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The role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs

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A research article submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

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Protocol number: (WBS/BA484272/602)

Declaration

I, Ntandoyenkosi Kunene, declare that this applied research report entitled "*The role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women owned SMEs"* is my own work, except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Signature: …NW Kunene……

Signed at Rivonia, Edenburg .....

On the .....28th..... day of .....February 2023

Dedication

This research report is dedicated to black women entrepreneurs that are striving to build sustainable businesses. The unemployment rate in South Africa has forced many people to explore the entrepreneurial route including black women, who have experienced hardships as a result of unemployment. With this in mind, the question of how else can we support black women to succeed in business and keep their doors open remains paramount. I hope this report renders itself a useful tool and/or reference for the economic emancipation of black women, their independence and self-sufficiency.

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I would like to acknowledge the following people who contributed to my research:

- To Dr. Jabulile Msimango-Galawe, thank you for your guidance, patience, empathy, and support, it has been truly instrumental to the successful completion of this research report.
- To my support structure, my loving family, friends, and mentors. Thank you for your endless words of support and acts of kindness.
- To my late dad, my heart hurts that you were not able to witness this moment with me. However, I am certain that you are immensely proud of me.
- To my professional friends at different incubator hubs, thank you for the endless words of support and access to valuable insights.
- To all my research participants who agreed to take part in my study, without you there would be no research report. Thank you for your time and insights.

Finally, to my God and ancestors that made it possible and carried me throughout this very challenging journey.

Ngiyabonga.

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ABSTRACT

Background: A clear definition of coaching in the context of entrepreneurship is still lacking. This kind of support is progressively becoming more popular to aid black women entrepreneurs succeed as first and second generation business owners. However, research on how well such a support measure generates revenue is currently being investigated.

Aim: This research study is aimed at exploring the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs.

Setting: This research was carried out in South Africa with 15 black women entrepreneurs located in different parts of the country. Moreover, the study focused on registered SMEs**.**

Method: To enable the exploration of personal experiences, a qualitative research approach was employed. Therefore, 15 in-depth interviews using semi-structured questions were used to collect the data and the thematic analysis was used as a tool of analysis.

Findings: The study established that black women business owners in the SME sector are increasingly discovering the benefits of entrepreneurial coaching as a form of support. The study established a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and entrepreneurial efficacy as key factors in coaching initiatives. The confusion of the terms mentoring and coaching is one that still exists where the concepts are used interchangeably. Lastly, black women face difficulties that can be divided into four categories; namely, entrepreneurial competencies, entrepreneurial exposure, being the racial and gendered minority group, and how this group of women is put in a vulnerable position to perform sexual favours to advance businesses.

Conclusion: The study deduces that the role of entrepreneurial efficacy is the foundation of building entrepreneurial competencies. The study will be helpful

to entrepreneurial coaches and mentors, policymakers and organizations, black women who manage their own businesses, investors and funders, and the academic community.

Keywords: entrepreneurial coaching, entrepreneurship, SMEs, mentorship, entrepreneurial competencies, social cognitive theory

Definitions of key words and concepts:

Entrepreneurial coaching: A suitably tailored method for assisting inexperienced owner-managers in improving their managerial capabilities. It is a discipline that focuses on the professional development and overall growth of the entrepreneur (Mkhonza, 2021).

Entrepreneur: A self-employed person running a business who makes a positive economic contribution, takes risks, develops new goods and procedures, and has the ability to recognise possibilities and adapt to change (Meyer, 2018).

SMEs: SMEs are organisations with less than 50 employees (Maduku & Kaseeram, 2021).

Mentorship: A relationship between two people in which the person with greater contacts, experience, and knowledge is able to impart their knowledge to a less experienced person (Stokes, Diochan, Otter, 2020).

Entrepreneurial competency: The information, skills, abilities, attitudes, personality, and expertise that support entrepreneurial action and success (Botha & Taljaard, 2021).

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

This qualitative study explored the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs in two selected provinces in South Africa; namely, Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal. The study employed the qualitative research method to explore the perceptions of black women entrepreneurs on entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool for SMEs success and to examine the outcomes of entrepreneurial coaching that contribute to the success of black women owned SMEs.

1.2 Background and context

SMEs, much like any other form of business operating in South Africa and the world, face immense challenges in starting up, sustaining, and scaling. Every country is ranked according to the ease of doing business, and South Africa is rated 39th by the World Bank (WB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). This is essentially how conducive a country's regulatory environment is to operating a business (Zikhali, 2021). According to an article by 1-grid Newsroom (2021), it has been estimated that 50% of small businesses fail within a year of launching, and 70% to 80% are estimated to fail within the first five years. Msimango-Galawe (2019) posits that 75% to 90% of small businesses in South Africa fail during the first five years of operation. It is clear from this evidence that SMEs are extremely susceptible to failure in their early years. What problems, then, do SMEs confront in modern times that make maintaining a business difficult? Further research has established that a lack of product demand, access to loans, bad roads and crime, government imposition, lack of financing, and electricity are among the factors that cause SME failure (Ayandiu & Houghton, 2017).

This then provokes a question of how a country may provide an environment that is enabling and supportive to the growth of SMEs? South Africa's national strategy for the growth and development of the small business sector was publicly announced in early 1995 by the national government. Under this strategy, the government set a number of goals for the expansion and development of the sector over a 10 year period. The plan was to do this by creating organisations and programs that would improve the SME sector's access to vital resources like markets, technology, and infrastructure, as well as training and counseling (Chalera, 2007).

Globally, SMEs play a critical role in absorbing labour, penetrating new markets, and generally expanding economies in creative and innovative ways (OECD Report, 2017). In South Africa, Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprises (SMMEs) represent an important vehicle to address the challenges of job creation, economic growth, and equality. According to Zizile and Tendai (2018), the growth and expansion of the economy are driven by the success of SMEs. Further, Bhorat *et al.* (2018) reiterates that the advancement of equitable growth and development in South Africa has been described as relying heavily on SMEs. It is estimated that SMEs account for between 50 and 60% of the workforce and more than 90% of all formal businesses, which equals 34% of GDP (Adspace, 2022).

Considering the split along gender lines across many industries, entrepreneurship has traditionally been seen as a career path that is only suitable for men (Mshumpela, 2019). Further research done by the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (2022) confirms that in today's world, and in traditionally male-dominated sectors, women are taking over in growing numbers. According to Mshumpela (2019), the strategic framework on gender and women's economic empowerment makes several recommendations in the Integrated Strategy for the Promotion of Co-operatives (2012-2020) report, where the goal is to offer various forms of support to women-owned SMEs. These programs include assistance for rural women, financial aid, and participation of women in international trade, research, and technology.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2012-2022) suggests that greater support should be given to female entrepreneurs because they may be crucial to enabling economic progress in most nations. Though SMEs face many challenges, female entrepreneurs face even more when compared to their male counterparts. It is for that reason that it is suggested that higher levels of domestic responsibilities, lesser educational attainment, a lack of female role models in business, a lack of wealth and assets and a lack of both assertiveness and confidence in one's capacity to succeed in business are some of the issues experienced by women today (Mshumpela, 2019).

While describing the challenges that women face, it should be remembered that black women still have more challenges because of racial and gender discrimination. These women gathered in solidarity for the economic independence of all women during the 1956 March to the Union Buildings in South Africa (Muller, 2017). Notwithstanding the advancements brought about by the march, black women still need to work extra hard to "stand out" from the crowd and be recognized in their professions (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018). Black women's lived experiences are compounded by the fact that they must deal with the double-edged sword of racial and gender-based discrimination.

In addition to the support provided for SMEs, Brinkley and Le Roux (2018) and Kotte *et al.* (2021), acknowledge entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool for entrepreneurs in successfully running their small businesses. Kotte *et al.* (2021) further argues that coaching is becoming increasingly popular in aiding entrepreneurs at all stages of the entrepreneurial process especially in addressing their complex job needs. In addition to the this study, it is highlighted that the phrase entrepreneurial coaching is imprecise and is commonly used to refer to numerous sorts of support.

1.3 Research problem

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the South African National Empowerment Fund (NEF), set a mandate for the empowerment of black women

entrepreneurs by allocating ZAR141 million to invest across key sectors of the economy (Women Empowerment Fund Bulletin, 2021), which translates to black women having greater access to financial support which would assist them when starting up and scaling their businesses. Research has found that unfortunately, women turn to necessity entrepreneurship more frequently than opportunistic entrepreneurship, mostly to survive, with neither preparation nor awareness of the complexities of business, nor the requisite managerial skills to run a successful enterprise.

Furthermore, the author says that what exacerbates the challenge is that black women have to overcome the barriers they encounter throughout cultures and across history. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN), which advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is in full support of public and private sectors in working together to promote various business training programs for black women entrepreneurs, who continue to make up the largest group of South Africans who work for themselves (Kere, 2020).

Msimango-Galawe (2019) states that in South Africa, 75% to 90% of small business owners fail in the first three to five years of operation, mainly due to a lack of competent mentors and business coaches. For athletes, their coaches have a significant impact on how they prepare for each sporting event. Considering this, should SMEs not include coaching in their success plan? Should thought leaders not place emphasis on the promotion of entrepreneurial coaches especially at the inception of a business?

Msimango-Galawe (2019) supports and promotes the idea of coaching for businesses since research has shown that entrepreneurs who receive coaching manage their SMEs more effectively and with greater self-assurance, which enhances the performance of their companies. There are countless questions about the role of entrepreneurial coaching as a contributing factor to the success of a business. Reducing the failure rate of black women-owned SMEs is the central goal. As a result, the problem statement is the lack of

entrepreneurial coaching among black women businesses as a support strategy in reducing business failure.

1.4 Research objectives

Main objective

To explore the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs.

Sub-objectives

1. To explore the perceptions of black women entrepreneurs on entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool for SMEs success.
2. To examine the outcomes of entrepreneurial coaching that contribute to the success of black women-owned SMEs.

