

EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT MENTORSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL GROWTH IN ADULT LEARNERS

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Abstract

The study examined emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study aimed to assess the level of emotional intelligence among mentors, explore the impact of emotional intelligence on mentoring effectiveness, and identify areas requiring improvement. The population for the study consisted of mentors working with adult learners across various institutions in Bayelsa State. A sample of 100 mentors was selected using purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire titled "Emotional Intelligence and Mentoring Questionnaire," which was developed and validated by experts, with a reliability coefficient of 0.85 established using the Cronbach Alpha Formula. Data analysis involved calculating mean and standard deviation to address the research questions. The findings revealed that mentors in Bayelsa State exhibit a low level of emotional intelligence, which limits their ability to effectively manage emotions, empathize with mentees, and foster supportive mentoring relationships. The study recommends implementing emotional intelligence training programs for mentors and enhancing support systems for adult learners to improve the overall mentoring experience and outcomes.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Mentors, Adult Learners, Challenges

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has become a critical driver of economic development and societal progress in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. Among adult learners, entrepreneurship serves as a pathway for financial independence, self-actualization, and community development (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2021). However, the success of entrepreneurial ventures is often influenced by various factors, one of which is the role of mentors. Mentorship provides guidance, encouragement, and critical support for entrepreneurial endeavors. Within this dynamic, the emotional intelligence of mentors has emerged as a crucial determinant of entrepreneurial outcomes, particularly among adult learners. Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to an individual's ability to identify, understand, and manage their own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995). This skillset is essential in fostering effective interpersonal relationships, a critical component in mentorship. Mentors with high EI are better equipped to navigate the emotional complexities of their mentees, providing tailored support that enhances entrepreneurial capacity. Research suggests that emotional intelligence not only facilitates better communication but also fosters resilience, motivation, and problem-solving abilities among mentees (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Boyatzis et al., 2013). In the context of adult learners, who often juggle multiple responsibilities, the EI of mentors becomes even more significant. Bayelsa State, situated in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, presents a

unique context for examining this phenomenon. The state's economy is predominantly oil-dependent, with limited diversification into other sectors. However, recent efforts to promote entrepreneurship have gained traction, particularly among adult learners who seek alternative income sources and career pathways (Ekanem & Emeh, 2020). Despite these efforts, the entrepreneurial landscape in Bayelsa State faces numerous challenges, including inadequate mentorship, limited access to funding, and a lack of tailored entrepreneurial training programs. Understanding the role of mentor emotional intelligence in overcoming these barriers is critical to fostering sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes in the state. Mentorship in entrepreneurship involves a complex interplay of technical guidance, emotional support, and strategic advice. While technical competencies such as business planning and financial management are essential, the emotional aspects of mentorship often determine the mentee's persistence and adaptability in the face of challenges (Baron, 2008). Mentors with high emotional intelligence can empathize with their mentees' struggles, offer constructive feedback, and inspire confidence, thereby fostering a conducive environment for entrepreneurial success. This is particularly important for adult learners, who may encounter unique challenges such as balancing entrepreneurial activities with familial or occupational responsibilities. The adult learning framework underscores the importance of personalized and experiential learning approaches (Knowles, 1984). Adult learners bring diverse life experiences, intrinsic motivations, and defined goals into the learning process. Effective mentorship must, therefore, align with these characteristics to maximize impact. Emotional intelligence enables mentors to tailor their guidance to the specific needs of adult learners, facilitating a learning experience that is both impactful and sustainable. Moreover, high-EI mentors are better able to manage conflicts, provide moral support, and foster an inclusive mentorship environment that encourages innovation and resilience. Several studies have highlighted the positive relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial success. For instance, Adeola et al. (2019) found that mentees with emotionally intelligent mentors demonstrated higher levels of creativity, innovation, and business growth compared to their counterparts with less emotionally adept mentors. Similarly, a study by Ismail et al. (2021) indicated that the emotional intelligence of mentors significantly influenced the entrepreneurial mindset and risk-taking abilities of mentees. These findings suggest that mentor EI is not only a catalyst for individual entrepreneurial success but also a driver of broader economic and social development. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of emotional intelligence in mentorship, there is limited empirical research on its impact in the context of adult learners in Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa State. This gap in the literature underscores the need for studies that examine how mentor EI influences entrepreneurial outcomes within this unique socioeconomic and cultural setting. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing mentorship programs that effectively address the specific needs of adult learners in the region. Entrepreneurial success is often measured by metrics such as business survival, profitability, and growth. However, intangible outcomes such as increased self-efficacy, enhanced problemsolving skills, and improved emotional resilience are equally important, especially for adult learners (Cardon et al., 2013). Emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in achieving these outcomes, as it equips mentors with the ability to nurture these

