles made it less likely that complex or uncertain translations would be required. Then, we looked at articles published within the previous fourteen years (between 2010 and 2024). There were no exclusions for specific countries or regions. In the final stage of the screening process, we focused attention on publications that contained at least one reference to adult education. Following the screening

phase, 55 articles were identified as duplicates which leaves the process with 854 articles.

Eligibility

As illustrated, the eligibility phase resulted from incomplete articles. First, journal articles that did not meet the criteria for best practices in adult learners were rejected. Then, to ensure that all 854 articles fit the study's selection criteria and objectives, each article's title, abstract, methodology, results, and discussion were thoroughly reviewed. At this point, 824 articles have been rejected because they do not fully explain ethical considerations of in adult learners or do not clearly explain and review the findings data in the study findings section. As a result, 30 articles were selected for publication in the final stage of the review process.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

After gathering all of the results from all identified sources, the selection criteria such as timeline, document type, language, and subject area to filter out the articles that were not relevant to our research was used. When selecting pieces for inclusion and exclusion, the inclusion and exclusion criteria must be clearly defined to ensure that the studies selected are relevant to the primary research purpose. It was determined that 30 articles were relevant, and the full-text articles of these publications were obtained.

Results and Findings

Specific characteristics and qualities exhibited by mentors that are perceived as most influential in facilitating entrepreneurial success among adult learners

Thematic analysis of the specific characteristics and qualities exhibited by mentors that are perceived as most influential in facilitating entrepreneurial success among adult learners reveals several key themes.

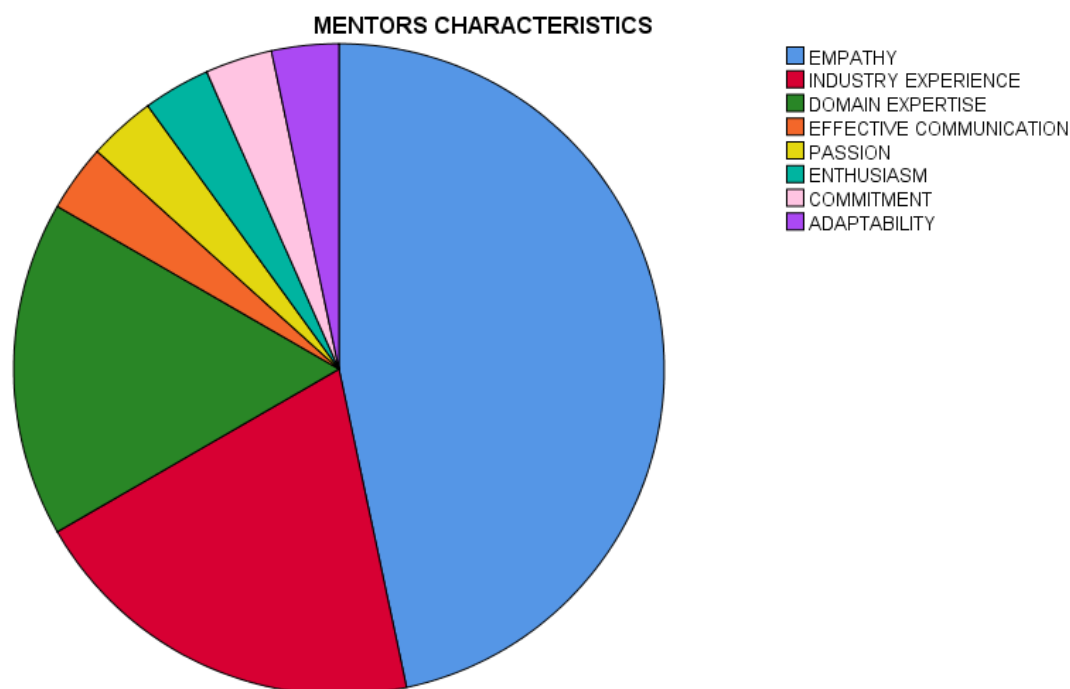


Figure 1: Pie Chart showing the common themes in Mentor Characteristics

Firstly, empathy and understanding emerge as critical mentor characteristics. Mentors who demonstrate empathy can relate to the challenges faced by adult learners, offering emotional support and encouragement (Allen et al., 2018). This understanding foster trust and rapport,

creating a supportive environment where adult learners feel comfortable discussing their concerns and seeking guidance.