1.5 Research questions

- ***Research Question 1*** - What are the perceptions of black women entrepreneurs on entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool for SME success?
- ***Research Question 2:*** What are the outcomes of entrepreneurial coaching that contribute to the success of black women-owned SMEs?

1.6 Significance of the study

The background information and context illustrate the characteristics of SMEs and how they are vulnerable to failing as businesses during their first years of existence. Although, some efforts have been made to establish a theoretical and empirical perspective, Kotte *et al.* (2021) acknowledge that the findings are still dispersed, and as a result a framework for entrepreneurial coaching may not have been fully established. They further argue that the concept of entrepreneurial coaching currently lacks a clear definition. Moreover, a wide range of support interventions have been proposed and labeled as “coaching”,

including start-up consultancy and mentoring. The terms "coaching" and "mentoring" are frequently used interchangeably when discussing support measures for entrepreneurs (Stokes, *et al.* 2020).

This study's significance lies in its ability to shed new light on the advantages of entrepreneurial coaching for enterprises, particularly those run by black women. The focus of this study sets it apart from others because it is specifically on a particular group of individuals who face unique challenges in establishing and managing their businesses. It is significant in that it presents a more focused strategy to promote activities that improve inclusion and diversity in the research environment.

The findings will be helpful to a number of stakeholders, including entrepreneurial coaches and mentors, policymakers and organizations, black women who run their own businesses, investors and funders, and last but not least, the academic community. It could assist black women entrepreneurs better navigate the entrepreneurial arena, adjust coaching interventions, develop policies and initiatives that support black women owned enterprises, and lastly, enhance the overall body of academic knowledge by contributing to its inclusivity and diversity.

1.7 Delimitations

The scope of the research was limited to black women in the SME sector, who have undergone or are undergoing the entrepreneurial coaching process. This study excluded the investigation of the male perspective and did not extensively explore other female racial groups in the SME sector.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In the background and context of this study, the importance of entrepreneurial coaching for black women-owned small businesses has been highlighted. This

study is influenced by the efforts to keep black women-owned SMEs operating since business failure in the initial few years of establishment is prone to business failure. The background and fundamental ideas that are pertinent to the study will be outlined in the literature review. This section will begin with an overview of SMEs major success indicators, then proceed to examine the challenges faced by black women in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial coaching as a practice. Further to that, the Social Cognitive Theory and the two research questions that underpin this study will be examined. The conclusion will be reached thereafter.

2.2 SME success

SMEs, as defined by Maduku and Kaseeram (2021), are companies with more than one employee but less than 50. In South Africa, there is record-breaking unemployment rates and slow economic growth. Therefore, SMEs play a significant role in reducing poverty, creating jobs, and fostering economic progress (OECD Report, 2017). An article by Adspace (2022) reported that a survey by the IFC observed that more than 90% of all formal enterprises in South Africa employ only between 50 and 60% of the labour force, and these businesses contribute 34% of the GDP. Furthermore, as part of the National Development Plan (NDP), SMEs in South Africa are expected to create 90% of all new jobs by 2030 (Bhorat et al.; 2018).

Olawale & Garwe (2010); as cited in Nuel *et al.* (2021) argues that there is a wealth of literature on what hinders or promotes the growth of SMEs. Past research has identified both internal and external factors that contribute to the success or failure of SMEs. Internal factors are those that an entrepreneur has control over, (internal factors) including aspects of human capital, financial management, business innovation, self-efficacy, and more. The parts that the entrepreneur has no control over (external factors) are the macro-economic elements including politics, environmental, demographic, and socio-cultural issues.

Motloung (2021) lists the determinants for success for women-owned SMEs in further detail and divided them into four internal and seven external elements.

The internal factors are as follows:

- **Motivation and commitment:** Entrepreneurs need self-motivation and conviction to drive them towards their objective of managing a successful business. While launching a business may be exciting at first, as challenges arise, self-motivation and the commitment to weathering the inevitable storms in entrepreneurship keep entrepreneurs strong.

- **Abilities and skills:** Women entrepreneurs need to have a wide range of skills to succeed in business, including delegation, market research, negotiating, sales, communication, and developing resilience.

External factors are as follows:

- **Business development organisations:** Poor management and a lack of preparedness for starting a business pose as barriers for SMEs. Government-provided services for business growth are out of the reach of many people, particularly women in rural areas where communication and transportation infrastructure is poor. Additionally, some of these service providers offer irrelevant services that are not catered to business owners' needs.

- **Networking:** this has been defined as a tool that enables female entrepreneurs to access a variety of information bases, professional contacts, and advice from other female business owners. Having said that, research on the ways in which men and women construct their networks has revealed that women's networks are homogeneous and that they have a greater number of family members and friends – most of whom are men. Jackson (2021) posits that women have a stronger network of family and friends and often utilise those which at times can cause a knowledge deficit.

- **Personal success factors:** The study also shows that for women to create their own businesses, they need to have both a vision and a desire to own them. The motivation for achieving sustainability, company success, and work-life balance demonstrates the enthusiasm they have for running their businesses.

- **Managerial factors:** In a study done by Kloppers (2018) as cited in Motloung (2021), women business owners identified their key success criteria as being involved in expansion strategy, having the correct leadership style, and efficiently utilising all production components, including capital, personnel, and operational procedures.

- **Financial management:** There is a clear relation between startup capital and business performance. Businesses with larger start-up budgets tend to have a lower failure rate since they can, for instance, expand by hiring more employees.

- **Human relations:** Employees of women business owners must share their dedication to the company's mission. It is crucial for entrepreneurs to be able to hire the right people for the proper jobs, keep them engaged, and teach them through performance assessments and monitoring programs because it is nearly impossible to manage a business as a one-man show.

- **Business knowledge and skills:** Motloung (2021) advises entrepreneurs to conduct in-depth market research. This is reinforced by Nuel *et al*. (2021), who state that industry expertise and a competitive strategy are crucial success criteria. These features should be seen as the core elements of a successful SME.

Equally, as many elements should be considered to ensure that SMEs survive beyond the anticipated five years, there are those that hinder the growth of

women-owned SMEs. When examining the success of SMEs that are owned by women, a discussion about how this success is determined should follow.

Motloung (2021) offers such a discussion over what constitutes the ideal metric for business success. Some suggest simply using financial indicators as measurements, including profitability, turnover, and return on investment. On the other hand, others propose categorising indicators into financial and non-financial ones. Commonly, when success is discussed today, only the financial aspect is taken into account. How much money did your business generate during a specific fiscal year and how much money did its proprietors take home?

Growing revenue, increasing profits, improved free cash flow, market share increase, and the number of employees are all examples of financial measurements of success. Non-financial measures are those that the entrepreneur sets where they self-report on perceptions, job experience, and competencies (Motloung, 2021).

2.3 Challenges facing women entrepreneurs

Historically, black women face a double-edged sword of both racial and gender discrimination (Desouza,2020). This is not just a South African phenomenon but a global one. Black American women struggle with having access to a variety of resources, social support, and social networks, which can be an obstacle to their success. Social capital in the form of networks is crucial in maintaining a successful business in whatever country the business operates. Another stumbling block is the formal entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial experience that, by contrast, white women often possess (Jackson, 2021). The background of having a family business offers invaluable resources such as, “transferring pre-existing clientele, the ability to offer guidance, and allowing a more seamless transition or start-up process for new entrepreneurs” (Jackson, 2021, p.3). The challenges are clearly similar when compared to those faced by black women in South Africa.

Jackson (2021) suggests that African-American women are less educated than their white counterparts whereas Motloung (2021) argues that black women in South Africa are making significant progress in their educational attainment, from basic secondary school completion to postgraduate studies. However, it is further highlighted that even with the highest level of education, the combination of vocational and technical skills required to support the development of highly productive businesses frequently appears to stifle growth.

Mathibe and Croucamp (2019) attest that black women in South Africa have faced several challenges when starting, expanding, and managing their small and medium enterprises. “The major stumbling block to women entrepreneurs’ success in South Africa is inaccessibility or lack of finance, lack of financial knowledge, lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge, traditional discrimination, and lack of a business record” (Zizile & Tendai, 2018, p.226). According to Jury (2021), another challenge women face is the lack of self-confidence, which is particularly harmful for an entrepreneur. Self-confidence plays a major role in how an entrepreneur does business and also how they seek help.

2.4 Theoretical framework

This study makes use of Alfred Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which was first articulated since the late 1970s. As Knud (2018) stated, what initially had a behaviourist foundation progressively drifted away from it and towards a theory of vicarious learning, which emphasized that reinforcement was not always direct but most frequently occurred indirectly through social imitation. This theory emphasizes that learning is an active cognitive process that is impacted by the social context that one exists in, indicating that the environment acts as a catalyst in the learning process. Its foundational essence is the phrase "I do what I see, not what I'm told" when translated in modern times especially in relation to children.

The social learning theory encourages the ongoing reciprocal interaction between three components, which Harinie *et al.* (2017) underline as being important behavioural factors, environmental factors, and individual aspects in the learning process. "Behaviour can affect cognitive and vice versa individual cognitive activities can affect the environment, environmental influencers can alter individual thought processes, and so on" (Harinie *et al* (2017), p.2). This means that the learning theory by Bandura occurs for everyone not only through their own experiences but also through the process of observing others; namely, by carefully studying and taking into account the current behavioural model in which a person exists. For instance, if a young child is raised in an atmosphere where there is a lot of entrepreneurial activity, they are likely to select that path when they are older, especially if they are actively engaged in such activities. The interaction seen in Figure 3 below demonstrates this:

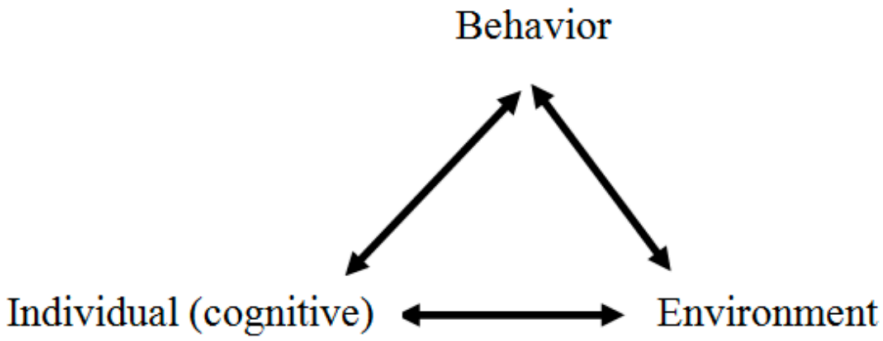


Figure 3: Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Harinie *et al.* (2017).

