

Building A Resilient Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (The Role of Mentorship and Networking in Rivers State)

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of mentorship and networking in building a resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem in Rivers State, Nigeria, focusing on their contributions to sustainable business communities. Employing a qualitative research design, primary data were collected from 120 participants through structured questionnaires. Respondents included local entrepreneurs, mentors, and network facilitators, selected using purposive sampling. The questionnaires incorporated both closed and open-ended questions aimed at understanding mentorship's impact on resilience and networking's role in fostering business sustainability. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), employing descriptive statistics to determine the frequency and percentage of responses, with themes such as "Knowledge Transfer," "Resource Access," "Community Support," and "Resilience" identified for further interpretation. The reliability of the data collection tool was confirmed with a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.83, indicating strong internal consistency. The results demonstrated that mentorship significantly contributes to entrepreneurial resilience. Nearly all respondents reported receiving mentorship and acknowledged its positive impact on navigating challenges, adaptability, and overall business success. Additionally, the most recommended mentorship is a key strategy for fostering resilience. Networking was also found to be vital, with a majority indicating active participation and recognizing its role in establishing partnerships, facilitating knowledge exchange, and ensuring long-term business sustainability. However, challenges related to resource access were evident, as most participants struggled with securing financial resources, despite relatively better access to material resources. Furthermore, a gap was identified in the availability of support programs aimed at facilitating resource access. Community support was highly valued, with the majority affirming its role in overcoming business challenges and promoting collaboration. These findings highlight the need for targeted initiatives to expand mentorship programs, strengthen networking opportunities, improve resource access, and enhance community support systems. Such efforts are crucial for building a more resilient and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Rivers State.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Mentorship, Networking, Resilience, Business Growth, Rivers State

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial ecosystems are essential foundations for fostering innovation, economic development, and competitiveness in both developed and developing regions. These ecosystems, which are made up of interrelated networks for organizations, individuals, and resources, offer SMEs a supportive setting in which to develop and prosper. In most economies, SMEs make up the bulk of enterprises, creating a large number of jobs and stimulating innovation. SMEs provide for up to 80% of jobs in Sub-Saharan Africa, and they have a significant influence on economic growth, particularly in cities (Adedoyin et al., 2021). As a result, a region's economic and social resilience is directly impacted by how well its entrepreneurial ecosystem functions.

Rivers State, Nigeria, has a particularly interesting entrepreneurial landscape. Situated in the oil-rich Niger Delta, Rivers State has traditionally relied heavily on the oil and gas sector, which accounts for a significant portion of Nigeria's national revenue. Although the oil industry has played a significant role in the economic importance of Rivers State, it has also resulted in an excessive dependence on one industry, which has hindered the growth of a diversified economy. Because of this reliance on oil, non-oil-based SMEs now find it difficult to get the infrastructure, capital, and support they need to thrive. As a result, Rivers State urgently needs diverse economic growth, which can only be attained by empowering and assisting its entrepreneurial environment.

Despite the potential, Rivers State entrepreneurs confront significant obstacles that compromise the durability and resilience of their companies. According to studies, having access to mentorship is essential for successful entrepreneurial ecosystems since it gives advice, develops skills, and offers insights into tackling the particular difficulties of managing a business. For example, mentorship has been linked to better strategic planning and decision-making, assisting business owners in avoiding typical mistakes that frequently result in company failure (Yani & Zaakiyyah, 2024).

Regions with organized mentorship programs reported a 35% higher company survival rate among SMEs in the first five years of operation than regions without such programs, according to a recent assessment of emerging countries (Anjorin et al., 2024). However, there aren't enough mentorship programs at Rivers State that are specifically designed to meet the demands of its entrepreneurial community. Many local business owners lack access to seasoned mentors who can offer guidance relevant to their industry or assist in navigating the intricacies of running a company in a demanding setting.

Networking is another crucial component of entrepreneurial resiliency. Access to markets, capital, and information exchange are all made easier through networking, and these are essential for the long-term viability of any organization. Formal networking opportunities generate a community of support where entrepreneurs may share ideas, work together on projects, and gain knowledge from each other's experiences in well-established entrepreneurial ecosystems. According to research, SMEs that actively network have faster rates of revenue development and are more resilient to economic setbacks (Abu-Rumman, Shraah, Al-Madi & Alfalah, 2020). By putting entrepreneurs in touch with important stakeholders like suppliers, investors, and legislators, networking also significantly improves business resilience. However, Rivers State's

underdeveloped networking systems restrict entrepreneurs' ability to network with other professionals in their fields. Because of the lack of networking infrastructure, entrepreneurs operate in a remote setting without the assistance they need to grow their businesses or change course in reaction to changes in the market.

Furthermore, these difficulties are made worse by structural and infrastructural obstacles. Poor road infrastructure, erratic power supplies, and restricted access to funding are recurring problems that raise the expenses and hazards of operating a business in Rivers State. According to SMEs in Rivers State, for example, regular power outages result in an average 25% drop in monthly revenues since more money has to be spent on fuel generators, which lowers profit margins (Olajide & Ibe, 2021). Furthermore, inadequate road infrastructure limits a company's client base and growth potential by making it difficult for them to access markets outside of their surrounding area.

Connecting with mentors and other business owners through organized programs and networking events becomes even more crucial in such a setting because it gives entrepreneurs a network of support to exchange resources, pick up coping mechanisms, and access alternate growth prospects.

