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Mentorship and business performance among Igbo entrepreneurs in Nigeria

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Abstract

Poor mentorship has been experientially and empirically found to be one of the major causes of inadequate competitiveness of Sub-Saharan African countries in global economy. In view of this, the study assessed the relationship between mentorship and the performance of selected entrepreneurs in Nigeria with a focus at Awka metropolis. Survey design was employed by using a structured questionnaire to collect data from 300 entrepreneurs who were selected using purposive and convenient sampling techniques. The research instrument was adequately validated and its reliability established by a test retest method with a correlation coefficient of -0.81 and a coefficient of determination (COD) of 65%. Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the collected data. The results indicate a moderately negative relationship between mentorship and the performance of entrepreneurs in Awka metropolis of Anambra State, Nigeria. A major finding of the study is that entrepreneurs, no longer receive positive mentorship - the type that could have positive impact in their performance. The study concluded by recommending a framework of attitudinal change which will encourage positive mentorship from successful entrepreneurs to the upcoming and prospective entrepreneurs in order to equip them with the rudiments to compete effectively in global economy.

Keywords: Mentorship, Business Performance, Igbo Entrepreneurs, Nigeria

Introduction

The act of mentoring implies a situation whereby an individual usually an adult accepts the responsibility of counseling and directing another individually usually a child. The two parties enter into a contract which may be written or oral. There is an offer and acceptance between these two individuals and it is expected that both of them perform to the achievement of the goal of the mentorship. The concept, construct and operationalization of business mentoring is as old as man (Egwu, 2012). Our Lord Jesus Christ according to him alluded clearly to it when in Matthew Gospel, chapter 25 from verses 14 down, he spoke to us about talents, skills, capabilities, profits, performance, productivity, return on investment (ROI), cash flow and breakeven point analysis, (BEPA). Indeed, this chapter popularly referred to as the MATTHEW LAW according to him is the foundation for CAPITALISM; Weber (1947) calls it the PROTESTANT ETHOS, which is the spirit of capitalism. Our external MENTOR, Jesus Christ expects us to be "good and faithful servants, being faithful over a few things in order to rule over many more things, he concluded. This underscores the value of mentoring in our modern life and existence as it is both physically and spiritually recommended as vital.

Modern business mentoring has been identified as a possible panacea to global economic distress, organizational failure and poor business leadership succession plan (Egwu, 2012), and can be a possible foundation to increase in competitiveness of sub Saharan nations in global economy.

Allen, Eby & Lentz (2006) opined that business mentoring has positive implication for the protégés – those being mentored, mentors and organizations. According to them, it enables the positive transmission of organizational values, cultures, goals, and vision. In addition, Hall and Smith (2009) as Egwu (2012) put it, that mentoring unlike apprenticeship and coaching strategies increases the skills, abilities and talents of protégés. This is made possible through copying, setting standards and emulation of the mentors by the mentees. In other words, mentoring enables the business environment to reproduce the best potentials in business environment from successful entrepreneurs because naturally mentees go to only the successful entrepreneurs for mentorship.

Business mentoring allows the “Ripecorn” or “CASHCOWS” to be isolated very early in their career and mentored into excellence (Egwu 2012) thereby exploring capabilities, skills, capacities and other hidden potentials and adequately preparing and equipping them for competition nationally and internationally not only economically but in all other aspects of life.

Since mentoring involves direct relationship with the mentor and the mentee, there is face-to-face contact which offers a fertilizing opportunity for the growth of trust and confidence in the two parties. This allows the mentors and their protégés to give opportunities for the development of competence, capability, productivity and performance. This is exactly what happened between Elijah and Elisha in the Holy Bible.

Adequate mentorship enables the mentored to aspire to the heights of their mentors to be like them and in some cases perform better than them (Nwogwugwu, 2012).

Problem of the Study

Despite the innumerable usefulness with little or no criticisms of mentorship in the human and technological development of individuals which predisposes them to compete effectively internally and externally, it have a lot of hurdles and challenges to combat in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Egwu (2012), there is nowhere in Africa and Nigeria where a systematized knowledge based, codified, face-to-face mentoring system exists. To him, the least of a type of mentoring system that can be seen are the legendary narratives of Master-Servant relationships that existed at the turn of the 20th century between Tycoon, and famed business men like Sir Lois Phillipe, Odummegwu Ojukwu of Nnewi and many of his drivers who later became master owners of fleets. Even that old but beneficial system is nowhere to be seen now due to circumstances that are caused by environmental factors including lack of trust between the parties involved.