Secondly, industry experience and domain expertise are essential qualities that mentors bring to the table. Mentors with relevant industry experience can provide valuable insights into market dynamics, regulatory requirements, and industry best practices (Klyver, Hindle, & Meyer, 2016). Additionally, mentors with domain expertise offer specialized knowledge and technical skills that are indispensable for the success of entrepreneurial ventures.

Effective communication emerges as another crucial theme in mentorship. Mentors who possess strong communication skills can convey complex ideas clearly and concisely, facilitating meaningful discussions and knowledge exchange (Hsieh & Tsai, 2017). Moreover, active listening skills enable mentors to understand the unique needs and aspirations of adult learners, tailoring their guidance to suit individual circumstances.

Passion and enthusiasm for entrepreneurship are also significant mentor characteristics. Mentors who exhibit genuine passion for their work can inspire and motivate adult learners to pursue their entrepreneurial goals with vigor and determination (Clarysse et al., 2014). Additionally, mentors who are committed to their mentees' success invest time and effort in nurturing their talents and fostering a supportive mentorship relationship.

Furthermore, adaptability emerges as a crucial quality in mentorship. Mentors who can adapt their approach to accommodate the diverse needs and learning styles of adult learners are better equipped to provide personalized guidance and support (Allen et al., 2018). This flexibility enables mentors to tailor their mentorship strategies to align with the evolving needs and goals of their mentees.

The specific characteristics and qualities exhibited by mentors that are perceived as most influential in facilitating entrepreneurial success among adult learners encompass empathy, industry experience, domain expertise, effective communication, passion, enthusiasm, commitment, and adaptability. These themes highlight the multifaceted nature of mentorship and underscore the importance of mentors in providing guidance, support, and resources that empower adult learners to succeed in entrepreneurship. Understanding these key characteristics is essential for designing mentorship programs that maximize the impact of mentorship on the entrepreneurial journey of adult learners.

The impact of mentor experience, including industry knowledge, entrepreneurial background, and mentoring expertise, on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners

A thematic analysis of the impact of mentor experience, including industry knowledge, entrepreneurial background, and mentoring expertise, on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners reveals several key themes.