The current study emphasizes how important networking and mentoring are to bolster the resilience of regional business owners in Rivers State. This study offers insights into practical tactics that have the potential to revolutionize Rivers State's entrepreneurship scene by examining these two factors. Evidence already in existence supports the beneficial effects of mentoring on company success; research indicates that through skill development, strategic direction, and assistance with problem-solving, mentorship can lower business failure rates by as much as 30% (Kauffman Foundation, 2022). Similar to this, networking makes it possible to access resources, possibilities for collaboration, and wider markets—all of which are essential for creating a sustainable entrepreneurial community (Kumar, 2024). When combined, these elements can enable Rivers State's business owners to get past the obstacles they presently encounter and promote a more resilient and sustainable ecology.

This study aims to address the gap in mentorship and networking within Rivers State's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The study aims to offer a framework for programs and policies that could assist regional business owners by concentrating on the transformative functions of these elements. The socioeconomic development of Rivers State as a whole, as well as the success of individual businesses, depends on the establishment of a robust entrepreneurial environment. Initiatives for networking and mentorship have the potential to improve economic diversity, lower business failure rates, and eventually increase the region's economic resilience if they are carried out well. The goal of this project is to help Rivers State's entrepreneurial community have a more resilient, sustainable, and economically diverse future by providing targeted support for networking and mentoring.

1.2 Problem Statement

The entrepreneurial ecosystem in Rivers State faces a range of interconnected challenges that weaken business resilience and limit economic diversification. Two of the most important of these

are the scarcity of networking opportunities and mentorship programs, both of which are necessary to create a positive work atmosphere. According to the 2022 World Bank research, areas with strong mentorship programs had 35% better rates of business survival because mentorship gives entrepreneurs vital knowledge and abilities. However, there is a dearth of organized mentorship in Rivers State, which forces many business owners to face obstacles on their own without the help of seasoned industry professionals.

The lack of established forums for entrepreneurs to work together, exchange resources, and establish alliances that promote the lifespan of their business further limits networking opportunities. Additionally, studies show that power outages alone lower SME revenues by roughly 25% per month, highlighting the impact of infrastructure deficiencies, such as unstable power supplies and bad road conditions, on operational costs for SMEs (Wolff, Pauling, Keck & Baumbach, 2020). A large percentage of SMEs fail as a result of this fragmented environment, which is greatly impacted by the dominant oil sector. Of these, 60% close within the first three years as a result of these compounding difficulties (Charfeddine & Barkat, 2020).

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to address these challenges with the following objectives:

1. To examine the impact of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience.
2. To analyze the role of networking in building sustainable business communities.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines key concepts and theories related to entrepreneurial ecosystems and resilience, mentorship in entrepreneurship, and the role of networking in fostering business resilience. It also identifies gaps in existing research, particularly regarding the unique challenges within Rivers State, Nigeria. The review is structured to provide a conceptual foundation, explore theoretical perspectives, and analyze existing research on mentorship and networking, concluding with identified research gaps that this study aims to address.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Resilience: Overview of Concepts and Significance

Complex networks of interrelated components make up entrepreneurial ecosystems, which together provide an atmosphere that is favourable to the establishment, expansion, and sustainability of business endeavours. Ermawati (2023) posits that entrepreneurial ecosystems comprise the actors, resources, and processes that facilitate entrepreneurship, including market dynamics, government agencies, financial institutions, and educational institutions. By offering a helpful infrastructure as well as access to the networks, resources, and expertise necessary for creativity and competitiveness, these ecosystems promote the expansion of businesses (Sotirofski, 2024). Contrarily, entrepreneurial resilience is the ability of entrepreneurs and their businesses to adjust to shifting conditions, endure hardship, and continue operations in the face of uncertainty (Montoro-Fernández, Cárdenas-Gutiérrez & Bernal-Guerrero, 2022). Strong mentoring programs, easily accessible networking opportunities, and a supportive regulatory environment are frequent characteristics of entrepreneurial ecosystems that promote resilience (Wurth, Stam & Spigel,

2023).

In developing economies, where SMEs confront particular difficulties because of political unpredictability, limited infrastructure, and unstable economic conditions, resilient ecosystems are particularly important. For instance, SMEs make up roughly 96% of firms in Nigeria; however, the ecosystem that supports these businesses is dispersed, which hinders entrepreneurs' capacity to grow and maintain their operations (Agunbiade, Afolabi, Olaiya & Omotayo, 2020). According to research, areas with robust entrepreneurial ecosystems have lower rates of business failure and faster rates of economic growth. This is because ecosystems are essential for providing entrepreneurs with the resources and tools they need to succeed in challenging business environments (Wurth, Stam & Spigel, 2023). In Rivers State, Nigeria, where economic activities are predominantly centred on the oil sector, the entrepreneurial ecosystem lacks diversity, making it challenging for non-oil SMEs to thrive.

Mentorship in Entrepreneurship: Theoretical Perspectives on Mentorship

A key element of entrepreneurial ecosystems, mentoring is well known for its potential to improve the sustainability and resilience of businesses. According to theory, mentoring in entrepreneurship is based on several theories, such as the social learning theory, which contends that people pick up knowledge by watching the actions of others (Bandura, 1977). Mentoring helps transfer information in the field of entrepreneurship by providing seasoned businesspeople with insights, practical knowledge, and skills. Mentors help entrepreneurs overcome obstacles by providing strategic advice on resource management, decision-making, and problem-solving (Mouammer & Bazan, 2021).