Secondly, the apprenticeship system which also existed had long been bewildered with fraudulent practices such as modern slavery, dishonesty, lack of trust, cheating of all types and kinds, etc.

The Igbos that occupies the Eastern Nigeria are naturally enterprising in nature (Egwu, 2012). They live mainly by active involvement in distributive trade unlike the Yorubas who survive mainly in manufacturing venture while the Hausas survive in Agricultural produce (Egwu, 2012). Being very competitive and enterprising, the Igbos are supposed to be business leaders in Africa and champions of Sub Saharan African competitiveness in global economy but the reverse seem to be the case due to the state of mentorship in this part of sub Saharan Africa.

This dominance or fascinating aspect of behaviours are embedded in their culture known as “self-help and self-enterprise” that translates to competitiveness which began in the Igbo Trade Apprenticeship System (ITAS). The ITAS is a kind of informal and unstructured training programme, scheduled for an agreed period of time, which a person undergoes in order to acquire a desirable aspect of entrepreneurship (Orugun and Nafiu, 2014). It is popularly called ‘Ogba boyi’ which see a young man attached to a business mentor for a period of 4-6 years as agreed by both families. The business mentor or ‘Oga’ undertakes the responsibility of his well-being. The ‘boyi’ on his part undertakes to serve his ‘Oga’ diligently. At the

end of the agreed period the ‘Oga’ settles the ‘boyi’ with an amount that will enable him to begin his own trade. This has become an ideology and a mantra amongst Ndigbo (Nwora, 2011). Though, the above has been the situation in Igboland, but in the recent times, situations are greatly changing. Lack of trust among the mentors and the mentee has been a major challenge in this relationship. The ‘boyi’ no longer trust that the ‘Oga’ would settle him without formulating unexisting dishonest accusations against him in order not to settle him at the end of the contractual relationship. The ‘Oga’ too lack a lot trust on the ‘boyi’. The belief of the ‘Oga’ in most cases is that the ‘boyi’ has settled himself with a lot dishonest tendencies whether confirmed or not. In view of this recent development, the two parties - the mentor and the mentee are no longer interested in entering into such relationships to avoid scandal and abuse of power. In the place of mentor – mentee relationship, the environment which always looks for a way out of any social problem, has devised another means through those who are not opportune to go to formal institutions for formal training. This self-imposed alternative is known as the” HUSTLING METHOD OF SURVIVAL”

Egwu (2012), discussing on the challenges of mentorship as a business strategy for survival in the sub-Sahara Africa pointed out that the only acceptable mentorship strategy in the Igboland now is the “HUSTLING METHOD”. To Egwu (2012), what is in vogue today in Igboland is the “HUSLING METHODS” where young Igbo boys gather themselves, from under every “Ukwa and Udara” tree in Igboland and stow away to the big towns and cities, on their own to pursue motorists along the streets of Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt in order to hawk, few wares. These according to him are not in any way forms of mentoring.

The former method of master and servant relationship which thrived before in Igbo land which could better be described as the apprenticeship system has been saddled with jealousy, greed, arrogance, disobedience, dishonesty and other innumerable indisciplinary practices which have robbed the relationship the trust it was originally created to have. This usually make the servants to start this relationship with the belief that his master is greedy and would not settle him after the expiration of the agreed number of years. The master himself also is usually preoccupied with the belief that the servant has not been honest enough. This usually leads to a relationship that is associated with suspicion, lack of trust, confidence, doubt and their associated negative consequences. In most cases this relationship has ended in grave enmity between the families of the mentors and the mentees. All efforts at resolving these differences has ended fruitless or even aggravated and degenerated to more serious cases of court intervention. Something definitely has gone wrong somewhere and need serious physical and spiritual intervention.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to find out the role of mentorship in Sub Sahara African competitiveness in global economy. The only sub objective of the study is to ascertain the relationship between mentorship and business performance of Igbo Entrepreneurs in Nigeria with a focus at Awka Metropolis.