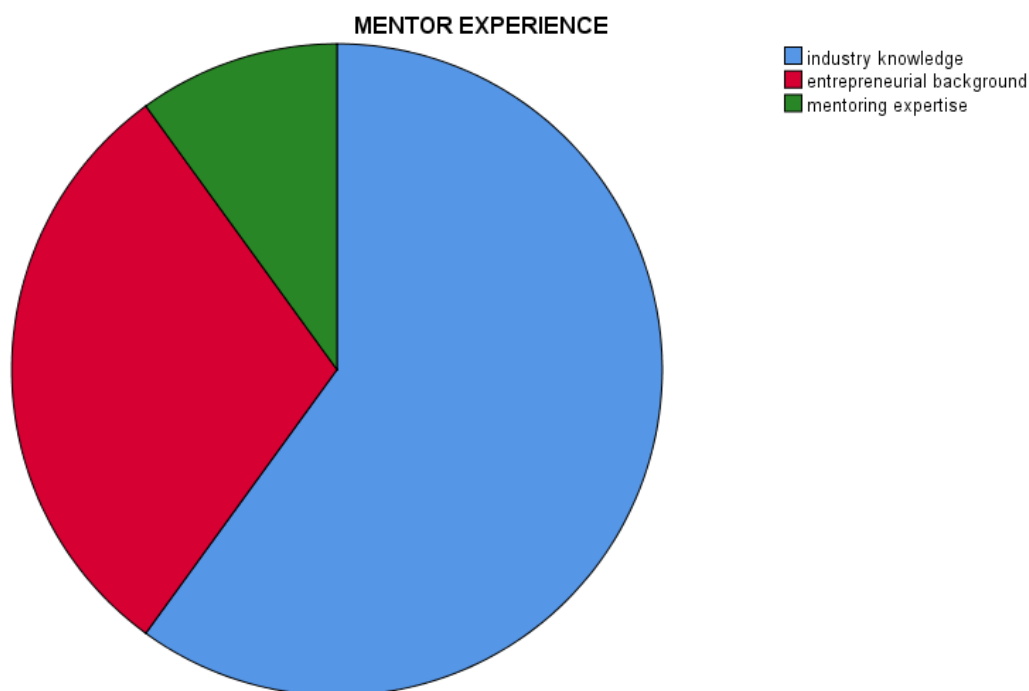


Figure 2: Pie Chart showing the common themes in Mentor Experience

Firstly, mentor experience emerges as a critical factor influencing entrepreneurial success. Mentors with extensive experience in relevant industries can provide valuable insights into market trends, customer behaviors, and industry-specific challenges (Klyver, Hindle, & Meyer, 2016). This industry knowledge enables mentors to offer practical advice and guidance tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of adult learners, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions and capitalize on opportunities.

Secondly, mentor entrepreneurial background plays a significant role in shaping the success of adult learners. Mentors who have successfully navigated the entrepreneurial journey themselves can offer firsthand insights into the realities of starting and growing a business (Allen et al., 2018). This experiential knowledge allows mentors to anticipate potential pitfalls, share personal anecdotes, and provide practical strategies for overcoming obstacles, thereby increasing the likelihood of entrepreneurial success for adult learners.

Furthermore, mentoring expertise emerges as a crucial theme in facilitating entrepreneurial success among adult learners. Mentors with strong mentoring skills can effectively guide and support adult learners through the complexities of entrepreneurship (Hsieh & Tsai, 2017). This includes providing constructive feedback, fostering critical thinking, and empowering adult learners to take ownership of their entrepreneurial endeavors. Additionally, mentors with mentoring expertise can create a supportive and nurturing mentorship environment conducive to learning and growth.

Moreover, the combination of mentor experience, industry knowledge, entrepreneurial background, and mentoring expertise synergistically contributes to the entrepreneurial success of adult learners. Mentors who possess a diverse range of skills and experiences can offer comprehensive guidance and support that addresses the multifaceted challenges of entrepreneurship (Clarysse et al., 2014). This holistic approach to mentorship enhances the

overall effectiveness of mentorship interventions and maximizes the impact on the entrepreneurial outcomes of adult learners.

Mentor experience, including industry knowledge, entrepreneurial background, and mentoring expertise, plays a crucial role in facilitating entrepreneurial success among adult learners. Mentors who possess these qualities can provide valuable insights, practical advice, and emotional support that empower adult learners to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship and achieve their goals.

Mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms influence the effectiveness of mentorship relationships in promoting entrepreneurial success among adult learners

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurial success, particularly among adult learners who may be navigating career transitions or pursuing new ventures later in life. Mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms significantly influence the effectiveness of these relationships, impacting the development of skills, knowledge acquisition, and overall entrepreneurial outcomes.