Harinie *et al.* (2017) further details that the theory established by Bandura demonstrates four interrelated components; namely, attentional processes, retention processes, motor reproduction processes and motivational process. This can be seen in the Figure 4 below:

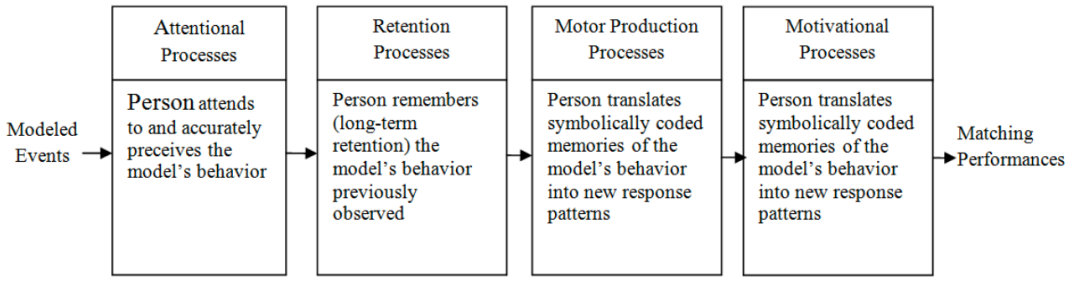


Figure 4: Component Processes Governing Observational Learning (Harinie *et al.* (2017)**.**

The basic concepts of the Social Cognitive Theory are consistent with those of Shoukry *et al.* (2018), who contend that coaching is a social process that takes place in several settings, with organizations and senior managers receiving the greatest attention. In these situations, coaching is provided as a process aiming at both professional and personal growth to enhance performance and effectiveness. The Social Cognitive Theory places a strong emphasis on how social influences, including observation, shape behaviour, cognition, and learning. Schunk *et al.* (2020) argues for motivation as a central component of the Social Cognitive Theory which has been researched, adapted and expanded in different contexts especially in education, business and health. "Motivation refers to the process that instigates and sustain goal-orientated activities" (Schunk *et al.,* 2020. p.3). Therefore, the question is how does this theory and its processes look like in the context of coaching?

The attentional process is when individuals learn by seeing and imitating others. Considering this, in the context of coaching, the coach can serve as a model where the client can learn from the coaches' actions, abilities, skills and other strategies that develop the client personally and on a professional level. The client goes through a process of storing and maintaining the knowledge acquired in the previous stage throughout the retention process. This entails assimilating and keeping in mind the strategies and behaviours used during the coaching process. The motor retention process is when the client has acquired and mastered skills from the coach which were acquired through observation, feedback, and constant practice. Finally, the motivational process is what can

be considered what sustains the learning process for it to happen again. During a great deal of time, the client is a part of this learning process, highlighting the interplay between cognitive, behavioural, and motivational elements in learning and behaviour change. At this point, the customer is capable of applying what they have learnt independently.

Schunk *et al.* (2020) argues that the key principle of social cognitive theory is that people seek a sense of agency, or the conviction that they have a significant amount of control over critical life decisions. The learning process strengthens the client's self-efficacy, as explained "self-efficacy, which results from self-reflection that is both evaluative and goal orientated, is a key internal motivational process in social cognitive theory" (Schunk *et al.,* (2020), p.5). Similar to this Msimango-Galawe & Mazonde (2021) supports the function of self-efficacy in the learning process or business startup since it enables the client to continue the learning process without encountering any difficulties.

2.5. Entrepreneurial coaching

According to Brinkley & Le Roux (2018), in the past, coaching was described as a process to help business owners find the opportunities, knowledge, and skills they need to succeed. Coaching is seen as a two-way conversation between a coach and a client in which they both contribute to the creative thinking that promotes potential on both the personal and professional levels. Rajasinghe and Mansour (2018) assert that coaching is a form of social interaction with the goal of enhancing a person's abilities, knowledge, and experience through interaction with a coach who understands how to bring out the best in them.

Kotte *et al.* (2021) prove that the acclaim coaching enjoys for its individualised, active, and reflection-focused approach is one reason why its use is being amplified in entrepreneurship. Conversely, the author notes that the phrase *entrepreneurial coaching* lacks a precise definition despite being very helpful. The findings from these investigations are dispersed, as many academics

continue to research entrepreneurial coaching from a theoretical and empirical perspective (Kotte *et al.* 2021). This then makes it challenging to develop an integrated framework that can be applied universally for entrepreneurs. "EC coaching stands between classical workplace coaching and start-up consultancy, closer to, yet distinct from, entrepreneurial mentoring and executive coaching" (Kotte *et al.* 2021).

In addition, Rajasinghe and Mansour (2018) shows that entrepreneurial education is becoming more and more popular as a strategy to nurture qualities and skills to shift the learning focus from educating *about* entrepreneurship to educating *for* it. These academics are advancing a novel idea asserting that coaching for entrepreneurs ought to be connected with more thorough research on entrepreneurship education since doing so will facilitate the coaching process.

Audet and Couteret (2012, as cited in Kotte *et al*. 2021) define entrepreneurial coaching as "individualized support provided by a coach to entrepreneurs in early start-up stages that is aimed at acquiring and developing skills and knowledge necessary to establish themselves as independent entrepreneurs" (p.520). Another definition offered by Crompton and Symyrnios (2011), as cited in Kotte *et al*., (2021, p.520) examines the same concept as having the objective of increasing the performance of the business. Overtly, the idea of entrepreneurial coaching has various definitions associated with it, but what is noteworthy is that all these definitions focus on the objective of assisting the entrepreneur.

For this study, entrepreneurial coaching will be defined through the two-dimensional framework presented by Kotte *et al* (2021). The authors characterize EC through two dimensions; namely, expert-versus process-consultation and individualized-work-venture focus as seen in Figure 3.1. In this instance, the expert consultant possesses a magnitude of expertise where they then offer clients their expert knowledge, counsel, and solutions. Process consultation on the other hand has the understanding that clients are experts

in their lived experiences which they then play the role of facilitating conversations that leads to clients finding their own solutions.

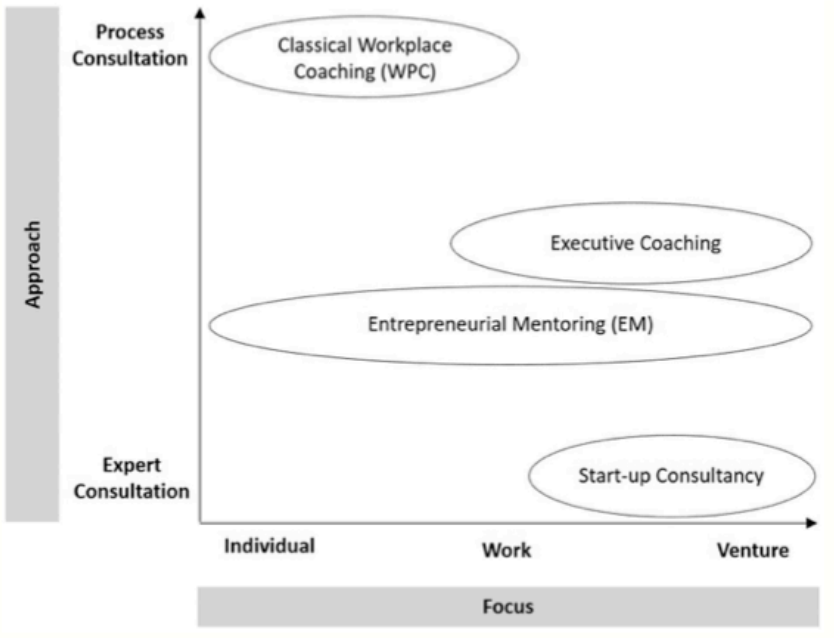


Figure 3.1. Interventions related to EC within the two-dimensional framework (Kotte et al. 2021).

Furthermore, it is important to note that coaching and mentoring are commonly referenced in the same sentence. Moreover, the terms are used interchangeably in the context of SMEs. According to van Coller-Peter and Cronjé, (2020):

> *"Although the roots of coaching and mentoring are different, both coaching and mentoring selectively draw on similar narratives to describe the activity, resulting in the notion that coaching and mentoring are essentially similar" (p.52).*

It is apparent that the core element of coaching and mentoring is that individuals can cultivate change with the assistance of a coach or mentor. Garvey *et al.* (2022) argues that by considering the dimensions of interactions in context, it is possible to see their attributes as moving and changing dynamics over time rather than as fixed positions. Stokes *et al.* (2020) presents the framework in

Figure 3.2 of coaching and mentoring to clarify the definitions of these two concepts.