Research by Nate, Grecu, Stavvytskyy, and Kharlamova (2022) indicates that mentorship offers entrepreneurs emotional support, which is essential for fostering resilience and self-assurance. In high-risk settings, like the Nigerian economy, where entrepreneurs must deal with uncertainty surrounding infrastructure, funding, and regulations, mentoring can have an especially significant impact on resilience. According to a study by Osabohien, Worgwu, and Al-Faryan (2024), mentorship programs in emerging economies have been shown to boost firm survival rates by as much as 30%. This is because mentors assist mentees in navigating regulatory and market conditions. The dearth of organized mentorship programs in Rivers State, however, presents a challenge for business owners who may not have access to knowledgeable advice within the community.

By giving access to networks, funding opportunities, and industry knowledge, formal mentorship programs have also been shown to boost venture growth rates (Yani & Zaakiyyah, 2024). For example, research by Major (2023) highlights two main purposes of mentorship in the corporate world: psychosocial support, which includes boosting confidence and providing emotional support, and career support, which includes counsel and direction. Entrepreneurs who received both forms of mentorships showed more resilience, as seen by a greater capacity to change course and reduce risks, according to an analysis of 50 mentorship programs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Osabohien, Worgwu & Al-Faryan, 2024).

Networking for Business Resilience: Examining the Role of Networking in Fostering Business Sustainability

Another vital component of entrepreneurial ecosystems is networking, which is vital for promoting the resilience and sustainability of businesses. Through networking, business owners can obtain important resources that are necessary for expansion and flexibility, such as financial capital, market intelligence, and strategic alliances. Theoretically, Granovetter's (1973) "strength of weak ties" theory contends that relationships with people outside of one's inner social circle, or "weak ties," are frequently more advantageous for gaining access to a variety of opportunities and information. These weak links enable entrepreneurs to access wider networks in entrepreneurial ecosystems, creating opportunities for cooperation, innovation, and market expansion (Fernandes & Ferreira, 2021; Rawhouser et al., 2024).

Because networks make it easier to access resources that might not otherwise be available in emerging economies, the study emphasizes the value of networking in boosting the resilience of SMEs. For example, SMEs with wide networks demonstrated 40% higher growth rates than those with restricted networking activities, according to a study by Eggers, Hatak, Kraus, and Niemand (2017). Additionally, networks allow business owners to exchange experiences, work together to solve shared problems, and create a community of support—all of which are particularly beneficial in areas with unstable economic situations. Because they lack access to support networks that could enable them to adjust and expand in the local market, entrepreneurs in Rivers State are less able to establish these vital relationships, which raises the failure rate of their businesses.

Additionally, it has been demonstrated that networking improves entrepreneurs' access to capital, which is essential for the durability of their businesses. Connected entrepreneurs have a clear advantage because venture capitalists, angel investors, and other funding organizations are more inclined to assist projects within their networks (Svetek, 2022). Research suggests that SMEs with robust networking strategies are 25% more likely to obtain outside finance than stand-alone endeavours (Fadil & St-Pierre, 2021). Additionally, networking encourages cooperation among business owners, opening doors for resource-sharing agreements and joint ventures that can lower operating expenses and boost productivity (Ntamu, Balunywa, Nsereko & Kwemarira, 2023).

Gaps in Literature: Mentorship and Networking in the Context of Rivers State's Ecosystem

Even though networking and mentoring are known to be beneficial for entrepreneurship, little research has been done on the ecosystem in Rivers State, Nigeria. Due to a narrow concentration on oil-based enterprises brought about by the region's economic reliance on oil, non-oil SMEs are underrepresented in both academic study and policy support. As a result, nothing is known about how networking and mentoring initiatives that are adapted to Rivers State's particular socioeconomic setting could improve the sustainability and resilience of entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the majority of previous research on networking and mentoring in entrepreneurial ecosystems has been carried out in developed countries or Western contexts, where the infrastructures necessary for these activities are highly developed (Fernandes & Ferreira, 2021). Contextual studies are scarce in emerging economies, particularly in areas like Rivers State, which limits the findings' applicability and practical insights for stakeholders and policymakers. Furthermore, while research has demonstrated the beneficial effects of networking and mentoring on business resilience, few studies have examined how these elements interact with Niger Delta-specific infrastructure issues like inadequate transportation networks, high operating costs, and limited power supplies. Designing successful treatments that meet the particular requirements of the local ecosystem requires an understanding of these distinctive variables.

In conclusion, the research on the functions of networking and mentoring in building resilience within Rivers State's entrepreneurial ecosystem is severely lacking. Although networking and mentoring are acknowledged as essential components of successful businesses, little is known about how these elements might be used or maximized in areas such as Rivers State, where the entrepreneurial landscape is shaped by particular socioeconomic and infrastructure problems. By investigating the precise effects of networking and mentoring on entrepreneurial resilience in Rivers State, this study aims to close these gaps and add to the larger conversation on assisting SMEs in developing nations. Through this focused exploration, the research aims to provide valuable insights that could inform the development of tailored programs and policies to enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Rivers State.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the impact of mentorship and networking on entrepreneurial resilience within Rivers State, Nigeria, with a focus on how these factors contribute to sustainable business communities. Structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data from network facilitators, mentors, and local business owners. Purposive sampling was used to choose 120 participants, who filled out the questionnaires and gave thorough answers on important topics about networking's function in business sustainability and mentoring's impact on resilience.

