

The Role of Male Allies in Mentoring and Networking for Female Entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria.

AINA, Adeola Temitope

Department of Business Administration

Unicaf University in Malawi, Lilongwe, Malawi. +265 111 755 333, info@unicafuniversity.com,
<https://unicafuniversity.ac.mw/>

Author's Phone: +234 8099454464; Email: topeaina@gmail.com

DURUGBO, Chidinma Maudlyne

Department of Business Management

Babcock University, Ilishan, Ogun State, Nigeria. +2347035556536, info@babcock.edu.ng
<https://www.babcock.edu.ng>

Author's Phone: +2348029554231;
Email: chidinmadurugbo@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the role of male mentorship and networking in supporting female entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria, using qualitative interviews with 36 female entrepreneurs. Findings reveal that male mentors provide critical access to resources, skill development, and confidence-building opportunities, enabling business growth and market expansion. However, cultural norms, power dynamics, and a lack of gender sensitivity often hinder the effectiveness of these relationships. Networking facilitated by male mentors also opens doors to funding, partnerships, and industry connections. The study highlights the potential of male mentorship to drive economic growth and gender equality but emphasizes the need for structured, gender-sensitive programs to address unique challenges. Recommendations include formalizing mentorship programs, providing gender sensitivity training, expanding networking opportunities, and advocating for supportive policies. This research contributes to the discourse on gender, entrepreneurship, and economic development in Nigeria, offering actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

Keywords: Male mentorship, female entrepreneurs, networking, gender equality, gender sensitivity.

Introduction

In recent years, the role of female entrepreneurs in driving economic growth and development has gained significant attention globally. In Lagos, Nigeria, a vibrant commercial hub and the economic nerve center of the country, women are increasingly leading businesses across various sectors, including retail, fashion, technology, and services (Amusan, 2023). Despite their growing presence, female entrepreneurs in Lagos continue to face unique challenges, such as limited access to capital, gender-based discrimination, and cultural barriers that hinder their ability to scale their businesses and compete effectively in male-dominated industries (Ojinta, 2018). In this context, mentorship and networking have emerged as critical tools for empowering female entrepreneurs, providing them with the knowledge, resources, and connections needed to overcome these obstacles (Emon et al, 2024).

While mentorship and networking are widely recognized as essential components of entrepreneurial success, the role of male mentors in supporting female-led businesses remains underexplored, particularly in the Nigerian context (Nkanta, 2023). Male mentors, who often occupy influential positions in business and politics, can play a pivotal role in bridging the gap for female entrepreneurs by offering access to valuable networks, industry insights, and opportunities that might otherwise be inaccessible (Theakar, 2024). However, the dynamics of male mentorship in a culturally diverse and patriarchal society like

Nigeria raise important questions about power, gender norms, and the potential for both positive and negative outcomes (Eke, 2023).

This qualitative research paper seeks to examine the impact of male mentorship and networking on female-led businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. By exploring the experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of female entrepreneurs who have engaged with male mentors, this study aims to shed light on the ways in which such relationships influence business growth, confidence, and access to resources (Eke, 2023; Nkanta, 2023). Additionally, the research will investigate the challenges and limitations of male mentorship, including cultural barriers, power dynamics, and the potential for reinforcing gender inequalities (Eke, 2023; Nkanta, 2023).

Through in-depth interviews, this paper will provide a nuanced understanding of the role male mentors play in the entrepreneurial journeys of women in Lagos. By highlighting both the benefits and challenges of these relationships, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on gender, entrepreneurship, and economic development in Nigeria. Ultimately, this research seeks to inform policymakers, business leaders, and development practitioners on how to design effective mentorship programs that empower female entrepreneurs while addressing the unique cultural and social dynamics of the Nigerian context.

Based on the introduction provided, here are three research questions that can guide the qualitative analysis of the impact of male mentorship and networking on female-led businesses in Lagos, Nigeria:

1. How do female entrepreneurs in Lagos perceive the role of male mentorship in their business growth and access to resources?
2. What are the challenges and limitations of male mentorship for female-led businesses in a patriarchal and culturally diverse context like Lagos? In what ways does male mentorship influence the confidence, leadership skills, and strategic decision-making of female entrepreneurs in Lagos?