intangible yet vital skills. This perspective aligns with the human capital theory, which emphasizes the value of intangible assets such as knowledge, skills, and emotional competencies in driving economic success (Becker, 1964). The unique challenges faced by adult learners in Bayelsa State further highlight the need for emotionally intelligent mentorship. Many adult learners in the region operate in an environment characterized by economic instability, infrastructural deficits, and social pressures. These challenges necessitate mentorship approaches that go beyond technical guidance to address emotional and psychological needs. High-EI mentors are better positioned to provide the holistic support required to navigate such complexities. This study aims to explore the interplay between the emotional intelligence of mentors and the entrepreneurial outcomes of adult learners in Bayelsa State. By examining this relationship, the study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on effective mentorship practices and provide actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and program developers. These insights are expected to inform the design of mentorship frameworks that prioritize emotional intelligence as a core competency, ultimately enhancing the success rates of entrepreneurial initiatives among adult learners in the state.

Aim and Objectives of Study

The study explored the emotional intelligence of mentors and entrepreneurial outcomes of adult learners in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the study achieved the following:

1. To assess the level of emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners in Bayelsa State.
2. To identify challenges faced by adult learners in their entrepreneurial ventures in Bayelsa State.

Conceptual Review

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a concept that encompasses the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage emotions effectively in oneself and in interactions with others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Goleman (1995) expanded this definition by identifying five key components of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These components are critical in fostering effective communication and building strong interpersonal relationships. In the context of mentorship, EI enables mentors to connect with their mentees emotionally, providing a supportive environment that facilitates learning and growth. High levels of EI in mentors are associated with improved problem-solving, enhanced trust, and greater resilience among mentees (Boyatzis et al., 2013).

Mentors

Mentors play a pivotal role in guiding and supporting individuals toward achieving personal and professional goals. According to Crisp and Cruz (2009), mentorship involves a reciprocal and developmental relationship where the mentor provides expertise, encouragement, and constructive feedback. In entrepreneurship, mentors often serve as advisors who share their knowledge, experiences, and networks to help mentees navigate challenges and seize opportunities. Effective mentors are characterized not only by their technical expertise but also by their ability to inspire and motivate mentees

through emotional and psychological support (Ismail et al., 2021). The emotional intelligence of mentors is particularly vital as it enables them to address the unique needs and challenges of their mentees, fostering a conducive environment for entrepreneurial success.

Entrepreneurial Outcomes

Entrepreneurial outcomes refer to the results or impacts of engaging in entrepreneurial activities. These outcomes can be tangible, such as business profitability, growth, and survival, or intangible, including increased self-efficacy, innovation, and problem-solving abilities (Cardon et al., 2013). The success of entrepreneurial ventures is influenced by various factors, including access to resources, market conditions, and personal attributes such as resilience and creativity. Mentorship has been identified as a critical determinant of entrepreneurial outcomes, particularly when mentors possess high emotional intelligence. Studies have shown that mentees with emotionally intelligent mentors exhibit greater innovation, risk-taking, and adaptability, which are essential for entrepreneurial success (Adeola et al., 2019).

Adult Learners

Adult learners are individuals who engage in learning activities later in life, often balancing their education with other responsibilities such as work and family (Knowles, 1984). Unlike younger learners, adult learners bring diverse life experiences, intrinsic motivations, and well-defined goals to the learning process. According to the principles of andragogy, adult learners thrive in environments that are experiential, problem-centered, and self-directed. Mentorship is particularly important for adult learners as it provides personalized guidance and support that aligns with their unique needs and aspirations. Emotional intelligence in mentors enhances the effectiveness of mentorship by fostering empathy, understanding, and tailored support (Ekanem & Emeh, 2020). The interplay between emotional intelligence, mentorship, entrepreneurial outcomes, and adult learners highlights the importance of emotionally intelligent mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial success. By understanding these key concepts, stakeholders can design interventions and programs that address the specific needs of adult learners, ultimately contributing to individual and societal development.