To gather information about participants' experiences, opinions, and results related to networking and mentoring, the structured questionnaire had both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Depending on availability and preference, each participant filled out the questionnaire either in person or online. Data on the advantages of mentoring, networking difficulties, and general resilience within the local entrepreneurial ecosystem were gathered through the creation of questions. The study used an organized methodology to examine how networking contributes to the development of sustainable business communities in Rivers State, Nigeria, and how mentoring affects entrepreneurial resilience.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to code and analyze the responses (SPSS). Participants' evaluations of networking and mentoring elements were interpreted using descriptive statistics, such as frequency and percentage. This method made it possible to comprehend broad trends and patterns in the replies, which were grouped into topics including "Community Support,"

"Resilience," "Knowledge Transfer," and "Resource Access." Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the data collection tool's dependability; the coefficient of 0.83 indicated a high degree of internal consistency.

4. RESULTS

This part provides a thorough examination of the study's findings, looking at how networking helps create sustainable business communities in Rivers State and how mentoring affects entrepreneurial resilience. To detect parallels, differences, and original insights, it also incorporates these findings with previously published research, offering a thorough grasp of the variables affecting the entrepreneurial ecosystem in this area.

4.1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Analyzing respondents' demographic profiles is necessary to comprehend their perceptions. This entails figuring out the responsibilities that men and women play in the community that was sampled and assessing how involved they are in the research. As a result, several demographic and socioeconomic traits were examined, including age, gender, occupation, educational background, and so forth.

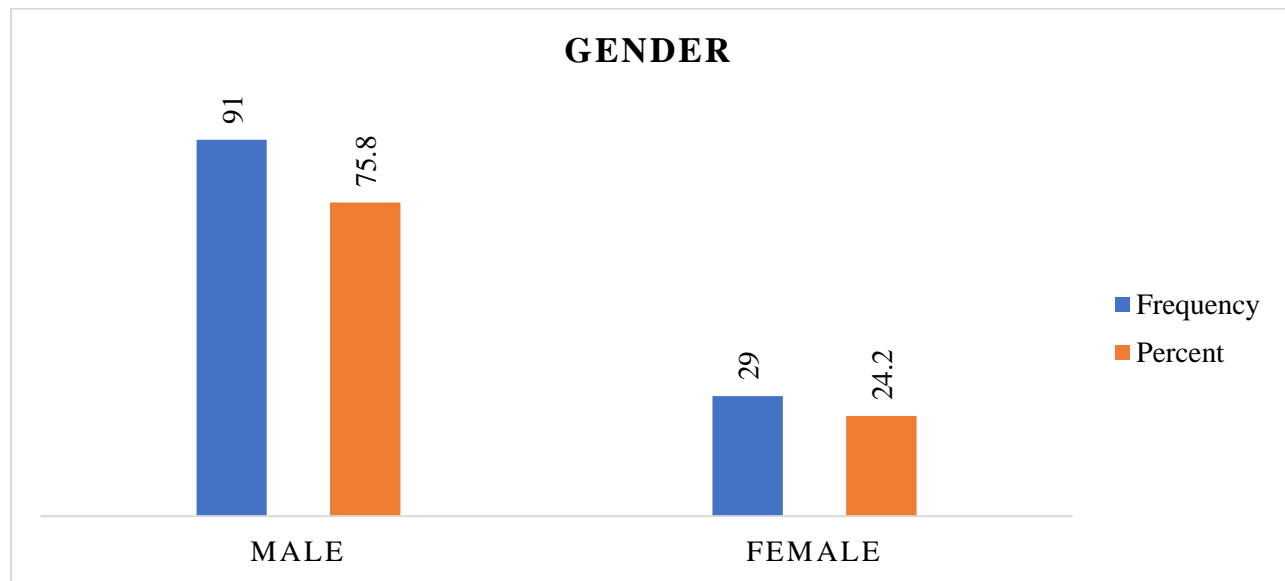


Figure 1 Gender of the respondents

As presented in Figure 1, a total of 120 respondents participated in the study, of which 91 (75.8%) were males and 29 (24.2%) were females. All respondents completed the questionnaire, indicating a predominantly male representation among the sampled population.