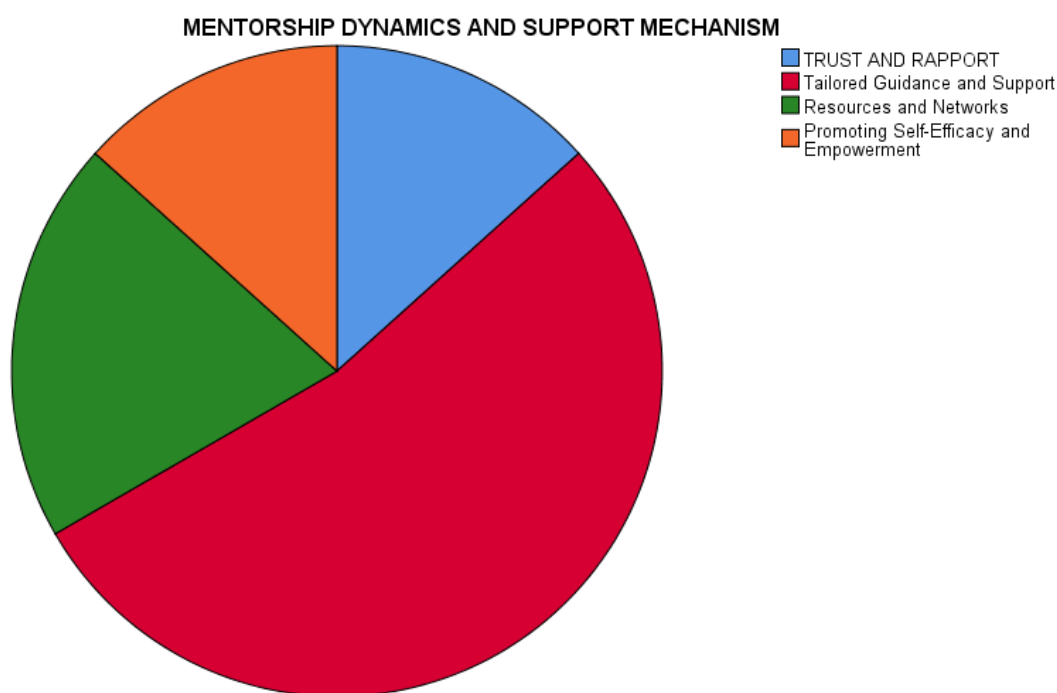


Figure 3: Pie Chart showing the common themes in Mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms

Trust and rapport between mentors and mentees are essential for effective mentorship (Haggard, 2019). In the context of adult learners, who often bring diverse experiences and perspectives to the table, building trust is crucial for open communication and learning. Mentors who establish trust create an environment where adult learners feel comfortable seeking guidance, sharing challenges, and experimenting with new ideas (Creswell, 2014). Trust enables mentors to provide constructive feedback and challenge mentees to grow, fostering resilience and adaptability in the face of entrepreneurial challenges.

Effective mentorship involves providing tailored guidance and support that meets the unique needs of individual mentees (Chao et al., 2020). For adult learners pursuing entrepreneurship, mentors who understand their background, goals, and learning preferences can offer targeted

support that accelerates their entrepreneurial journey. This may include assistance with business planning, networking opportunities, or emotional support during periods of uncertainty (Allen et al., 2018). Tailored guidance ensures that mentorship relationships remain relevant and impactful, maximizing the potential for entrepreneurial success among adult learners.

Mentors often serve as gatekeepers to valuable resources and networks that can significantly benefit adult learners in their entrepreneurial endeavors (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Whether through introductions to industry contacts, access to funding opportunities, or sharing of relevant knowledge and expertise, mentors play a critical role in expanding the social capital of their mentees (Bakker et al., 2019). By leveraging these resources and networks, adult learners can overcome barriers to entry, access new markets, and accelerate the growth of their ventures, ultimately enhancing their chances of entrepreneurial success.

Effective mentorship empowers adult learners to develop self-efficacy—the belief in their ability to succeed in entrepreneurial pursuits (Bandura, 1997). Mentors who provide encouragement, affirmation, and opportunities for skill development contribute to the growth of self-efficacy among their mentees (Lent et al., 2016). Through challenging assignments, exposure to real-world experiences, and recognition of achievements, mentors instill confidence in adult learners, enabling them to take risks, pursue opportunities, and overcome setbacks with resilience and determination.

Conclusion

The impact of mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners cannot be overstated. Through the lens of mentorship dynamics and support mechanisms, it becomes evident that mentors possess unique traits and qualities that significantly influence the outcomes of mentorship relationships. Factors such as trustworthiness, expertise, accessibility, and empathy are crucial in shaping the effectiveness of mentors in guiding adult learners through their entrepreneurial journey.

Moreover, the ability of mentors to provide tailored guidance, access to resources, and empowerment contributes to the development of key entrepreneurial skills and competencies among adult learners. As adult learners navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship, mentors serve as invaluable allies, offering support, encouragement, and practical insights derived from their own experiences. By understanding and leveraging mentor characteristics, adult learners can enhance their entrepreneurial success, capitalize on opportunities, and overcome challenges with confidence and resilience.

Recommendations

The recommendations based on the impact of mentor characteristics on the entrepreneurial success of adult learners:

1. Institutions and programs facilitating mentorship for adult learners should prioritize the matching process by carefully considering mentor characteristics.
2. Investing in mentor training and development programs is essential for enhancing mentor effectiveness. These programs should focus on equipping mentors with the necessary skills and competencies to support adult learners effectively.
3. Institutions should actively promote diversity and inclusion within their mentorship programs by fostering a diverse mentor pool. This includes recruiting mentors from various

backgrounds, industries, and demographic groups to reflect the diversity of adult learners' experiences and perspectives.

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