Theoretical Review

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory, which posits that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in personal and professional effectiveness (Goleman, 1995). According to the theory, individuals with high emotional intelligence demonstrate self-awareness, empathy, and social skills, which enable them to manage interpersonal relationships effectively. These attributes are particularly significant in mentorship contexts, where the emotional intelligence of mentors directly influences the quality of guidance and support provided to mentees. In the context of entrepreneurship, emotionally intelligent mentors can foster resilience, creativity, and adaptability among adult learners, thereby enhancing their entrepreneurial outcomes (Boyatzis et al., 2013). By applying Goleman's framework, this study seeks to examine how emotional intelligence shapes the mentorship process and its impact on adult learners' entrepreneurial success. Additionally, the study draws on Knowles's Andragogy Theory, which emphasizes the unique characteristics and needs of adult learners

(Knowles, 1984). According to this theory, adult learners are self-directed, goal-oriented, and motivated by intrinsic factors such as personal growth and practical application of knowledge. Mentorship programs designed for adult learners must therefore align with these principles to be effective. The integration of emotional intelligence into mentorship frameworks provides a tailored approach that addresses the specific challenges faced by adult learners, such as balancing educational pursuits with other responsibilities (Ekanem & Emeh, 2020). By combining insights from Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Theory and Knowles's Andragogy Theory, this study aims to explore the intersection of emotional intelligence, mentorship, and entrepreneurial outcomes in the context of adult learners in Bayelsa State.

Research Question Development

Several studies have highlighted the significance of emotional intelligence among mentors and its influence on mentees. Adeola et al. (2019) conducted a study in Nigeria examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial success. The findings revealed that mentors with higher levels of emotional intelligence were better equipped to address the emotional and psychological needs of their mentees, fostering an environment conducive to learning and innovation. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2021) investigated the role of emotional intelligence in mentorship and found that emotionally intelligent mentors facilitated improved self-efficacy and resilience among adult learners. These studies underscore the importance of assessing the emotional intelligence of mentors, as it directly impacts their effectiveness in guiding and supporting mentees. In Bayelsa State, little empirical evidence exists on the specific level of emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners. Ekanem and Emeh (2020) emphasized the need for targeted mentorship programs that incorporate emotional intelligence as a core component. The authors argued that understanding the emotional competencies of mentors is critical for tailoring interventions that meet the unique needs of adult learners in the region. Given this gap, this study seeks to assess the level of emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners in Bayelsa State. Challenges faced by adult learners in their entrepreneurial ventures are another critical area of exploration. Adult learners often encounter unique obstacles that stem from their dual responsibilities of managing education and other life commitments. Adebayo and Yusuf (2021) noted that access to capital, limited entrepreneurial training, and a lack of mentorship are significant barriers for adult learners in Nigeria. These challenges not only impede entrepreneurial success but also discourage sustained participation in entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, societal expectations and age-related stereotypes often create additional pressures that hinder adult learners' ability to fully engage in entrepreneurial ventures (Ekanem & Emeh, 2020). In the context of Bayelsa State, the challenges faced by adult learners in their entrepreneurial pursuits are compounded by infrastructural deficits and socio-economic constraints. Studies by Adeola et al. (2019) and Ismail et al. (2021) highlighted that inadequate access to technology, poor market integration, and insufficient policy support are recurring challenges that stifle entrepreneurial growth in similar regions. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of the specific barriers faced by adult learners, which can inform targeted interventions and policies. This study aims to

identify these challenges, paving the way for solutions that can enhance entrepreneurial outcomes for adult learners in Bayelsa State.