Research Question

What is the relationship between mentorship and the business performance of Igbo entrepreneurs in Awka Metropolis?

Hypothesis of the Study

There is no significant relationship between mentorship and the business performance of Igbo entrepreneurs in Awka metropolis.

Review of Related Literature

The concept of mentorship is a very important concept especially among Igbo people in Eastern Nigeria. Mentorship as a business survival strategy is one of the commonest strategies of survival, success and sustainability in the literature. It is mostly used in developing nations of the world to ensure the acquisition of business knowledge and skills through a non-formal process of teaching and learning. It makes use of apprenticeship methods to make sure that the learners acquire the basic skills and competencies to be employable in the business environment. The present position in Nigeria is that employment has reached its peak. Part of the reasons for this is that most graduates are not employable because even when they possess the theoretical knowledge, they lack the practical skills to be able to carry on the job for which they are employed. This problem calls for a scientific investigation especially among the Igbos in Eastern Nigeria.

The Igbos of the three ethnic groups in Nigeria are argued to be the most energetic parvenus who have successfully challenged the established order of supremacy which the Yorubas occupied in the elitist professional civil service establishments (Olutayo, 1999). The Igbo entrepreneurs are persons who do not only co-ordinate factors of production, but who from time to time seeks opportunities to make profit through innovativeness, creativity, customer's satisfaction and efficient utilization of scarce resources in a consistent cultural pattern (Orugun and Nafiu, 2014). Thus, Igbo entrepreneurs are visionary, enthusiastic and result-driven, renowned for their zeal and tenacity that they have for business; a unique trait that has distinguished them from others, Eze, (2012). In Orugun and Nafiu (2014). According to Agazie 2012, remove the Igbos from Nigeria, the economy will collapse like a flimsy deck of cards.

The influence of mentorship on business performance of entrepreneurs worldwide cannot easily be swept under a carpet. The quantum of evidence of this fact in the literature triggered a statement by Prof. Egwu U. Egwu (2012) – A renowned Professor of business management to hypothesize that the current global economic meltdown is as a result of low quality mentorship in the world and Africa's business environment. According to him, the meltdown was occasioned by corruption, greed, avarice and hedonistic atavism. Between 2003 – 2007, he stated that the world GDP grew by 5% with less than 4% inflation rate. The so called free trade which is a baby of "I can do it myself syndrome" led to the flourishing and outsourcing of liberalization and competition. The result of this, he continued with the emergence of market economies such as the CRISBA (China, Russia, India, South Korea, Brazil and South Africa) who flourished and cheap products flooded world markets. According to the same report, by 2008, 35 years of World Boom had vanished, leaving in its trail a DOOMED WORLD. This he continued made experts to

suddenly go back to re-examine the validity and reliability of the MACRO-ECONOMIC variables of world capitalism which were devoid of mentorship from the cradle, he concluded.

Business mentorship has been found to be the root of corporate citizenship and self-efficacy in organizations (Egwu, 2012). This according to him is because when people properly choose their mentors and protégés whom they are sure would be committed, loyal and patriotic leadership successors of the future, they are happier that their efforts would not at the end be in vain. The mentor has a willingness to devote his energy to produce his succession while the protégés have a loyalty to act according to the dictates and directions of the mentor all to the benefit of the organization (Bernard 1938 in Egwu, 2012). In other words, mentoring can exist at individual, groups and organizational levels. Wherever and however it exists, it requires absolute loyalty in offer and acceptance of goals and commitment of the parties towards the achievement of the goals.

This prompted Kanter (1968) according to Egwu (2012) to state that only those who loyally accept the goals and values of an organization shall be mentored because according to Porter (1974); organizational commitment indicators of protégés often indicate loyal attitudes, intentions and behaviour. This skill of commitment is very vital in entrepreneurship. This is in agreement with studies by Agbionu and Agbionu (2012) which found that entrepreneurs who were more committed to their goals were more successful than those who were less committed in their goals.