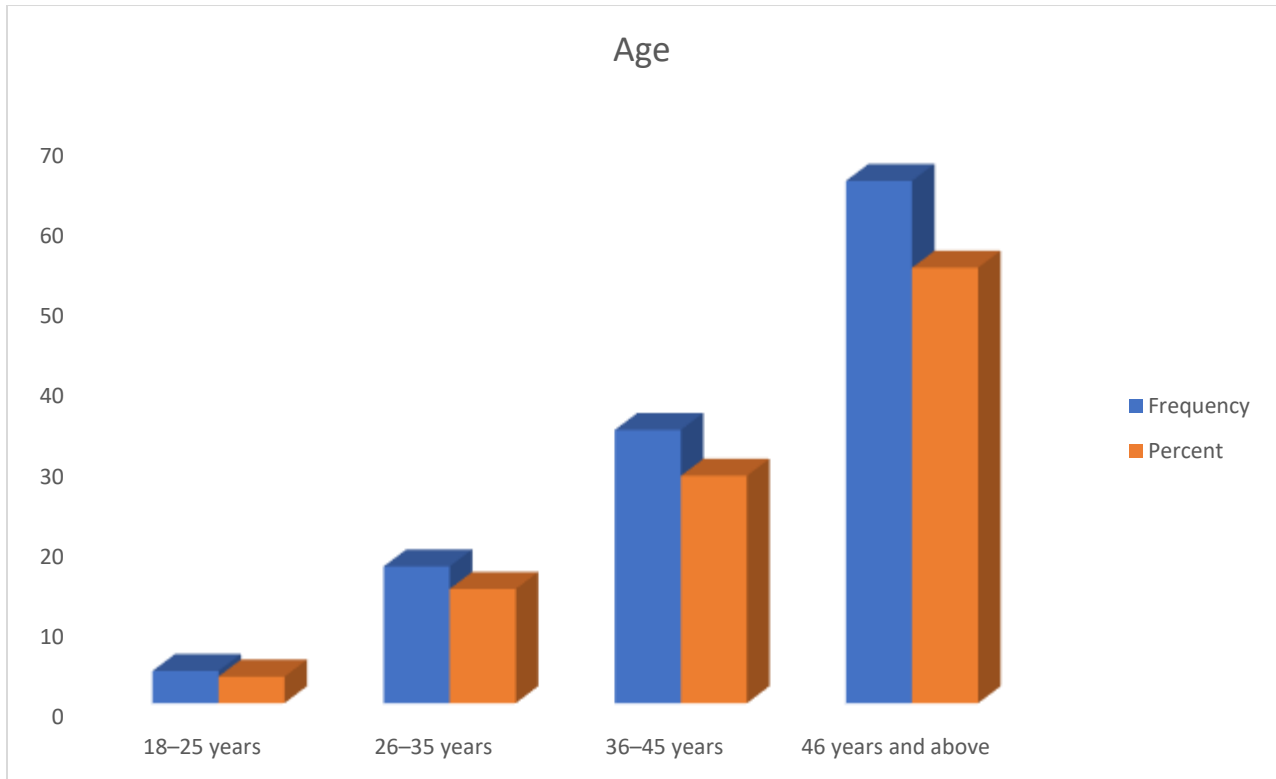


Figure 2 Age of the respondents

Figure 2 illustrates that the majority of respondents were aged 46 years and above (65, 54.2%), followed by those in the 36–45 years age group (34, 28.3%). Respondents aged 26–35 years accounted for 17 (14.2%), while the smallest group, aged 18–25 years, included 4 respondents (3.3%). This distribution indicates a significant concentration of respondents in the older age brackets, particularly those aged 46 years and above.