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the emotional intelligence of mentors and entrepreneurial outcomes of adult learners in Bayelsa State. The population of the study comprised all mentors and adult learners engaged in entrepreneurial mentorship programs within Bayelsa State. These individuals were drawn from various mentorship and entrepreneurial training institutions in the state. Purposive sampling techniques were employed to select 150 participants, including 75 mentors and 75 adult learners, who were actively involved in mentorship programs. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Emotional Intelligence and Entrepreneurial Outcomes Questionnaire (EIEOQ),” developed by the researcher. This questionnaire consists of three sections: Section A which measured the demographic variables of the respondents, including age, gender, years of experience in mentorship, and entrepreneurial sector. Section B: Consisted of 15 items assessing the level of emotional intelligence among mentors. Items in this section were measured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. Section C contained 12 items focusing on the challenges faced by adult learners in their entrepreneurial ventures, also structured on a 4-point rating scale. The content and face validity of the instrument were ensured by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, whose corrections and suggestions contributed to the final draft utilized in the study. The questionnaire was pilot tested with ten (10) mentors and adult learners who were not part of the main study but had similar characteristics to the target population. A reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained using the Cronbach Alpha formula, which was deemed appropriate for this study. Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions. The decision rule for interpreting the research questions was established by calculating the average of the 4-point scale, such that any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered significant (indicating agreement with the research questions), while a mean score below 2.50 was interpreted as not significant (indicating disagreement with the research questions).

Results

Research Question 1

What is the level of emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of responses on the level of emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners

S/N	STATEMENT	X	SD	REMARK
1.	I am aware of my emotions and how they influence my mentoring style.	1.78	.851	LL
2.	I effectively manage my emotions during challenging interactions with adult learners.	2.04	.746	LL
3.	I can identify and empathize with the emotional states of my mentees.	2.34	0.60	LL

4.	I remain calm and composed when facing stressful situations in mentoring.	2.12	0.62	LL
5.	I encourage open communication and make mentees feel comfortable expressing their emotions.	2.30	0.74	LL
6.	I am able to adjust my mentoring approach based on the emotional needs of my mentees.	2.19	0.74	LL
7.	I use positive reinforcement to build the confidence of my mentees.	2.21	0.50	LL
GRAND MEAN		2.14		LL

Source: Fieldwork (2024) *HL=HIGH LEVEL, LL= LOW LEVEL

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the level of emotional intelligence among mentors working with adult learners in Bayelsa State is relatively low. The grand mean score for all statements is 2.14, which falls within the "Low Level" (LL) range, suggesting that the mentors in the study generally report limited emotional intelligence in their mentoring practices. Several individual items, such as "I am aware of my emotions and how they influence my mentoring style" (mean = 1.78) and "I effectively manage my emotions during challenging interactions" (mean = 2.04), further confirm this low level of emotional intelligence, as these responses reflect difficulties in self-awareness and emotional regulation. The responses across the board indicate that mentors also face challenges in identifying and empathizing with their mentees' emotional states, managing stress, and adjusting their mentoring approach to the emotional needs of their mentees. With means ranging from 2.04 to 2.34 for different statements, it is clear that emotional intelligence—critical for effective mentorship—is an area that requires significant improvement among mentors in Bayelsa State. The low scores suggest that additional training and development in emotional intelligence could enhance the mentoring experience for adult learners in the region.

Research Question 2

What challenges do adult learners face in their entrepreneurial ventures in Bayelsa State? **Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on responses on challenges adult learners face in their entrepreneurial ventures.**

S/N	STATEMENT X	SD	REMARK
8	I struggle to access sufficient financial resources to support my business.	2.62 .38	M
9	I lack access to adequate training and skill development programs for entrepreneurs.	2.61 .89	M
10	Government policies and regulations make it difficult to sustain my business.	2.84 1.52	M
11	I experience difficulties in balancing my Entrepreneurial activities with personal and family responsibilities.	2.73 .35	M
12	Limited access to modern technology affects the growth of my business.	2.90 .30	M
13	I find it challenging to identify and connect with potential customers or clients.	3.12 .38	M
14	The lack of mentorship and guidance hinders the success of my business ventures	3.16 .45	M

GRAND MEAN 2.85 M

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

****M=Major Challenge, Mi=Minor Challenge**

Based on the data in Table 2, adult learners in Bayelsa State face significant challenges in their entrepreneurial ventures, with the grand mean score of 2.85 indicating that these challenges are considered major. The items with the highest mean scores, such as "I find it challenging to identify and connect with potential customers or clients" (mean = 3.12) and "The lack of mentorship and guidance hinders the success of my business ventures" (mean = 3.16), suggest that networking and mentorship are crucial obstacles for these entrepreneurs. This reflects the difficulty adult learners face in developing the necessary connections and guidance to succeed in their businesses.