In a study that examined the relationship among constructs of protégés experiences, role ambiguity, affective and continuance organizational commitment, job satisfaction and intention to quit according to Egwu (2012), protégés whose mentors had focused their attention to their upbringing, had very little intention to quit (Kalbers et al., 2007). Egwu (2012) observed that a good mentor must develop the eyes and knack for spotting "slayers" as opposed to "quitters" who are just business mercenaries. He concluded by stating that generally mentoring enhances job satisfaction and performance adding with a confirmation from Ensher et al (2001) that mentored protégés tend to be more satisfied than non-mentored ones and job satisfaction have been found to increase job performance. In addition, business organizations that show their belief in their young employees and go ahead to monitor them, find the individuals clearly reciprocating (Egwu 2012).

Though mentoring has many usefulness in the area of business and other aspects of life but it is not without significant shortfalls. Criticisms of business mentoring point out some negative consequences of mentoring. Human Resources International, (2002), and Gibb (1999) according to Egwu (2012), listed these negative consequences as follows:

- Mentors delegate too much work
- Mentors take credit of protégés work
- Mentors sabotage or deceive protégés
- Mentors can be incompetent but hide it (interpersonal or technical incompetence)
- Mentors-protégé personality mismatch or lack of it
- Mentors sexually harasses protégés

In spite of the above shortcomings, mentoring still have significant and commendable effects in the positive performance of entrepreneurs not only in Nigeria but in the global environment Chao et al (1992), Arecher et al (1990); Eby et al (2004); Kiran (1985); Ragins (1997); Scandura (1992); and Thomas (1990); according to Egwu (2012) all have positive reports from their different studies conducted at different times in different environments.

Theoretically, the concept of business mentoring is underpinned by the process theories of motivation. The process theories according to many writers can also be referred to as the processes through which need deficiencies are translated into behaviour. The process theories include the expectancy theory of Victor Vroom (1964), Equity theory of Stacy Adam, Goal setting theory of Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, Attribution Theory and Reinforcement Theory of B .F .Skinner. Among all these theories, the Reinforcement Theory upon which are based classical and operant or instrumental conditioning (Pavlov and Skinner or Waston) states that the consequences of past behaviour would affect future actions in a cyclical learning process. The Incentive Theory of motivation as some authors refer to it posits that the incentives people receive from the performance of certain tasks spurs more positive behaviour in future or reinforces the emitting of negative behaviours in future if the incentive earlier received was negative (Dike, 2005).

Some critics argue that the reinforcement theory of motivation is not a motivation theory since it does not centre on what initiates behaviour, but it can be seen as a process of motivation because according to the proponents, it is a powerful tool in analyzing what controls behaviour (positive or negative). Relating this theory to this study, when people are positively rewarded early enough through a positive and unbiased mentoring process to a desirable behaviour, it will generate future positive actions. This will spur this kind of behaviour in the environment and before you know it, it will form part of their culture, tradition and philosophy of life. The implication of the above to the study is that an atmosphere that will make for conducive relationship between the mentors and the mentees should be created. This can be done by a drastic change in the attitudes the mentors have on mentorship itself and the protégés. When the mentors see mentorship as a serious business and approach it with a sense of commitment, dedication and responsibility, it will automatically make the protégés to reciprocate in like manner. By so doing, it will lead to positive change in behaviour which will lead to the fruitful and positive development and sustainability of the mentoring relationship.

Methods

Research Design

The study adopted survey research design to collect the primary data from the respondents because according to Asika (1991), survey research design is the best design for descriptive studies.

Population of the Study

The population of the study is infinite because it is not feasible to determine all the entrepreneurs in Awka metropolis due to the fact that they have no point of registration. Therefore, all the entrepreneurs in Awka metropolis constitute the population of the study. The study

used all the entrepreneurial ventures in Awka metropolis as the population irrespective of the sector of the economy.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size Determination

Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were adopted due to the nature of the population to collect 300 entrepreneurs from the population. The researcher moved from one entrepreneurial venture to another to solicit for the cooperation of entrepreneurs. Many of them cooperated with the study while others did not have time to for such study. The researcher however pressed harder and at the end, a total of three hundred entrepreneurs participated in the study.