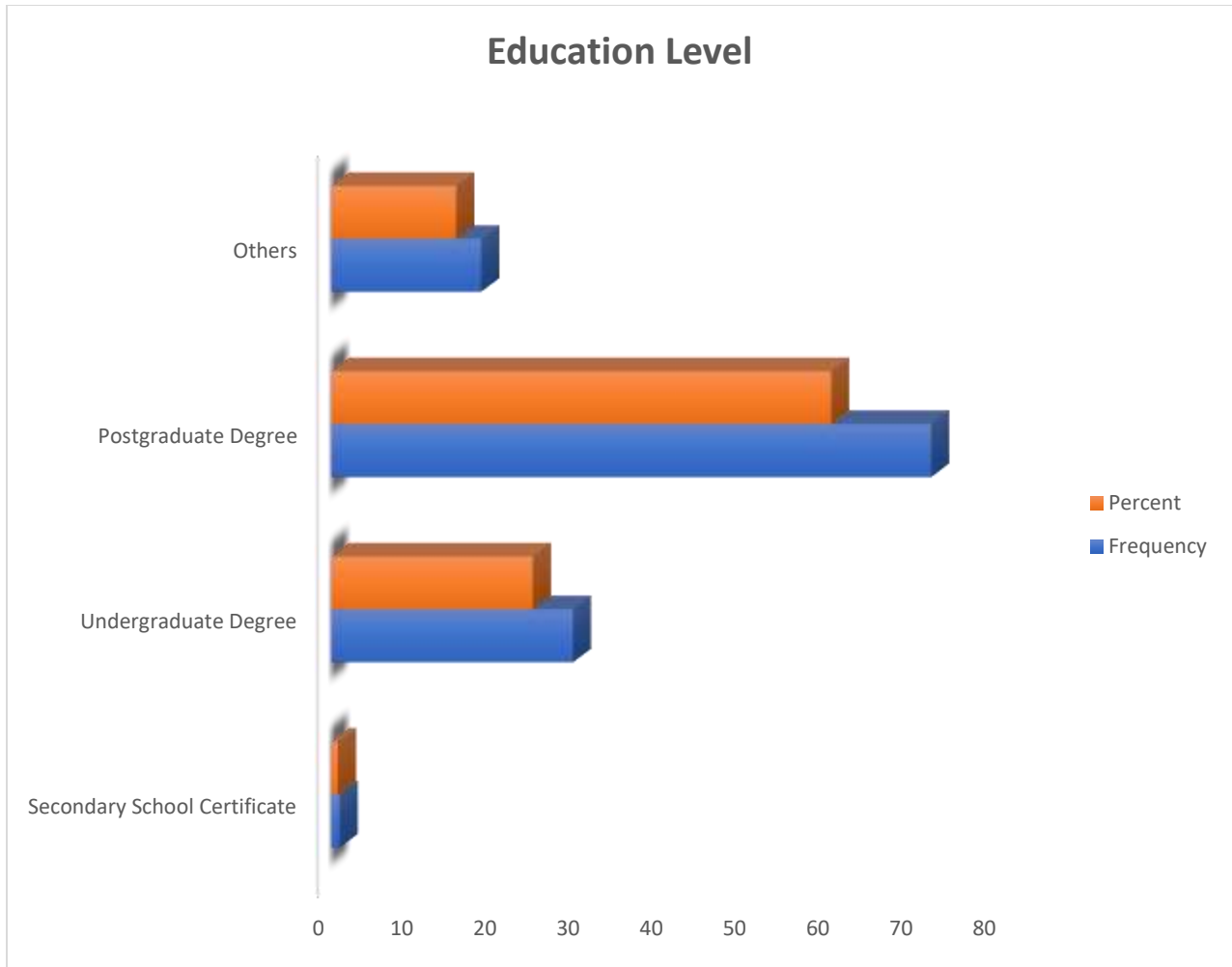


Figure 3 Education level of the respondents

As presented in Figure3, most respondents held a Postgraduate Degree (72, 60.0%), while 29 (24.2%) had an Undergraduate Degree. Respondents with Secondary School Certificates were the least represented (1, 0.8%), and 18 (15.0%) fell under the category of Others. This indicates a highly educated sample population, with a majority having postgraduate qualifications.

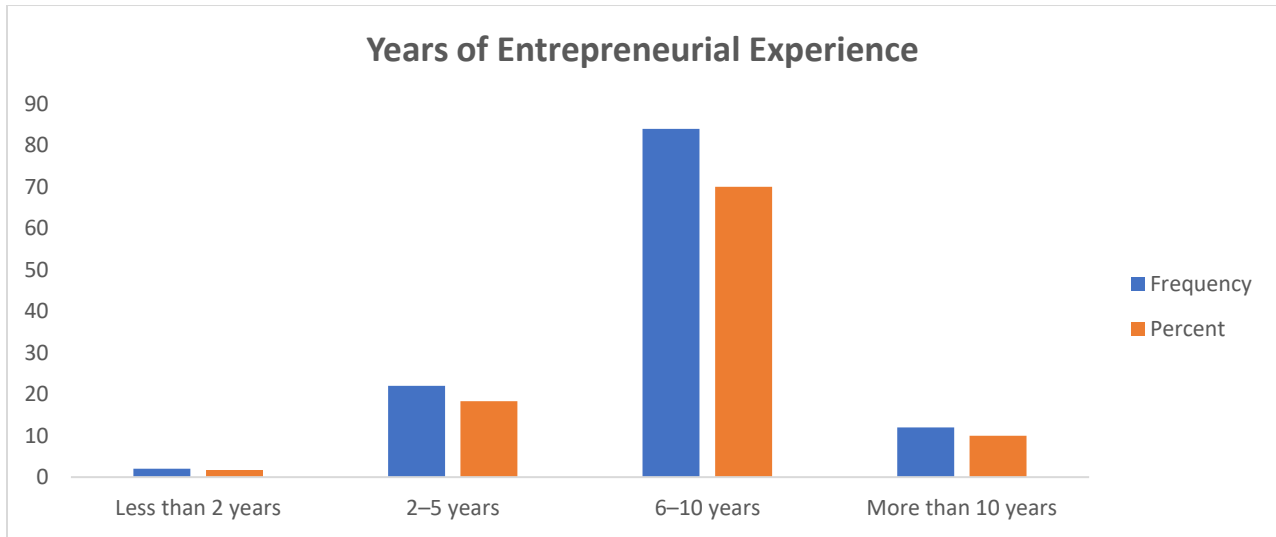


Figure 4 Years of Entrepreneurial Experience

Figure 4 indicates that the largest group of respondents had 6–10 years of entrepreneurial experience (84, 70.0%), followed by those with 2–5 years of experience (22, 18.3%). Respondents with over 10 years of experience made up 12 (10.0%), while the smallest group, those with less than 2 years, comprised 2 (1.7%). This distribution shows a significant concentration of respondents with considerable experience, particularly in the 6–10 years range.