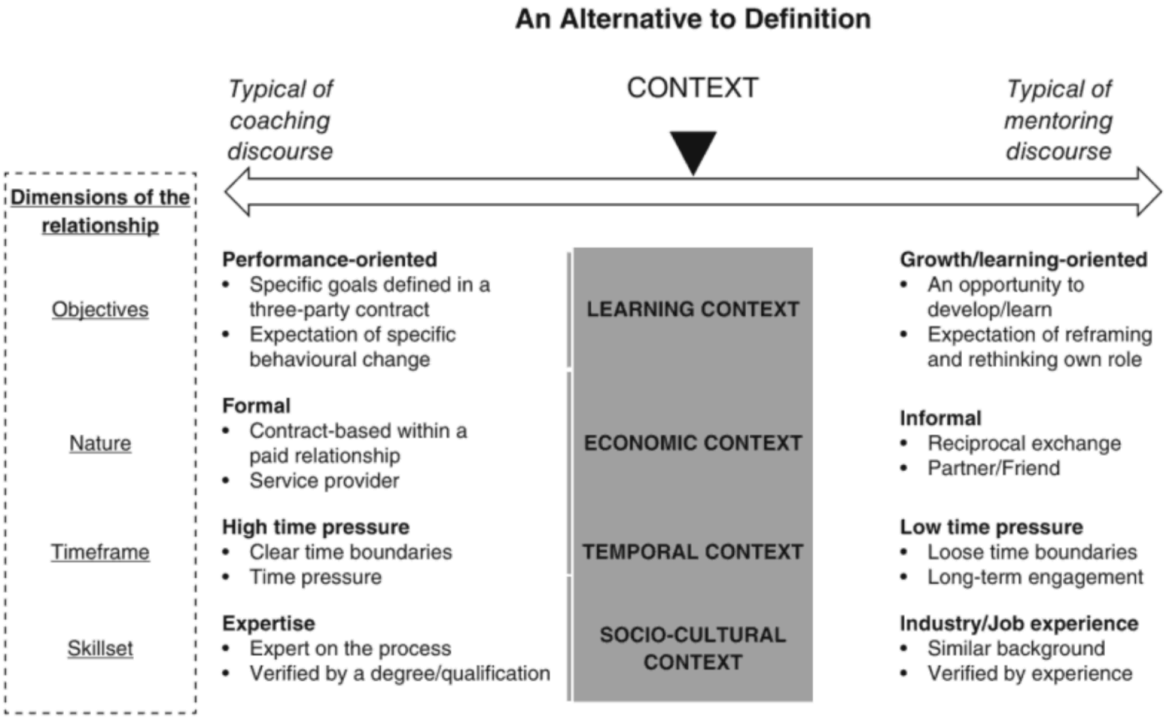


Figure 3.2: Coaching and Mentoring dimensions Source: Stokes *et al.* (2020).

Notwithstanding the fuzzy lines between coaching and mentoring, Mshumpela (2019) notes that whilst entrepreneurial coaching has an impact on SMEs on traits like managing self-cognition and managing self-emotion, its impact on business, is however low.

2.6 Perceptions of entrepreneurial coaching

Research question 1: What are the perceptions of black women entrepreneurs on entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool?

Harris (2016) subscribes to the notion that perception is the co-pilot of reality, and how the market responds to any given topic indicates that reality and perception are intertwined. Idris and Abu Bakar (2020) argue that a woman's use of business coaching is influenced by their mentality, which is affected by

how effective they perceive it to be. As a result, in addition to receiving advice on how to succeed in business by acquiring the essential knowledge, abilities, and attitudes, women entrepreneurs must recognise the benefits of business coaching.

Women entrepreneurs who received coaching and those who did not were the subjects of a study by Timberlake (2017). However, the women who did receive coaching drew particular attention. The crucial question was how these female business owners perceived business coaching? The participants were asked about their thoughts on online business coaching, before determining whether to pursue or receive coaching for themselves. In this phase of the research, scepticism emerged as the main theme. Since many of the participants were unaware of the coaching process, they believed the business idea as a whole to be too good to be true.

Timberlake (2017) also found that participants thought business coaching was overvalued and useless, especially since some had backgrounds in multilevel marketing, which suggests that they were familiar with fundamental business principles. Women entrepreneurs were also sceptical of the business coaching industry, “because there is no governing body that oversees coaches or the coaching industry” (Timberlake, 2017, p. 5). This alludes to the idea that a solution's gravity depends on how it is governed, and that any solution is unstable in the absence of a regulatory body.

Furthermore, Timberlake (2017) argued that having evidence of achievement was another issue that this group of women needed to pay attention to. They wanted to discover who had been their clientele and what kind of feedback they had before deciding on a business coach. The women business owners demanded evidence – proof that the coach and their methods were reliable.

Proposition 1 : In a study by Timberlake (2017), the main focus was on the experiences of female internet business owners who had received business coaching to help them transition to full-time entrepreneurs. Scepticism, a desire for business expansion, success proof, self-awareness, and investment proof were among the topics that came up.

2.7 Outcomes of Entrepreneurial coaching initiatives

Research question 2: What are the outcomes of entrepreneurial coaching initiatives that contribute to the success of black women owned SMEs?

According to Hunt *et al.* (2021) entrepreneurs' self-efficacy, or the degree to which they believe they have the inner strength, talents, and capacities to complete the business venture they are working on, can be used to gauge the success of coaching activities. Self-efficacy can be assessed on four levels among entrepreneurs; namely:

- ***Enactive mastery****:* an individual's sense of their self-efficacy and confidence can be increased by positive experiences.
- ***Vicarious experiences:*** by drawing on the experiences of others, entrepreneurs can observe accomplishment without running the risk of failing.
- ***Social/verbal persuasion****:* how preconceptions, society, or interpersonal interactions that impose peer pressure may affect specific individuals.
- ***Psychological or autonomic arousal****:* gaining awareness of one's own emotional responses to various situations as well as the effects of one's actions.

According to Msimango-Galawe and Mazonde (2021), self-efficacy is defined as, "an individual's subjective judgment of one's knack to manage, influence, and control diverse aspects of one's life" (p. 244). This is an individual's ability to believe in themselves and their capabilities to complete a task they have set out for themselves. Smith *et al* (2019) argues that entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), in contrast to the oversimplified definition of self-efficacy, explores the extent to which an individual believes that he or she is capable of carrying out the roles and tasks required in an entrepreneurial context, which includes venture creation and entrepreneurial performance. This is in line with Elliott's (2020) notion that the desire to start a new business is a major driving force.

Msimango-Galawe and Mazonde (2021) posits that the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) supposes that what may be taught through direct experience can also be learnt by watching others. They claim that those with a higher self-efficacy are more inclined to engage in a specific behaviour or endeavor and are more emotionally resilient to the adversity that entrepreneurship is susceptible to. They underline that there are five approaches to develop self-efficacy; namely, mastery experiences, role modeling, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and judgment of one's physiological states. Does self-efficacy increase the success of a business?

Msimango-Galawe and Mazonde (2021) argue that the traits of the entrepreneur have a significant impact on the success of a business, especially in new endeavours. Self-efficacy is associated with subjective performance perceptions, innovation, and growth in the business. In addition, Mielniczuk and Laguna (2020) assert that entrepreneurs with poor self-efficacy are more likely to be easily discouraged by obstacles and to think they have little control over entrepreneurial events and results, both of which can negatively affect their ability to perform their roles.

Proposition 2: Self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy have been recognized as the results of entrepreneurial coaching initiatives.

2.8 Conclusion on literature review

In conclusion, it is noted that the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs have been extensively discussed in the literature review. It is well understood, and there are possible solutions that could lower the failure rate of these types of businesses. The authors argue that black women, in comparison to their white counterparts, suffer even greater difficulties in maintaining their enterprises. This is partly because they are less exposed to various forms of entrepreneurial activity. According to the Social Cognitive Theory, learning happens through observation, which would support the fact that limits black women from observing economic activities that they would learn from during

their formative years. Using coaching as a support strategy, this theory can also help close the exposure/skills gap. Although this study did take a position on the definition of entrepreneurial coaching, scholars generally agreed that there does not appear to be a single definition; rather, the providers of the support structure can define it and combine various ways.

The underrepresentation of black women and their distinctive experiences, particular problems, and how they have successfully overcome these challenges was a glaring gap in this literature. Although entrepreneurial coaching is acknowledged as a business support strategy, there may be little research on how it impacts SMEs owned by black women in terms of development, expansion,and overall success. Additionally, there are not many success stories that feature case studies of black women entrepreneurs who may be able to shed light on the precise advantages of their entrepreneurial journey. Black women have a variety of cultural factors that influence how they interact with their surroundings. With that stated, it would be interesting to see how that impacts the relationships between coaches and the implications to coaching initiatives.

The authors' recommendations are largely centred on entrepreneurship skill development and having entrepreneurial coaching at the core of developing, in order to ensure that this group of women is at least somewhat supported.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the research methodology that was used to address the research question as stipulated in Section 1. There is a strong focus on what and how data were collected to ensure reliability and validity. The definition of qualitative research methodology is provided alongside the research instrument, the analysis approach, and the ethical considerations.

3.2 Research approach

“Qualitative research, is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Aspers & Corte, 2019, p 142). This implies that qualitative researchers investigate phenomena in its natural setting while attempting to explain it in terms of how individuals assign meaning to things. To achieve qualitative research, researchers use a variety of empirical materials to collect data, such as case studies, introspective life stories, interviews, observations, narratives *et cetera*. This makes reference to the fact that all these methods are used to uncover insights and the lived experiences of participants.

Castro *et al.* (2010) as cited in Mshumpela (2019) presents a key strength to qualitative research as its ability to produce in-depth narrative descriptions that occur in the original environment in which observations occur which gives a rich detailed assessment of human experiences (emotions, beliefs, and behaviours). When compared to quantitative research, the qualitative approach offers a thorough understanding of human experiences that can never be properly captured by measurement scales and multiple regression models.

For this research, a qualitative research method was employed. The reason for this selection was due to the need to draw in-depth insights from the lived experiences of the chosen participants to better understand their thoughts and

experiences about the role of entrepreneurial coaching for black women owned SMEs.

3.3 Population and sampling method

The number of formal and informal SMEs in South Africa was 2 683 602, according to the SMME quarterly report of 2022. There were 1 005 288 SMEs in Gauteng and 375 209 SMEs in Kwazulu-Natal. Black people own 75.7% of all SMEs in South Africa. The prior data provides no clear indication of how many are explicitly owned by Black women. For the purposes of this study, black women who own businesses in Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal who have been exposed to entrepreneurial coaching were the target group. Women between the ages of 25 and 46 made up most of the population. Two PhDs were the greatest level of education attained by the populace. Most SMEs have been in operation for over four years, with the longest tenure being seven years. The SMEs had staff sizes ranging from one to 30. The population's business sector included everything from manufacturing chemicals to advertising.