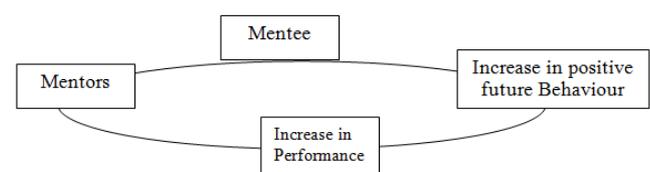
Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect the primary data for the study. Likert type modified scale was used as a measurement scale for data collection, ranging from strongly agrees (SA) 4 point to strongly disagree (SD) 1 point. While the extent of mentorship entrepreneurs received was measured by the modified Likert four-point scale as explained above, performance was measured by productivity and profitability which are the elements of the goal approach of organization effectiveness of these entrepreneurial ventures.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The face, content and construct validities were ascertained by giving the instrument to 20% of the sample size since the population is infinite. The essence is to dictate redundant information which were however expunged. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using a test re-test method. A correlation coefficient of 0.62 was obtained and was considered adequate for the study.

These research findings in the literature and the expectations of the researchers form the propositions of the study which it intends to practically investigate in order to prove or disprove. This is expressed in a research model of the study adopted from Allen and Lentz (2006) and developed by the authors.



The model is a diagrammatical framework that is used to express the relationships that exist between and among the variables of the problem under investigation. The literature unanimously agreed that when the mentors and the mentees engage in a contractual relationship, each of the parties to the contract is expected to be bind by the rules of the game. The expectations are absolute performance or compliance by the parties to the contractual agreement. This will transcend into the achievement of the goals and objectives of the relationship but problems usually arise when the two parties or one of the parties fails to perform his own aspect of the contract. This is exactly what common sense, experience as well as what some scholars also observe from the studies they carried out in some parts of the world especially in Africa, this time Nigeria where people have high level of distrust among themselves. The essence of the present study is to fill the gap in knowledge which existed

from the fact that studies that specifically and empirically examined how the present situation in mentorship concept in Awka metropolis is scanty if they exist at all. This is therefore the crux of the study.

Data Analysis

The primary data collected for the study were analyzed using frequency distributions, percentages and Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Frequency distributions and percentages were used to analyze the data on the biodata of the respondents. While the hypothesis was tested using Karl Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, the significance of correlation was ascertained using Z Statistics. The coefficient of determination of the variables (COD) was ascertained for more authenticity of the results.

Test of Hypothesis

Applying Karl Pearson's Correlation Coefficient formula of

$$r = \frac{n\sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Where r is the correlation coefficient

n = number of items in the distribution (8)

x = a value in the distribution of independent variable (500) which is mentorship

y = a value in the distribution of dependent variable (500) which is business performance-

$\sum xy$ = sum of deviation of value in the distribution (1000) which are mentorship and performance. Therefore $r(x,y) =$

-0.81 This showed a high negative correlation between mentorship and business performance. The implication of this is that the type of mentorship the entrepreneurs in Eastern Nigeria receive presently does not have any positive influence in the business performance of the entrepreneurs. Rather it has a high negative influence on the performance of the entrepreneurial organizations. This is a great deviation from the expectations in the literature. It is also a major deviation from the traditional roles of mentorship in the Igbo communities in the Eastern Nigeria.

A Coefficient of Determination (COD) of the hypothesis is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \text{COD} &= -0.81^2 \\ &= 0.6561 \times 100 = 65\% \end{aligned}$$

There is a 65% variation in mentorship (x) and business performance (y). This means that there is a prediction that positive changes in mentorship (x) would guarantee a 65% effect in business performance (y). This gives a good fit because a future positive improvement in mentorship (x) would produce a significant increase in business performance (y).

Results and Discussion of Findings

The result of the test of hypothesis of the study shows that there is a high negative relationship between the variables of the study. The result shows a negative correlation coefficient of $r = -0.81$. The implication of the result is that the rate of mentorship the entrepreneurs had has a high negative impact in their performance. This further implies that mentorship is not receiving the type of application it supposed to have. A test of the significance of r shows that