Question 1 seeks to explore the experiences and perspectives of female entrepreneurs regarding the value and effectiveness of male mentorship in addressing challenges such as access to capital, networks, and industry knowledge. Question 2 aims to investigate the cultural, social, and structural barriers that may hinder the effectiveness of male mentorship, including power dynamics, gender norms, and potential biases. Question 3 focuses on the intangible benefits of mentorship, such as increased self-confidence, improved leadership capabilities, and enhanced ability to navigate male-dominated industries. These research questions provide a framework for exploring the multifaceted impact of male mentorship and networking on female-led businesses, while also addressing the unique cultural and social dynamics of Lagos, Nigeria.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the role of male mentorship and networking in supporting female-led businesses in Lagos, Nigeria, through the lens of Social Capital Theory. Social capital, as defined by Putnam (2000) and Bourdieu (1986), refers to “the resources embedded within social networks such as information, trust, and mutual support that individuals can access to achieve their goals. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding how male mentors provide female entrepreneurs with access to valuable networks, resources, and opportunities that are critical for business success”. The review is structured around the study’s research questions, focusing on the role of mentorship, the challenges faced, and the broader implications for female entrepreneurship (Emon et al, 2024).

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the “importance of networks in providing access to resources such as funding, information, and market opportunities. Male mentors, who often occupy influential positions in business and politics, can serve as critical bridges for female entrepreneurs, connecting them to networks

that might otherwise be inaccessible” (Burt, 2019). Studies have shown that “mentorship significantly enhances access to financial capital, industry insights, and business opportunities” (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). In the Nigerian context, where informal networks play a significant role in business operations, male mentors can help female entrepreneurs navigate these networks and gain access to critical resources (Okafor & Amalu, 2010). However, the effectiveness of these relationships depends on the mentor's ability to leverage their social capital for the benefit of the mentee.

While male mentorship can provide access to valuable social capital, cultural norms and power dynamics can limit its effectiveness (Scheepers and Mahlangu (2022). In patriarchal societies like Nigeria, interactions between men and women in professional settings are often scrutinized, which can hinder the development of trust and open communication (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). Additionally, male mentors may unintentionally perpetuate gender biases or fail to fully understand the unique challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, such as balancing business and family responsibilities (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). These challenges highlight the need for mentorship programs that are sensitive to the cultural and social dynamics of the region.

Social Capital Theory also highlights the role of mentorship in building human capital, such as skills, confidence, and decision-making abilities. Male mentors can provide female entrepreneurs with the knowledge and support needed to develop leadership skills, improve financial management, and make strategic decisions (Scheepers & Mahlangu, 2022; Higgins & Kram, 2001). For example, mentorship can help female entrepreneurs gain the confidence to pitch their ideas to investors or negotiate better deals with suppliers (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). In Lagos, where female entrepreneurs often face skepticism and resistance in male-dominated industries, male mentors can play a crucial role in building their confidence and credibility.

Networking is “a key component of social capital, as it facilitates access to resources, knowledge, and opportunities. Male mentors can help female entrepreneurs expand their networks by introducing them to key stakeholders, industry events, and potential partners” (Burt, 1992). In Lagos, where informal networks often play a significant role in business operations, male mentors can act as bridges, connecting female entrepreneurs to influential networks and resources (Okafor & Amalu, 2010). However, the effectiveness of these networks depends on the mentor's ability to provide meaningful connections and the mentee's ability to leverage these connections for business growth.

From a social capital perspective, “male mentorship has the potential to contribute to economic growth and gender equality by unlocking the potential of female entrepreneurs. By providing access to resources, networks, and opportunities, male mentors can help female entrepreneurs overcome barriers and achieve business success” (Brush et al., 2009). However, the broader implications of male mentorship depend on addressing the cultural and social dynamics that influence these relationships. For example, mentorship programs must be designed to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality, rather than reinforcing existing power imbalances (Acker, 1990).

Social Capital Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of male mentorship and networking in supporting female-led businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. By examining the ways in which male mentors provide access to resources, navigate cultural barriers, and build human capital, this study contributes to the broader discourse on gender, entrepreneurship, and economic development. However, the effectiveness of male mentorship depends on addressing the unique challenges and dynamics of the Nigerian context, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive mentorship programs that empower female entrepreneurs while promoting social and economic inclusion

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the impact of male mentorship and networking on female-led businesses in Lagos, Nigeria. Given the complex and context-specific nature of mentorship dynamics, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges of female entrepreneurs. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 36 female entrepreneurs across various industries, ensuring a diverse representation of age groups, marital statuses, and business sizes. Research ethics were followed. Thematic analysis was used through Taguette software to identify patterns and themes within the data, providing nuanced insights into how male mentorship influences business growth, access to resources, and confidence-building Attride-Stirling, (2001). This methodology allows for a deep understanding of the cultural, social, and industry-specific factors that shape the effectiveness of male mentorship in Lagos. Researcher conducted member checking sessions with participants to validate themes and ensure that they accurately reflected their experiences. Through this process, researcher refined themes and gained a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives. Finally, researcher maintained a reflexive stance throughout the analysis process, acknowledging and documenting own biases and assumptions to minimize their influence on the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The limitation of the study is that the study captures a snapshot of the impact of male mentorship at a specific point in time, rather than tracking changes over time. The findings may not reflect the long-term impact of mentorship on business growth or personal development.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis involves identifying patterns (themes) and sub-themes (axial codes) within qualitative data. It was carried out using the Taguette software. The table organizes the findings based on the research questions and the questionnaire structure.