A sampling survey uses a structured interview to explore people's attitudes and opinions. The results of a structured interview schedule can be used to identify a particular demographic or sub-group. It is widely known that a smaller group of participants can accurately predict data about a larger number of participants (Rahi, 2017). In addition, this form of selection saves time and money by not requiring as much research into the entire target population. Rahi (2017) also discusses probability sampling and non-probability sampling, which are two different types of sampling techniques. Non-probability sampling was employed as this will be an in-depth explorative study. “Non-probability sampling is the sampling approach in which the chance or probability of each unit is to be selected is not known or confirmed” (Rahi, 2017, p. 3).

For this research, purposive and convenience sampling was used “purposive sampling, also called judgement sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Mshumpela, 2019, p. 44). This implies that the researcher selects what information is necessary

to gather and then explores participants who can and are willing to offer it as they possess the necessary skills or experience. Convenience sampling is defined as “a type of non-probability sampling where the members of the target population that meet certain criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at any given time or willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study” (Mshumpela, 2019, p. 44). This means that the research made use of participants within available networks who are willing to be a part of the study.

Using semi-structured interviews, a sample size of 15 black women were interviewed. These black women were chosen based on their experience with SME entrepreneurial coaching. The researcher purposefully and conveniently sought out black women-owned SMEs in various networks and business sectors.

3.4 Data gathering

For this study the data were collected in the form of one-on-one semi-structured interviews where the researcher had in-depth online video interviews with the selected black women participants. Interview questions that addressed the different research questions are available in Appendix B. Emails and Whatsapp messages were used to get in touch with the participants and schedule times for interviews on platforms such as Google Meet and Microsoft Teams where the consent form was attached for participants to sign before the commencement of the interviews. The location was wherever the participants felt most at ease, whether it be at home, at work, or in a coffee shop, for example. During the interview process, as per interview protocol, the researcher introduced herself, thanked the participant for their time, reiterated what was on the consent form and notified participants that the sessions are recorded via an external phone recorder. Lastly, the aim of the study was explained to each participant. The researcher prefaced the interview with a few qualifying questions, including: have you ever received coaching? How long

were the coaching sessions, and how many sessions have you received thus far?

3.5 Analysis approach

According to Kiger and Varpio (2020) when attempting to comprehend events, thoughts, or behaviours present across data, thematic analysis is the most effective analytic approcah. Themes are purposefully created patterns or interpretations that are taken from a dataset and address a research question. Thematic analysis was employed in the research as a lens to interpret the data sets. Creswell and Creswell (2018) posits that the process of making sense of the data, preparing data for analysis, and moving deeper into understanding the data are all the steps in the process of data analysis in qualitative research. The authors have then made a study recommendation for researchers employing a bottom-up method to data analysis. (Refer to Figure 3.5.1)

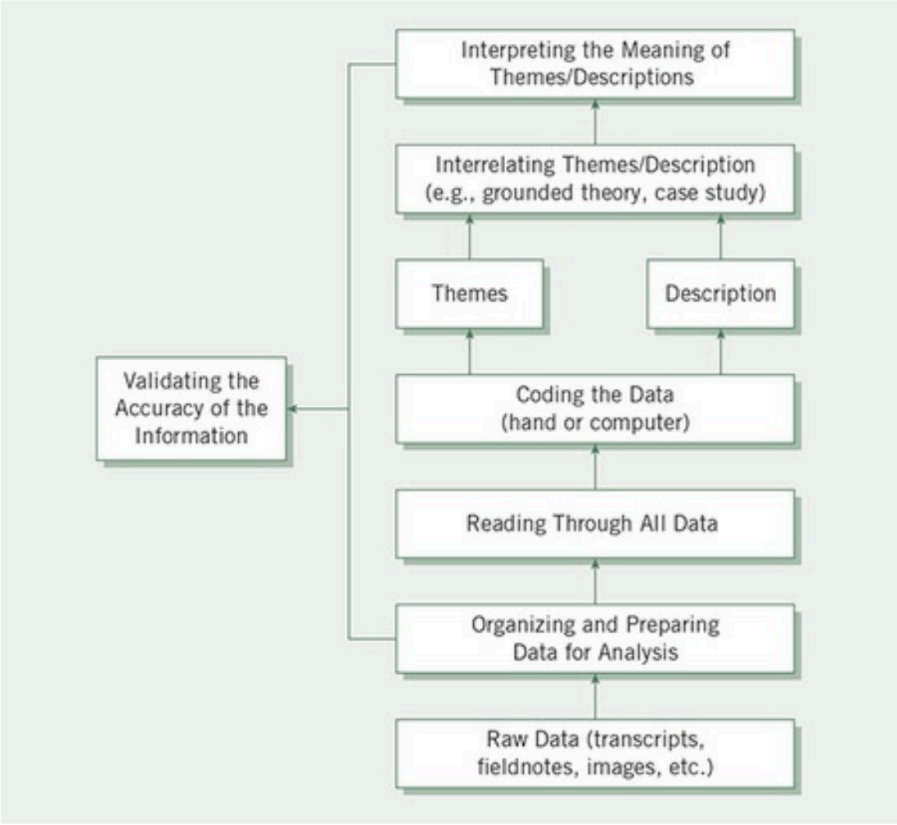


Figure 3.5.1 Processes for analyzing qualitative data. Source: Creswell & Creswell (2018).

3.6 Research instrument

The main method of collecting data for this study was the use of semi-structured interviews. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) this type of data collection methodology is beneficial for studies where participants cannot be observed physically. With the use of this data gathering tool, the researcher can fully control the exploration path. The researcher should employ an interview guide that is only intended to obtain pertinent material to meet the study aim. Semi-structured interviews, nonetheless, allow the researcher and participants to have free flowing conversations. Roulston and Choi (2018) further add that follow-up questions, also known as probes, are created in semi-structured interviews in relation to what the respondents have already said. Researchers ask open-ended questions on the research topics to spark discussions that are guided by the opinions and thoughts of the participants.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from participants using the research questions. The interviews lasted about 90 minutes depending on the participant and their level of expression. The interview guide was divided into 3 sections; namely, the participant's general information, the perceptions that exist around entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool and the outcomes from entrepreneurial coaching initiatives that contribute to the success of black women-owned SMEs. Adosi (2020) defines an interview guide as a list of the topics that a researcher intends to cover in the conversation alongside the questions that must be addressed during the interview process.

3.7 Quality control

The phrase *trustworthiness of data* is defined by Bryman *et al.* (2015) as referring to a collection of criteria used as reliability and validity in qualitative research that are supported by studies. These are the steps taken and the efforts made to make sure the researcher collects data that is accurate and of high quality. Bryman *et al.* (2015) propose that trustworthiness of is made up of three characteristics:

Credibility: This refers to participants being given the findings of the research so they can confirm whether they have been properly understood and whether they have additional information. Credibility and validation are often used interchangeably. This aspect was achieved by questioning participants on specific questions that were informed by previous studies with a similar aim and analysing those responses.

Transferability: This involves a transfer of research findings to a different context, and to accomplish it well, readers must read the original study in greater detail to contrast the similarities to their own situations. A thorough description of the issue under investigation was provided for this study.

Dependability*:* This aspect refers to ensuring that the research process is logical, traceable, and well documented. Bryman *et al.* (2015) suggest that to achieve dependability, the process should be audited. For this study, interviews were transcribed, categorised, and then a thematic analysis was employed.

In further upholding reliability of the participants' responses, the researcher did not give the questions to the participants beforehand to avoid rehearsed responses. To guarantee relative regularity in the questions used, the researcher employed an interview guide. In addition, video recording was used in the study to eliminate recency recall bias and memory loss.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are a set of guidelines that direct the research methodology and the process of data collection, analysing and finally the dissemination of the study results (Pietilä. et al. 2020). This is to make sure that participants are not harmed in any way because of their participation in this study. All data provided by participants was voluntary and anonymity was assured. The researcher was granted ethical approval from the Wits Business

School and the official ethical approval number was provided to participants. Consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were explained in the letter of information to all participants. The researcher also ensured that the participants were aware that they were being recorded, and their recordings were stored in a secure location where they will then be destroyed after the completion of the study.

3.9 Conclusion

The study used a qualitative research methodology as a data gathering tool. The sample of the participants was 15 black women entrepreneurs in the SME sector who have undergone or undergoing the entrepreneurial process. The interview guide served as a support for the semi-structured interviews which allowed participants to share their lived experiences. To anaylse the data , the thematic analysis was employed which provided key themes from the interviews. Quality control was achieved through credibility, transferability and dependability.

4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This section of the study focuses on the findings from the chosen group of participants. The study's main objective was to explore the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs. The data will be presented in tables, quotes, and charts that will be individually or collectively interpreted to reflect the non-verbal communication discovered during the interview sessions. All the findings were compiled utilizing thematic content analysis.

4.2 Demographics of participants

The educational background and business sector of the participants are highlighted in Table 4.2.1 below. In light of studies that indicates that 75 to 90% of small businesses fail during the first five years, the amount of time they have been in existence is extremely important because it will help construct an image. It should be mentioned that in Table 4.2.1, the size is the number of employees and the age is expressed in years.

Table 4.2.1 Demographics of research participants

Participants	Age	Level of education	Business Industry	No. of years in business	Size
1	42	Diploma in Media and journalism	Media Training	7	3
2	34	B-Engineering	Chemical Manufacturing	5	3
3	29	PhD in Chemistry	Chemical Manufacturing	6	5
4	46	Master of Business Administration	Retail Cosmetics	4	15
5	30	Honours in Psychology	Food & Beverage	6	6
6	35	Captain in Maritime (Dredge master)	Maritime	4	10
7	32	Honours in Journalism	PR, Food and Beverage	6	7
8	34	Postgraduate in Law	Legal Practitioner	5	7
9	26	Honours in Marketing	Marketing and Branding	4	5
10	34	BA Communication Management	Advertising	7	24
11	33	BA in Corporate Finance	Digital	5	2
12	31	Postgraduate in Marketing	Beauty and Hair	7	2
13	40	MBA Candidate	Business Consulting	7	27
14	31	PhD in Education	Consulting	4	2
15	35	National Diploma in Law	Fuel and Food Retail	6	30

Pseudonyms were used throughout this section, as was detailed in the methodology, to ensure the anonymity of all the participants.