the Z calculated of 0.019 falls within the range -1.645 to 1.645 (Normal distribution table) at 5% or 0.05 level of significance. This made the null hypothesis to be accepted while the alternative was rejected. This finding calls for a serious need for the Igbos to have a change of attitude especially the mentors and the mentee in order to utilize the natural skills God endowed them to develop themselves, the society and remains competitive. The Igbos have been widely acclaimed to be naturally enterprising, energetic and skillful (Basden 1920, Paul, Laura and Bohannau, 1968 and Isichei (1976), but lack the spirit of trust and honesty (Egwu, 2012) which are essential requirements in effective mentoring, are seriously lacking. This current development is reflecting in the type of mentorship the mentee is receiving and consequently on the performance of such mentees in their future entrepreneurial pursuit. The findings of the study further confirm the assumptions of the study borne out of the experiences of the researchers in the geographical area of the study. This immediately calls for attitudinal change among the Igbo people in the area of mentorship. Mentorship cannot be allowed to die because it is an age long strategy that ensures the acquisition of basic skills for future performance of an action. It is used to enforce the possession of apprenticeship on the youths. One may be tempted to say that apprenticeship skills are not needed among the graduates of formal school system. It may not be an understatement to say that many Nigerian youths are not employable and that is why employment has been on the increase even among formal school graduates. The Nigerian university system enforces the learning of theoretical skills without the practical aspect of it. It is not the practical aspects are not part of the programme especially in the Natural Sciences but the practical programmes are not monitored by the institutions to ensure that the students are getting the required skills. The students are left to secure the places they intend to do the practical training and many of them seek the places with more money to the neglect of the places they will acquire the practical skills. There is need for a drastic change in the curriculum of the universities in Nigeria to accommodate the practical aspects of knowledge.

Conclusion

The study identified mentoring as a tool that could be adopted in transforming the Igbos who are naturally enterprising and creative to adequately have attitudinal change in order to assist in repositioning the Sub-Saharan Africa in its competitiveness in global economy. In view of this, the study investigated the relationship between mentoring and business performance of selected entrepreneurs in Awka metropolis. The result indicates that mentoring as it exists among the Igbo entrepreneurs have a high negative relationship to their performance.

Recommendations

Since mentoring has been found to be very effective in business performance and since the Igbos have been identified to be skillful in business, it is therefore recommended as follows:

1. That mentoring though an old long business survival strategy should be modernized by some form of attitudinal change of both the mentors and the mentees.
2. Adequate and effective communication between and among the parties involved in mentoring can go a long

way in reducing the incidence of lack of trust and dishonest tendencies in the parties involved.

3. Strategies to increase creativity and innovative skills in the mentees should be encouraged. Such strategies according to Nnabuife (2009:8) include: allowing oneself to be creative by removing the wall around oneself; giving ones mind fresh input everyday by doing anything and once taken can be acted upon by entrepreneurs; listening to other peoples ideas; talking to a child; keeping a diary handy to record ones thoughts and ideas; recognizing the creative power of mistakes; taking some time off; reading books on stimulating creativity or taking a class on creativity; keeping a box in ones office which could be used to keep all junks that could be referred to later.
4. Leabeouf (1989) model of rewarding what one wants could be employed since according to him when you reward what you want, you would get more of that which you want, and leave those you do not want.
5. Attitudinal change is indispensable. Since attitude is everything according to Harrell (2005), his ten life-changing steps to turning attitude; choose to take charge of your life; identify through self-awareness the attitudes that hold you back or propel you forward; reframe your bad attitude; find your purpose and passion; be pro-active; discover how to motivate yourself; build supportive relationships; see change as an opportunity; leave a lasting legacy, could all be adopted to make for a drastic change from negative attitude to positive attitude.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Entrepreneurs

Section A - Bio data of the Respondents

1. Sex of the Respondents
2. Type of Entrepreneurial Venture
3. Age of the Entrepreneurs
4. Qualification of the Entrepreneurs
5. Experience of the Entrepreneurs

Section B - Mentorship and Business Performance for Mentees

1. I received adequate mentorship before starting my business and it gave me confidence to start my entrepreneurial venture.
2. My mentorship lasted for about 4 to six years and I quite enjoyed it
3. My mentor is open with me during the process and that made me to be free with him
4. My mentor involves me in taking major decisions in the mentorship process and that help me in taking major decisions in my own business
5. Iam always appreciated whenever I perform well in the mentorship process and this makes me a confident entrepreneur
6. My boss engages me in goal setting and it helps me in setting major goals in my enterprise
7. My boss taught me to be honest and it is the brain behind my success presently
8. I was always free to introduce my own ideas and this makes me to be creative and innovative in all my undertakings.