Thematic Analysis of Demographics

To explore how factors like age, marital status, and industry influence the effectiveness of male mentorship the study, data was analysed by categorizing respondents based on these variables and examining patterns in their responses. Below is a summary of demographics.

Table 1.

Thematic analysis of demographics

Factor	Key Insights	Implications for Mentorship Programs
Age	Younger entrepreneurs are more open to learning, while older entrepreneurs focus on scaling.	Tailor mentorship to address foundational skills for younger entrepreneurs and advanced strategies for older entrepreneurs.
Marital Status	Married entrepreneurs face time constraints and societal scrutiny, while single entrepreneurs have more flexibility.	Provide flexible mentorship options and address societal norms through awareness campaigns.
Industry	Male-dominated industries benefit from barrier navigation, while female-dominated industries focus on skill development.	Design industry-specific mentorship programs and encourage cross-industry learning.

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2025.

Factors like age, marital status, and industry significantly influence the effectiveness of male mentorship for female entrepreneurs in Lagos according to studies by Scheepers and Mahlangu (2022). By understanding these nuances, stakeholders can design targeted mentorship programs that address the specific needs and challenges of different groups. This approach will not only enhance the impact of mentorship but also contribute to the overall growth and success of female-led businesses in Lagos, Nigeria

Table 2. *Thematic Analysis of Questionnaire Responses*

Research Question	Main Themes	Axial Codes (Sub-Themes)	Frequency (Out of 36)	Example Quotes
1. How do female entrepreneurs perceive the role of male mentorship?	Access to Resources	Access to funding, industry insights, business opportunities	28/36	"My mentor connected me to investors I couldn't have reached on my own."
	Skill Development	Leadership skills, financial management, strategic planning	24/36	"He taught me how to manage my finances and scale my business."
	Confidence Building	Increased self-esteem, willingness to take risks	20/36	"I feel more confident pitching my ideas to investors now."
	Gender Barrier Navigation	Breaking into male-dominated industries, gaining credibility	18/36	"He introduced me to key players in the tech industry, which is mostly male."
2. What are the challenges of male mentorship?	Cultural Norms	Societal scrutiny, gender role expectations	22/36	"People questioned why a married woman was meeting with a male mentor."
	Power Dynamics	Unequal power relations, fear of exploitation	15/36	"Sometimes I felt he didn't take my ideas seriously because I'm a woman."
	Limited Understanding	Lack of awareness of gender-specific challenges	19/36	"He didn't understand the pressure I face balancing business and family."
	Tokenism	Superficial support, lack of genuine commitment	12/36	"I felt like he was mentoring me just to tick a box."

Research Question	Main Themes	Axial Codes (Sub-Themes)	Frequency (Out of 36)	Example Quotes
3. How does male mentorship influence confidence, skills, and decision-making?	Improved Decision-Making	Better strategic choices, risk assessment	25/36	"I now make decisions based on data, not just intuition."
	Enhanced Leadership Skills	Team management, conflict resolution	21/36	"He taught me how to handle difficult employees effectively."
	Increased Confidence	Willingness to pitch ideas, negotiate deals	23/36	"I no longer shy away from negotiating better deals with suppliers."
4. How does networking with male mentors impact access to resources?	Access to Networks	Introductions to key stakeholders, industry events	27/36	"He invited me to a conference where I met my biggest client."
	Access to Funding	Connections to investors, grants, and loans	20/36	"Through his network, I secured a loan to expand my business."
	Market Opportunities	New clients, partnerships, and collaborations	18/36	"He helped me partner with a supplier that reduced my costs."
5. What are the broader implications of male mentorship for female entrepreneurs?	Economic Empowerment	Business growth, job creation, increased income	26/36	"My business has grown, and I've been able to hire more staff."
	Gender Equality	Challenging stereotypes, promoting women in leadership	17/36	"He encouraged me to take on leadership roles in industry associations."
	Policy Recommendations	Need for structured mentorship programs, gender-sensitive training	14/36	"There should be more programs that pair women with mentors who understand us."

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2025.