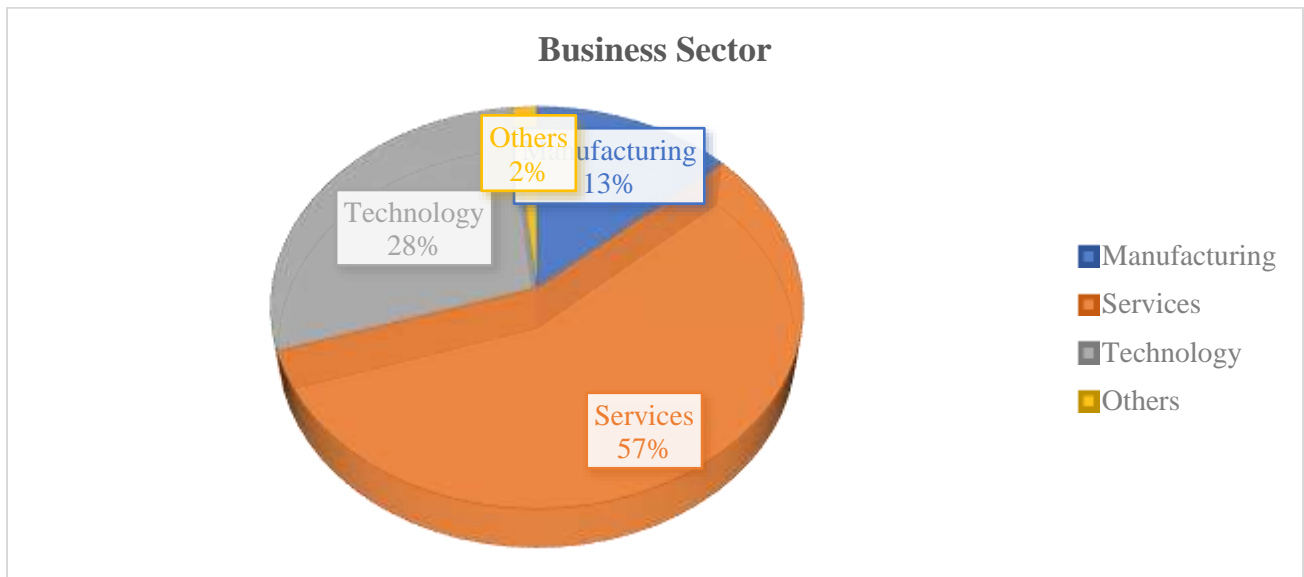


Figure 5 Business Sector

As presented in Figure 5, respondents were primarily engaged in the Services sector (68, 56.7%), followed by the Technology sector (34, 28.3%). The Manufacturing sector accounted for 16 (13.3%), while Others represented a minority of 2 (1.7%). This distribution indicates that the Services sector dominates the entrepreneurial landscape among the sampled population.

Table 1 Respondents' Agreement on the Impact of Mentorship on Entrepreneurial Resilience

S/N			Frequency	Percentage
			(F)	(%)
1	Have you ever received mentorship as an entrepreneur?	Yes	118	98.3%
		No	2	1.7%
2	Do you believe that mentorship has helped you navigate business challenges effectively?	Yes	118	98.3%
		No	2	1.7%
3	Has mentorship improved your ability to adapt to changing business conditions?	Yes	119	99.2%
		No	1	.8%
4	Do you think having a mentor has contributed to your overall business success?	Yes	118	98.3%
		No	2	1.7%
5	Would you recommend mentorship to other entrepreneurs as a resilience-building strategy?	Yes	119	99.2%
		No	1	.8%

From the findings presented in Table 1, the majority of respondents reported positive agreement on the impact of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience. Nearly all respondents (118, 98.3%) indicated they had received mentorship as entrepreneurs, while only 2 (1.7%) had not. Similarly, 118 (98.3%) believed mentorship had effectively helped them navigate business challenges, with only 2 (1.7%) disagreeing. Most respondents (119, 99.2%) agreed that mentorship had improved their ability to adapt to changing business conditions, while only 1 (0.8%) disagreed. Additionally, 118 (98.3%) noted that having a mentor contributed to their overall business success, with just 2 (1.7%) stating otherwise. Finally, nearly all respondents (119, 99.2%) recommended mentorship to other entrepreneurs as a resilience-building strategy, with only 1 (0.8%) disagreeing. These results underscore the overwhelming consensus among respondents regarding the value of mentorship in enhancing entrepreneurial resilience and supporting business success.

Table 2 Respondents' Agreement on the Role of Networking in Building Sustainable Business Communities

S/N			Frequency Percentage	
			(F)	(%)
1	Are you an active participant in business or professional networks?	Yes	109	90.8%
		No	11	9.2%
2	Do you believe networking has helped you establish meaningful business partnerships?	Yes	111	92.5%
		No	9	7.5%
3	Has networking facilitated knowledge sharing within your entrepreneurial community?	Yes	120	100.0%
		No	-	-
4	Do you think networking contributes to the sustainability of your business?	Yes	120	100.0%
		No	-	-
5	Would you consider networking essential for long-term entrepreneurial success?	Yes	120	100.0%
		No	-	-

From the findings presented in Table 2, the majority of respondents demonstrated strong agreement on the role of networking in building sustainable business communities. Most respondents (109, 90.8%) reported being active participants in business or professional networks, while only 11 (9.2%) indicated otherwise. Similarly, 111 (92.5%) believed that networking had helped them establish meaningful business partnerships, with 9 (7.5%) disagreeing.

All respondents (120, 100.0%) affirmed that networking facilitated knowledge sharing within their entrepreneurial communities. Likewise, every respondent (120, 100.0%) agreed that networking contributes to the sustainability of their businesses and that it is essential for long-term entrepreneurial success. These findings highlight the critical role networking plays in fostering collaboration, sharing knowledge, and ensuring the sustainability and long-term success of entrepreneurial ventures.

Table 3 Respondents' Agreement on the Resource Access

S/N			Frequency Percentage	
			(F)	(%)
1	Do you have easy access to financial resources such as loans or grants?	Yes	8	6.7%
		No	112	93.3%
2	Are material resources (e.g., equipment, raw materials) readily available for your business?	Yes	101	84.2%
		No	19	15.8%

3	Do you face frequent challenges in accessing the resources needed to grow your business?	Yes	112	93.3%
		No	8	6.7%
4	Are there sufficient support programs in your area that improve access to essential business resources?	Yes	12	10.0%
		No	108	90.0%

From the findings presented in Table 3, the majority of respondents reported challenges with resource access. Only 8 respondents (6.7%) indicated having easy access to financial resources such as loans or grants, while 112 (93.3%) reported difficulty. Similarly, while most respondents (101, 84.2%) stated that material resources like equipment and raw materials were readily available, 19 (15.8%) disagreed.

A significant proportion of respondents (112, 93.3%) acknowledged facing frequent challenges in accessing resources needed for business growth, with only 8 (6.7%) indicating otherwise. Furthermore, just 12 respondents (10.0%) noted the availability of sufficient support programs to improve access to essential resources, while the majority (108, 90.0%) reported a lack of such programs.

These findings highlight substantial gaps in resource accessibility, particularly in financial and support programs, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address these challenges and support business growth.