4.3 Overview of themes

The findings in this section are analyzed via the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The themes were generated from each research question as indicated in Section 2. Further, there were themes that emerged that will form part of additional findings to provide a broader view of the topic.

Table 4.3.1 Summary of themes in relation to research questions

Research question	Themes
RQ1: Perceptions of entrepreneurial coaching	• Not understanding the value
RQ2: Outcomes of entrepreneurial coaching	• Key factors • Self-efficacy
Additional Findings	• Coaching vs Coaching • Challenges faced by black women

4.4 Findings

4.4.1 Findings on research question 1

The research objective with this research question was to explore the perceptions of black women entrepreneurs on entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool for SME success. This objective was uncovered by as a series of questions such as how they were introduced to entrepreneurial coaching, the perceptions they held about entrepreneurial coaching and the perceptions that exist in the space around the entrepreneurial coaching as a success tool.

Entrepreneurial coaching

Trusted sources

This section was taken from participants' general information in their entrepreneurial coaching journey, more specifically how they started or were introduced to the space. Out of the 15 participants, 10 used entrepreneurial coaches and understood what was meant by the concept. The question was ***"How were you introduced to entrepreneurial coaching?."*** The collective responses regarding when and how participants were introduced to entrepreneurial coaching were:

- Through business networks;
- Through mentors;
- Through other businesspeople who have used entrepreneurial coaching as well; and
- Through hitting brick walls.

Some participants' comments:

Participant 3: *"I started attending business exhibitions and would meet people who spoke about business coaching."*

Participant 9: *"It was when I joined incubator programs and accelerator programs, that's how I found out about it."*

Participant 10: *"I knew a group of white guys who ran a successful business and I had asked them how they did it? They told me about their coach who I then contacted myself."*

Participant 12: "*I was constantly hitting walls in my business and wanted to find out how I can solve these issues. I then spoke to a mentor of mine, and they recommended coaching."*

What stands out about this group is that they comprehended the coaching process and concept. As seen with participant 12, they could tell the difference between mentoring and coaching clearly. According to participant 3, these participants desired more than just mentorship or incubator programs. They

desired a personalised, systematic method of overcoming the obstacles they encountered in business. The participants mentioned that they found out about entrepreneurial coaching from mentors and their white counterparts, which suggests that coaching may be a concept that is understood and valued by few black individuals and many white people.

Personal perceptions

Positive perception

The participants who were questioned about their individual perceptions prior to contacting a coach gave a generally good reaction, which can be attributed to how they were introduced to coaching for entrepreneurs. Below were the three responses:

Participant 9: *"I had a positive perception because I didn't know about it until it was presented to us at the guiding programs. I understood the role of a coach in my entrepreneurship journey."*

Participant 10: *"I didn't have any perception, I didn't think much about it…wait, actually I thought it was motivational speaking to encourage me in my entrepreneurship journey."*

Participant 12: *"I had never thought about it. It was a new thought/suggestion, something that I could apply in my business as per a suggestion from my mentors and business associates."*

Most participants 9 out of the 10, paint a clear image of how they had little prior perception but instinctively believed in it because of who proposed it, with only participant 10 believing it was personal motivational speaking. This shows that the importance of who informs the entrepreneur about the benefits of coaching for entrepreneurs matters.

Perceptions that exist

Understanding the value and cost

The second component of this question was the perceptions that exists within the space. This question will be looked at from 10/15 participants from the interviews and below are some responses:

Participant 1: *"…Some of the black women I have spoken to do not take it too seriously and they don't think it works."*

Participant 2: *"…the black women I have spoken to think that they can only get a coach once they reach a certain financial goal. Before that time, they don't think there is much value in it."*

Participant 4: *"… they think that a coach will steal the idea and will interfere with the structure of the business."*

Participant 8: *"Most people I have spoken to think that it's an expensive exercise, why should I spend about one thousand something whereas I can redirect those funds somewhere else in the business."*

Participant 10: *"…coaching takes a long time; they want immediate solutions… like a quick fix."*

The participants brought up several concerns, including access to qualified coaches, which suggests that they may not have known where to look for them or how to properly vet them. Entrepreneurs would rather spend the money that could be used for coaching on other business expenses, according to participant 8. This suggests that the value of entrepreneurial coaching has not been adequately conveyed to or understood by entrepreneurs, and as a result, is not a priority for them. This argument is buttressed by the responses from

participants 2 and 4, where the value and cost are not comprehended. Participant 2 adds that entrepreneurs also think that one can only have a coach when one reaches a certain financial threshold.

4.4.2 Findings on research question 2

Here the participants were asked about the outcomes of entrepreneurial coaching that contributes to the success of black women-owned SMEs. All participants agree that there are great outcomes from such initiatives that not only grow the business but grow them as well on a personal level. This was separated into 2 key questions; namely:

- *What are the key factors that made your coaching journey a success or effective?*
- *Some of the key factors that are listed as outcomes of a successful coaching intervention are self-efficacy, confidence, and self-awareness. Share with me your thoughts on this, how each of this changed in any way since after coaching.*

Key factors

Coach and coachee relationship

Participants responded as follows:

Participant 13: *"It's the coach's character and also my attitude as the entrepreneur make the coaching a success."*

Participant 10: "*it's the contents of the coaching program that make it a success."*

Participant 15*: "I think for me, it was my attitude towards coaching, my coaches character and knowledge and the relationship we had together."*

The afore-mentioned responses imply that the relationship between the coach and the coachee was foremost. Participant 15 mentioned that though relationships were open-ended, there was also a certain level of respect present that allowed boundaries to be maintained. The program's substance, according to Participant 10, was in line with her needs when she saw the coach. It can be inferred that the entrepreneur must first identify their areas of need for the coach to be able to assist them in getting from where they are to where they want to be.

Self-efficacy

The participants were asked about the outcomes they received after their entrepreneurial coaching initiatives. The participants shared the following comments:

Participant 8: "*After the coaching initiative I was more confident in what I was doing. I became aware of my strengths and weakness and how that affects my business."*

Participant 2: "*My self-awareness really increased, I'm more able to identify my blind spots and how to work on them."*

Participant 15: *"I already [had] confidence in my abilities but since getting a coach I learnt to distinguish between the health of my business and my worth."*

Participant 12: *"I grew a lot during the process, I had major imposter syndrome and that subsided. Coaching really validated and invalidated some of my limiting beliefs. All of this contributed to my confidence growing."*

It is clear from all the comments that coaching programs for entrepreneurs serve purposes beyond business. One hundred percent of the participants mentioned being more assured in their capacity to develop their enterprises. The statement made by participant 15 that she was able to distinguish between

her business and herself indicates that she is able to put herself in a different category from her business. This allows her to maintain her independence even if a particular business model fails. This was a crucial issue to bring up since being able to distinguish between your personal and professional worth shows a high level of self-awareness.

Participant 12 noted how she struggled with impostor syndrome and how, due to some limiting beliefs, she did not completely believe she was capable of many things. Since beginning her coaching journey, she has been able to overcome these limiting beliefs by having her coach confirm or refute certain assumptions she has about herself and the world.

4.4.3 Additional findings

Additional findings emerged which were catergorised into two themes; namely, misunderstanding of concepts and the competency gap. Both themes are discussed below.

Coaching vs Mentoring

Misunderstanding of concepts

The study initially had a focus on entrepreneurial coaching as a tool for the success of black women-owned SMEs. However, during the semi-structured interviews it became apparent that participants had inconsistencies in the meaning of these two concepts. With that being said, the decision was reached to interview 10 participants that have undergone or are still undergoing entrepreneurial coaching and 5 that actively use mentorship. This was done to compare these definitions and their role in these businesses and the participants' understanding of these definitions. Of the 15 participants, 10 were familiar with the concept of coaching and 5 were familiar with being mentored.

This is displayed in Figure 4.4.1

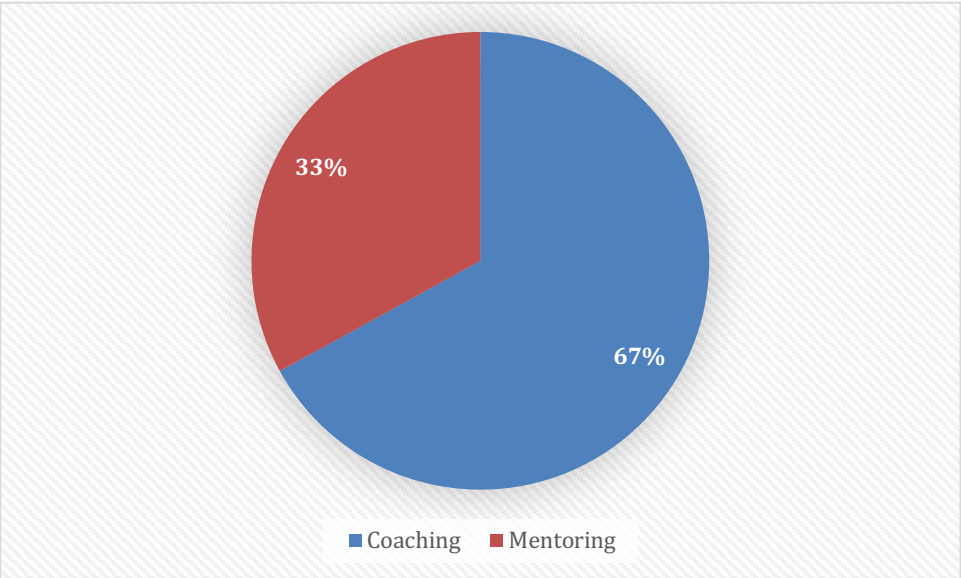


Figure 4.4.1: Black women owned SMEs that have used entrepreneurial coaching and those that used only mentoring. Own work.