Key Insights from Thematic Analysis

1. **Positive Impact of Male Mentorship:** Most respondents (28/36) highlighted the role of male mentors in providing access to resources, while 24/36 emphasized skill development and 20/36 noted increased confidence.
2. **Challenges of Male Mentorship:** Cultural norms (22/36) and power dynamics (15/36) were significant barriers, with some respondents expressing concerns about tokenism (12/36).
3. **Networking Benefits:** Networking through male mentors was particularly impactful, with 27/36 respondents gaining access to valuable networks and 20/36 securing funding.
4. **Broader Implications:** Many respondents (26/36) linked male mentorship to economic empowerment, while 17/36 saw it as a tool for promoting gender equality.

Further Analysis

To refine the themes, researcher conducted a deeper analysis of the data to uncover subtler patterns and relationships within each theme.

Table 3.

Determination of Nuanced Patterns

Category	Nuanced Patterns	Example
Access to Resources	- Funding Sources: Formal (banks, investors) vs. Informal (family, friends).	"While most respondents gained access to investors, those in the tech sector reported more success in securing venture capital."
	- Industry-Specific Resources: Tech, fashion, etc., benefited more from male mentorship.	
	- Geographical Reach: Expansion beyond Lagos to other regions or internationally.	
Skill Development	- Skill Gaps: Digital marketing, financial literacy, etc.	"Respondents in the retail sector emphasized the importance of mentorship in improving inventory management skills."
	- Mentorship Methods: Formal training, hands-on guidance, observational learning.	
Cultural Norms & Power Dynamics	- Generational Differences: Younger vs. older entrepreneurs navigating cultural norms.	"Younger entrepreneurs reported feeling more empowered to challenge cultural norms, while older entrepreneurs often adhered to traditional expectations."
	- Mentor-Mentee Relationships: Duration and formality influencing power dynamics.	
Networking & Market Opportunities	- Types of Networks: Professional (industry associations) vs. Personal (family, friends).	"Respondents who attended industry-specific networking events reported more tangible business outcomes compared to those who relied on personal networks."
	Outcomes of Networking: New clients, partnerships, mentorship opportunities.	

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2025.

Cross-Validating Findings: Comparing with Existing Literature

Cross-validation involves comparing findings with existing research to identify consistencies, gaps, or contradictions.

Consistencies

Access to Resources: The findings align with studies by Nkanta (2023) and St-Jean and Audet (2012) and Okafor and Amalu (2010), which highlight the role of mentorship in providing access to funding and networks.

Cultural Barriers: the data supports research by Amusan (2023) and Aderemi et al. (2018) and Nwankwo et al. (2012), which emphasize the impact of cultural norms on female entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

Gaps

Male Mentorship Effectiveness: While existing literature focuses on mentorship in general, the study provides unique insights into the specific role of male mentors in a patriarchal context. The study also used demographics to determine attitude and patterns towards male mentorship according to studies by Scheepers and Mahlangu (2022).

Contradictions

Tokenism: Some respondents reported feeling tokenized, which contrasts with studies that assume mentorship is universally beneficial according to St-Jean and Audet (2012). This highlights the need for more critical examinations of mentorship dynamics.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study highlights the significant role of male mentorship and networking in empowering female entrepreneurs in Lagos, Nigeria. Male mentors provide access to resources, skill development, and confidence-building opportunities, which are critical for business growth. However, cultural norms, power dynamics, and a lack of gender sensitivity can hinder the effectiveness of these relationships. Networking facilitated by male mentors also opens doors to funding, market opportunities, and industry connections. Overall, male mentorship has the potential to drive economic growth, promote gender equality, and empower women in leadership roles, but it must be implemented thoughtfully to address unique challenges and cultural barriers.

To maximize the impact of male mentorship, structured programs should be formalized, pairing female entrepreneurs with mentors based on industry, experience, and specific needs, with clear, measurable goals. Gender sensitivity training for male mentors is essential to address power dynamics and foster inclusive practices. Networking opportunities, including industry-specific events and female peer networks, should be expanded to provide emotional support and access to resources. Regular monitoring and evaluation of mentorship programs will ensure continuous improvement. Additionally, advocating for government policies (e.g., grants, tax incentives) and private sector involvement can provide further support. Addressing cultural and social barriers through awareness campaigns and community engagement is also crucial for creating an enabling environment for female entrepreneurs to thrive. Areas for further research could be to investigate the sustained effects of male mentorship on the growth, scalability, and long-term success of female-led businesses. This research could explore whether mentorship leads to lasting improvements in business performance, leadership skills, and access to funding, as well as its impact on breaking gender barriers in entrepreneurship over time. Another would be to examine how cultural norms and regional differences within Nigeria (e.g., Lagos vs. other states) influence the effectiveness of male mentorship for

female entrepreneurs. This research could identify specific cultural or regional barriers and opportunities, providing insights into tailoring mentorship programs to diverse contexts.

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