Additionally, challenges related to financial resources, training, and access to modern technology also appear prominently, with means ranging from 2.62 to 2.90. Statements like "I struggle to access sufficient financial resources" (mean = 2.62) and "Limited access to modern technology affects the growth of my business" (mean = 2.90) further indicate that inadequate financial support and technological barriers are significant concerns for these entrepreneurs. Overall, the data highlights that adult learners in Bayelsa State encounter a range of major challenges, with access to resources, mentorship, and customer acquisition standing out as key barriers to success in their entrepreneurial ventures.

Discussion of Findings

The results from Research Question 1 revealed that mentors working with adult learners in Bayelsa State exhibit a low level of emotional intelligence, with the grand mean score of 2.14 indicating overall challenges in emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy. The findings suggest that mentors generally struggle with self-awareness and emotional management, as shown by the lower mean scores for statements such as "I am aware of my emotions and how they influence my mentoring style" and "I effectively manage my emotions during challenging interactions with adult learners." This implies that emotional intelligence, a critical component for effective mentoring, is an area where mentors require further development. These results highlight the importance of training programs focused on emotional intelligence to enhance the mentoring capacity of these individuals. Mentors' difficulties in understanding and managing their emotions could hinder their ability to provide the necessary emotional support to adult learners. The findings align with studies by Smith (2022) and Williams (2021), which demonstrated that emotional intelligence plays a pivotal role in effective mentoring, particularly in creating supportive and empathetic learning environments. Given that emotional intelligence is vital for building strong mentor-mentee relationships, educational institutions and training organizations in Bayelsa State could consider implementing specialized emotional intelligence development programs to improve the overall mentoring experience for adult learners. The results from Research Question 2 revealed that adult learners in Bayelsa State face significant challenges in their entrepreneurial ventures, with a grand mean score of 2.85 indicating that these challenges are considered major. The findings suggest that key obstacles include

difficulties in accessing financial resources, limited training opportunities, and the lack of mentorship. For instance, the statements "I struggle to access sufficient financial resources to support my business" and "The lack of mentorship and guidance hinders the success of my business ventures" had some of the highest mean scores, highlighting that these barriers are critical to the success of adult learners' entrepreneurial ventures. These challenges reflect broader systemic issues, such as limited access to capital and the need for more structured support for budding entrepreneurs. The findings imply that adult learners in Bayelsa State require better access to financial support, training, and mentorship to overcome these hurdles. The lack of technological infrastructure, difficulty in balancing personal responsibilities with business demands, and the inability to effectively connect with customers also add to the entrepreneurial challenges. These results are consistent with studies by Nwachukwu (2021) and Eze (2022), who emphasized that entrepreneurship success among adult learners is often impeded by inadequate resources, training, and guidance. The high level of challenges reported by the participants underscores the need for local government and educational institutions to develop programs and policies that provide financial support, mentorship opportunities, and access to training to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Bayelsa State.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the emotional intelligence of mentors and the entrepreneurial challenges faced by adult learners in Bayelsa State. The findings revealed that mentors working with adult learners possess a low level of emotional intelligence, as indicated by their struggles with emotional awareness, regulation, and empathy. This suggests that there is a significant need for training programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence to improve the effectiveness of mentoring relationships. Mentors with higher emotional intelligence can foster more supportive and empathetic learning environments, benefiting both themselves and the adult learners they guide. Furthermore, the study highlighted the major challenges faced by adult learners in their entrepreneurial ventures, including limited access to financial resources, lack of mentorship, insufficient training, and challenges in networking and customer acquisition. These barriers are significantly hindering the success of entrepreneurial endeavors among adult learners in the region. The results point to the necessity for targeted interventions such as financial support, mentorship programs, and enhanced access to training opportunities. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can help create a more conducive environment for entrepreneurial success in Bayelsa State. Ultimately, the findings suggest that improving both the emotional intelligence of mentors and the support systems for adult learners can foster a more effective and sustainable learning and entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were given:

1. It is recommended that training programs focused on enhancing emotional intelligence be implemented for mentors in Bayelsa State to improve their effectiveness in supporting adult learners.

2. It is recommended that local government and educational institutions develop targeted initiatives that provide financial support, mentorship, and skill development to adult learners in order to address the challenges hindering their entrepreneurial success.

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