Table 4 Respondents' Agreement on the Community Support

S/N		Frequency Percentage		
		(F)	(%)	
1	Do you feel supported by your local entrepreneurial community?	Yes	110	91.7%
		No	10	8.3%
2	Are there regular networking events or forums available in your area for entrepreneurs?	Yes	100	83.3%
		No	20	16.7%
3	Have you collaborated with other entrepreneurs or organizations in your community for business growth?	Yes	120	100.0%
		No	-	-
4	Has community support helped you overcome significant business challenges?	Yes	113	94.2%
		No	7	5.8%

Table 4 highlights respondents' perceptions of community support for entrepreneurship. A majority (110, 91.7%) reported feeling supported by their local entrepreneurial community, while 10 (8.3%) indicated otherwise. Additionally, 100 respondents (83.3%) acknowledged the availability of regular networking events or forums in their area, whereas 20 (16.7%) noted a lack of such opportunities. All respondents (120, 100.0%) affirmed engaging in collaborations with other entrepreneurs or organizations within their community for business growth. Moreover, most respondents (113, 94.2%) stated that community support had helped them address significant

business challenges, with only 7 (5.8%) disagreeing. These findings underscore the importance of community support in promoting entrepreneurial collaboration, providing networking opportunities, and assisting entrepreneurs in overcoming obstacles to enhance business growth.

5. Discussion of Findings

Impact of Mentorship on Entrepreneurial Resilience

The findings revealed that mentorship is crucial for enhancing entrepreneurial resilience. The vast majority of respondents confirmed receiving mentorship and recognized its positive impact. Most respondents agreed that mentorship helped them navigate business challenges effectively, improved their adaptability to changing business conditions, and contributed significantly to their overall business success. Furthermore, nearly all respondents recommended mentorship as a resilience-building strategy for other entrepreneurs. These results align with previous studies, such as Yani & Zaakiyyah (2024) and Osabohien, Worgwu & Al-Faryan (2024), which highlighted the importance of mentorship in fostering business sustainability and growth. The findings suggest the need for structured mentorship programs to ensure broader access, particularly for entrepreneurs in underserved areas.

Role of Networking in Building Sustainable Business Communities

Networking was found to be a critical component of building sustainable entrepreneurial communities. A significant proportion of respondents reported active participation in business or professional networks and credited networking with helping them establish meaningful business partnerships. All respondents agreed that networking facilitated knowledge sharing, enhanced business sustainability, and was essential for long-term entrepreneurial success. These findings are consistent with Gqwabaza & Maqoqa (2024), who emphasized the role of networking in fostering collaboration, innovation, and resource sharing. The results underline the importance of expanding access to networking platforms and forums to strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Resource Access

Resource access posed significant challenges for respondents. Most reported difficulty in obtaining financial resources such as loans or grants, although a majority indicated that material resources were more accessible. Many respondents acknowledged frequent challenges in acquiring the resources necessary for business growth, and most noted a lack of sufficient support programs in their areas. These findings align with Agrawal, Samadhiya, Banaitis & Kumar (2024), who identified resource access as a key barrier to entrepreneurial success. The results suggest a need for targeted interventions, including expanded financial support programs and improved infrastructure to facilitate resource availability.

Community Support

Community support emerged as a significant factor in entrepreneurial success. A majority of respondents felt supported by their local entrepreneurial community, with many acknowledging the availability of regular networking events. All respondents reported collaborating with other entrepreneurs or organizations, and most stated that community support helped them address significant business challenges. These findings are consistent with Marlina, R. (2024), who highlighted the importance of community-driven initiatives in overcoming entrepreneurial barriers. The results indicate the need for policy-driven strategies to enhance community support through events, mentorship programs, and collaborative forums. The findings collectively emphasize the roles of mentorship, networking, resource access, and community support in promoting entrepreneurial resilience and sustainability. Addressing resource access challenges and strengthening community-driven initiatives will further bolster the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of mentorship, networking, resource access, and community support in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and building sustainable business communities. The findings reveal that mentorship significantly enhances entrepreneurs' ability to navigate challenges, adapt to dynamic business environments, and achieve overall success. Networking, on the other hand, facilitates knowledge sharing, fosters collaboration, and sustains entrepreneurial ventures over the long term. However, significant gaps were identified in resource accessibility, particularly in financial and support programs. While material resources were relatively accessible, financial constraints and inadequate support initiatives posed substantial barriers to entrepreneurial growth. Community support emerged as a critical enabler of success, offering collaboration opportunities and helping entrepreneurs overcome key challenges. Collectively, these findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to address resource limitations, expand mentorship opportunities, and strengthen community support systems. Such efforts will enhance the resilience and sustainability of entrepreneurial ecosystems.

7. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Mentorship programs should be expanded to provide accessible support for entrepreneurs in various sectors, including pairing emerging business owners with experienced mentors.
2. Networking opportunities should be strengthened through regular events, workshops, and industry-specific forums to promote collaboration and knowledge sharing among entrepreneurs.
3. Resource access should be improved by increasing the availability of grants, low-interest loans, and crowdfunding options, as well as establishing government-backed programs to enhance access to equipment and infrastructure.

4. Community support systems should be enhanced by setting up local business hubs, incubators, and innovation centres while encouraging public-private partnerships to support entrepreneurs in underserved areas.
5. Policy advocacy should focus on simplifying financial access, reducing bureaucratic barriers for small businesses, and monitoring programs to ensure their effectiveness and impact on entrepreneurial resilience.

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