The qualifying question for participants was, ***"Have you been coached before?"*** with the *coaching* in this context meaning *entrepreneurial coaching*.

The participants provided the following responses:

Participant 4: *Not formal coaching, but I have asked for guidance from other businesspeople. So no, I don't have a coach per say but my mentor is a helpful coach.*
Participant 5: *"I have always thought that they are the same thing, just that one you pay for and other one you don't."*
Participant 7: *"It wasn't formal, but I do have a life coach who does sometimes touch on the business aspect of my life."*
Participant 12*: "Yes, I have, not formally but I have a few mentors to whom I go get advice from as and when I hit stumbling blocks."*

Participants 4, 5, 7 and 12, who have used or are still employing mentors as a tool for business success, misunderstood what the term *coaching* meant. There was a disconnect between what the researcher intended by *coaching* and what the participants comprehended. For instance, participant 5 emphasised that

both ideas are the same and that the only distinction is in terms of payment. This implies that a mentorship turns into coaching if one pays for it.

When probed further, participants 7 and 12 displayed the usage of formal and informal coaching, with the difference being based on the relationship between payment and structure. The mentorship that these individuals received within their enterprises was what they referred to as *informal coaching*. To further unpack these two concepts, when the 5 participants mentioned above were asked to differentiate between *entrepreneurial coaching* and *mentoring* the themes in Table 4.4.2 emerged.

Table 4.4.2: Participants responses on Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching	Mentoring
"Structured"	*"Unstructured"*
"Not much of a relationship needed "	*"Relationship based"*
"You pay for coaching"	*"You don't need money"*
"Not necessarily needing business experience"	*"Business Experience"*
"Has walked through the journey"	*"A well-rounded person"*
"Has the lingo of business"	*"Generic, like a life coach"*

The above Table shows how participants compare the two concepts and the meanings they hold.

Challenges faced by black women

Competency gap

All 15 participants admitted to having faced challenges in growing their businesses. The participants were questioned about their business challenges as well as the difficulties experienced by black women in the SME sector to get a broader perspective on these issues.

The following were common themes:

- Being 2nd or 3rd generation entrepreneurs;
- Lack of funding;
- Not being taken seriously;
- Access to market;
- Sexual favours;
- Imposter syndrome;
- Financial education;
- Scaling;
- Networking;
- Being approached as a front for Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (tick box exercises);
- Being over mentored and less monetary opportunities;
- The historic role of women in the household; and
- Race and gender discrimination.

The following comments were made by participants:

Participant 3: *"I know a lady that was on the verge of getting funding where she met all the requirements for funding but only one person was left for signatory. She was then invited to his office and after she refused his sexual advances, the funding was no longer available. There are many of these stories."*

Participant 6: *"What I have noticed is that we need to prove ourselves 500% more than anyone else in business. I must go over and above to get half of what everyone else has."*

Participant 13*: "When we look at the hierarchy of women in South Africa, at the lower bottom its disabled people, black women, coloured women, Indian women and at the top its white women. That's what the stats have shown us, that black women are at the bottom."*

Participant 10: *"The lack of relationships with decision makers in most companies that might buy services from us, so I think the benefit of being the 4th or 5th generation in a family of businesspeople or professionals means you have those relationships to tap into whereas most of us are 1st or 2nd generation businesspeople. Already we have a knowledge deficit."*

The responses from the participants demonstrate the significant challenges black women face in the SME sector. The need for exposure to entrepreneurship before engaging in it was emphasised by participant number 10, stating that having a family network of business owners makes it easier than for first-generation business owners who must create their own network from scratch. They have no networks to tap into or businesses to take over. This implies that there are more black women that are first or second-generation entrepreneurs, which reinforces their limitations pertaining to knowledge and experience. This response is further enhanced on the aspect of race and gender brought forward by participant 13 where it is noticeable that amongst all women, black women are still marginalised.

Participant 6's response, that black women must prove themselves, "500% more than anyone else," implies that any errors emanating from black women-owned SMEs are intolerable; that perfection is expected throughout. Although the participants mentioned collectively that they do not want to be coddled, they expect an equal chance of making errors and being given the opportunity to rectify without the blanket statement to the effect that, "black businesses do not perform." Participant 3 draws attention to the problematic nature of the current power imbalances and the predominance of men in important decision-making positions. Women are, unfairly, forced to choose between bending to unjustifiable social pressures to win contracts or standing their ground and losing them. Overall, the issues raised by the participants highlight the value of teaching this group of women entrepreneurial skills to close the knowledge gap that currently exists.

4.5 Conclusion

According to the findings above, black women entrepreneurs collaborate with other black women entrepreneurs to share connections, knowledge, and advise. This is demonstrated by their contributions to the discourse on entrepreneurial coaching regarding perceptions that exists outside of the selected participants. The desire to continue doing business and grow while doing so is strong. The participants in the entrepreneurial coaching session praised the results, saying that their increased self-confidence and competency contributed to the company's growth.

Furthermore, the findings have shown that there is still confusion between the concepts coaching and mentoring, where it is discovered that they are used interchangeably. The study clearly demonstrates the difficulties faced by black women, which can be divided into four categories; namely, entrepreneurial competencies, entrepreneurial exposure, being the racial and gendered minority group, and how women are put in a vulnerable position to make sexual favours to advance their businesses.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This section discusses the results of the qualitative study, following the findings presented in Section 4. These findings were integrated with the literature review from Section 2 which will assist in generating insights as a way of answering the research objective which is to explore the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs. This section discusses the findings in relation to the research questions.

5.2 Discussion pertaining to research question 1

The perception of entrepreneurial coaching among black women-owned SMEs were the subject of this study. Through the semi-structured interviews with participants who did not have an entrepreneurial coach, it became clear that there was a lack of awareness and/or knowledge of the benefits that entrepreneurship coaching might have for their businesses. The value of entrepreneurial coaching needs to be *emphasised* to participants before they can partake in it. The research found that there is a lot of scepticism when it comes to entrepreneurial coaching as a support tool for SMEs. These findings are supported by Idris and Abu Bakar (2020) who posits that receiving business coaching has major advantages for the person receiving it.

It was also found that an individual's mindset, which defines how valuable they consider business coaching to be, impacts whether they use it. The importance of business coaching must therefore be understood by women micro-entrepreneurs, in addition to receiving advice on how to succeed in business by acquiring the essential information, skills, and attitudes. As could be predicted, the participants who used entrepreneurship coaching did so as a result of the many contexts in which they found themselves while seeking solutions to all the obstacles they were encountering. Even though they did not really know much about this form of assistance, they trusted individuals who suggested it, such as mentors, accelerator programs, and business partners

who had used entrepreneurial coaching to grow their own businesses. With that being said, the participants were aware of other black women that were sceptical of the benefits and purpose of entrepreneurial coaching and would therefore not consider taking it up.

Similar findings were reported by Timberlake (2017), who found that business owners who were unfamiliar with coaching believed it to be a money-making scam. The fact that the coaching industry is not regulated also contributes to their suspicion. This was also confirmed in this study's analysis of the coaching sector, which revealed entrepreneurs' lack of confidence in it. Another point raised was the price of coaching. Since it is seen as an expensive endeavour, some business owners would prefer to divert those funds to cover other expenses. This relates to the notion that the value of entrepreneurial coaching has not been effectively communicated to those that may use the service.

5.3 Discussion pertaining to research question 2

This topic examined the outcomes that may be attained through interventions involving entrepreneurial coaching. There was a broad agreement throughout the study regarding the advantages that entrepreneurs had during and after the coaching intervention. However, they do hold the key belief that a lack of self-efficacy prevents an entrepreneur from operating their business to the fullest potential. The participants concur that this is the cornerstone for them to continue learning and expanding their businesses. Without self-efficacy, a person is more likely to give up as they will lack the inner confidence needed to be a self-starter and continue moving forward. Muchabaiwe & Msimago-Galawe (2021) asserts that there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Another study found that entrepreneurial self-efficacy regulates the interaction between entrepreneurial education and intention. There was also evidence that entrepreneurial self-efficacy may work as a moderator because one's confidence in one's abilities can significantly influence how other characteristics affect entrepreneurial intention.

One might then ask, “can self-efficacy be taught to an entrepreneur?” “Is an entrepreneur born with self-efficacy?”. According to Smith *et al.* (2019), proactive personality and generalised self-efficacy are highly correlated with the likelihood of establishing a firm and venture success. Those with more generalised self-efficacy were more likely to establish new businesses, and those who also possessed a proactive personality and higher generalised self-efficacy were more likely to be successful in such ventures. The results of the present study demonstrates how these two constructs influence entrepreneurs' success. There was an increase in the participants’ self-awareness, which is supported by Timberlake (2017) as being some of the benefits of such initiatives. The participants demonstrated an increased level of self-confidence from when they first started. Santoso and Oetomo (2018) demonstrate how self-efficacy and self-confidence are related. They go further by mentioning that an entrepreneur with poor self-efficacy is less likely to have confidence in their ability to carry out specific tasks successfully.

5.4 Discussion on additional findings

Mentoring and Coaching

Even while many participants understood the significance of mentoring and coaching as being beneficial to the business and to themselves, there were signs that both concepts were being used interchangeably, especially among the participants who were receiving mentorship. Stokes *et al.* (2020) claims that integrating these two ideas is detrimental because it ignores their differences, and that this omission causes problems from both a conceptual and practical perspective. Knowing the distinctions between these two terms is useful for anyone who seeks to develop these habits and competencies. When the two constructs of mentoring and coaching are misconstrued, as participants do not understand the distinct contrasts between them, it results in addressing an incorrect objective. Stokes *et al.* (2020) highlights the potential for confusion regarding the appropriate behaviours for those who would be paying for such

services and those who would be participating in the program free of charge. Koopman et al. (2021) contends that to reconcile the meaning of these concepts, a closer examination of the subjective and objective aspects of these two misconceptions is necessary. The author highlights a crucial point when asserting that it is crucial to draw a distinction between the mindsets used in research to define coaching and mentoring.

According to van Coller-Peter and Cronjé (2020), there needs to be an understanding of the different contributions that mentoring and coaching can make in the development of an entrepreneur. This supports the present research's findings that the two concepts are used interchangeably in the literature. However, mentoring is seen as less formal and coaching is viewed as being more focused on performance and alignment of business objectives. Furthermore, the participants who were receiving coaching highlighted phrases like *formal coaching* and *informal coaching*. The participants provided explanations for their knowledge of these two concepts based on monetary compensation and organised versus unstructured coaching approaches. Since Stokes *et al.* (2020) suggested a more formal relationship, which today takes the form of a clear, paid contract of what services need to be performed, the assertion on formal and informal coaching are in line with the findings from participants.

The findings of these studies on mentoring and coaching show that there are interrelated parallels and variations, but what unites the participants is the influence of the concepts. Observationally, the impact of this depends significantly on the mentor or coach's ability to help the entrepreneurs attain their objectives. According to Stokes *et al.* (2020), it is also possible to uncover aspects of mentoring discourse that are performance-oriented and components of coaching discourse that are growth or learning-oriented. Therefore, it is more likely that a relationship focused on growth and learning will be referred to as *mentoring* whereas one that is performance-based will be referred to as *coaching*.

Challenges faced by black women entrepreneurs and the theoretical framework

The participants addressed the difficulties they have as black women in business. Although other races face similar difficulties, the study's focus was on black women as they are historically disadvantaged. The knowledge gap, which was frequently a result of being second and third-generation entrepreneurs, was one of the challenges recognised out of all the others. This was raised because the participants believe they had no prior knowledge of how business was conducted compared to their counterparts who often inherit family businesses. Black people, more especially black women, are still being considered as firsts in many career fields in South Africa, which suggests that there is much work needed to advance this disadvantaged group.

Muchabaiwa and Msimango-Galawe (2021) support the above mentioned finding that heuristics are driven by normative behaviours and exposure to entrepreneurial experience, which confirm the finding regarding *exposure* as stated in the Entrepreneurial Cognitive theory which is also called the Bandura Social Cognitive Theory. According to this social learning theory, people can mimic and learn from the actions of others. These might be parents, family members, or friends in this situation. A person's exposure to the entrepreneurial environment also has a significant impact on their motivation to start and maintain a business.

According to Norman *et al.* (2020), the success of women entrepreneurs is allegedly being constrained by a complex interplay of micro and macro-economic factors, including a lack of financial access, a lack of personal assets, stereotyping (marginalisation), psychological fear of failure, a lack of education and training, socio-cultural boundaries, a lack of networks, legal and regulatory requirements, and ineffective marketing strategies which supports the present research's findings. Norman *et al.* (2020) claim that the majority of economic sectors, including suppliers and consumers, continue to marginalise and discount women entrepreneurs. Many participants concurred that economic actors tend to only try something if it is from a black woman-owned small

business. Black women entrepreneurs do not necessarily seek pity, but they do observe a lot of prejudice based on perceived competency.

The importance of entrepreneurship education in empowering female business owners is supported by Norman *et al.* (2020). Research has indicated that many women entrepreneurs lack technical and entrepreneurial competence, indicating that this group has limited opportunities for vocational and technical education and training in an area that has traditionally been viewed as being for men. This points to the need for fundamental business skills among novice entrepreneurs. It is clear in 2023 that the challenges that Tirivangasi (2017) described, including discrimination, lack of education and skills shortages remain important issues.

6. Conclusion

The study's findings show that there is a lack of understanding of the benefits of entrepreneurial coaching, which contributes to the perception that it is an expensive endeavour. On the other hand, individuals that have a favourable opinion of entrepreneurship coaching have quickly embraced it and recognized its advantages. The results emphasize the value of self-efficacy even before starting an entrepreneurial journey. The owner has a better chance of success in business if they have entrepreneurial self-efficacy since they are ready to confront the challenges that come with managing a business.

Furthermore, the findings show that although some terms, like coaching and mentoring, are used interchangeably when discussing support measures, it should be noted that mentorship has a place in the entrepreneurial coaching framework put out by Kotte *et al.* (2020). The main obstacle for black women is racial and gender discrimination, which means they begin their careers with a lack of business knowledge. It was revealed that most times, this specific race is either first or second-generation entrepreneurs. The Social Learning theory emphasises the impact of exposure to entrepreneurial activities as a means to mitigate start-up challenges. Overall, the findings demonstrate that there is

evidence that entrepreneurial coaching does play a crcuail role in the success of black women-owned SMEs when it comes to the growth of the business.

6. Limitations

The research focused on black women business owners who have employed entrepreneurial coaching to manage their SMEs. The study investigated the role of entrepreneurial coaching on these SMEs. This study only interviewed 15 participants, which is considered a small sample when compared to the total number of black women-owned SMEs in South Africa. Mays & Pope (1995) contend that the results cannot be generalized due to the sample size. The participants' self-reported data, as well as their knowledge of SMEs and of entrepreneurial coaching, were significantly weighed in the study. In addition to these fundamentals, there were also methodological and administrative restrictions.

The availability of participants was the administrative component. A couple of the participants that were initially identified were no longer available due to job obligations. Even after these participants were changed, it was discovered that load shedding schedules hampered the interview scheduling. The assurance of the anonymity or any indications of the data that can be linked back to participants was one of the methodological limitations. In order to address this, each participant was informed of what was on the consent form and, most significantly, that they would each be given a pseudo name.

8. Future Research

The following section makes recommendations on future research that could be considered.

The first recommendation is to conduct quantitative research on the advantages of coaching for the entire business, including the financial aspect

of the company. This would provide a clearer picture whether the business experienced financial shifts as a result of entrepreneurial coaching. Secondly, a comparison of black women who live in urban and rural areas in terms of their exposure to entrepreneurship coaching is advised. The question at hand is whether a person's surroundings influence their willingness to take up coaching. The third recommendation would be to apply this research question to white female entrepreneurs to challenge the idea that their earlier exposure to business activities served as a launching pad for them to own successful businesses. The final recommendation is to examine an identical research subject in a setting outside of South Africa. Knowing this can help determine whether there is a need for context-specific coaching methods for black women worldwide. Exploring these recommendations would further contribute to the body of knowledge in this subject matter.

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Appendices

A: Consent Form

Interview consent form Consent Form

Date & Time of Interview: _____

RE: INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT INTERVIEW AND PARTICIPATE IN A RECORDED INTERVIEW

My name is Ntandoyenkosi Kunene and I am a final year MBA student at the Wits Business School. As part of the requirement for the completion of my studies, I am required to conduct an applied research on an academic subject. My research is looking at the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women owned SMEs.

The study arises from the primary objective of understanding the role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women-owned SMEs. You have been identified as a participant to carry out this research.
The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes to an hour and will help us explore the need of entrepreneurial coaching in business.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be kept confidential and will be kept safe throughout the use of it. For ethics considerations I will make available to yourself the letter of approval to do the research study which I acquired from the Wits Business School.

Please tick the boxes below if you agree to the following aspects of the interview and the use of the information:

☐ I agree to conduct the interview with Ntandoyenkosi Kunene on the research topic as described above

☐ I agree that the interview may be tape recorded, a copy of which will be electronically stored by Ntandoyenkosi Kunene in compliance with university requirements

☐ I agree that my name, as a participant will be omitted from the research outcome.

If you have any concerns, please contact either myself or my supervisor on the details below

Ntandoyenkosi Kunene (Researcher) E: 484272@students.wits.ac.za C: 076 307 0488	Dr. Jabulile Msimango-Galawe (Supervisor) E : jabulile.msimango-galawe@wits.ac.za T: +27 11 717 3980

I thank you in advance for agreeing to participate in this study.

Signature of participant: _____
Date: _____
Signature of researcher: _____
Date: _____

B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Qualitative Method: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. **Qualifying Question** : Have you been coached before ? If NO, then exclude
2. How long was each coaching session?
3. And how many sessions did you have?

General Information

- Where did it all start for you? How did you get into business?
- What has kept you in business for this long?
- What skills do you think are needed to thrive as a business owner?
- What challenges do you think black women face in business, what have been your challenges?
- How were you introduced to entrepreneurial coaching?
-

What perceptions exist around entrepreneurial coaching as a support measure for the success of black women owned SMEs?

- Before getting a coach, what perceptions did you hold with regards to entrepreneurial coaching?
- Among other business associates what perceptions exist around getting a coach?
- What perceptions do you think exist around entrepreneurial coaching for black women?
- Anything you want to share about entrepreneurial coaching and the perceptions around it
- What are your views about it being used as a support tool for business success

What outcomes from entrepreneurial coaching initiatives contribute to the success of black women owned SMEs?

You have been coached before and I would love to hear how you have experienced it

- What would you describe as the key factors that made your coaching a success or effective (Probe on process, coach characteristics, individual coachee, style or approach, place coached etc.)
- Share you experience on your coaching journey (good or bad)
- What would you have loved to see that you think would have made the intervention effective
- Were your expectations met
- Was it what you expected coaching to be (if not how different and share what you expected)
- What are your thoughts on coaching in general especially when it comes to black women) . Share anything that comes to mind

Some of the key factors that are listed as outcomes of a successful coaching intervention are self-efficacy, confidence and self-awareness. Share with me your thoughts on this, how each of this changed in any way since after coaching

- How important is self-awareness when it comes to entrepreneurial coaching?
  - Do you believe an entrepreneur can be successful with a coach but no self-efficacy? Please tell me more about that

- Do you think the coaching needs for black women are understood? Tell me more about that
- Do you think women and men should be coached differently when it comes to business? Please expand further

Tell me about your business growth before and since you started coaching
What has changed
Employees , revenue, profits, growth , sales , tell me about these success measures

C: Ethics clearance

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA484272/602
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	The role of entrepreneurial coaching on the success of black women owned SMEs
Investigator / Researcher	Ms. Ntandoyenkosi Kunene
Nature of Project	MBA (Research Article)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	2022-09-01
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey ☎ +27 11 717 3587 +27 82 880 4531 anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

nvkunene — Signature

24/10/2022 — Date: