Jurnal Teknologi Industri Pertanian 35 (2): 136-143, August 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.24961/j.tek.ind.pert.2025.35.2.136
ISSN: 0216-3160 EISSN: 2252-3901

Terakreditasi Peringkat 2
SK Dirjen Pendidikan Tinggi, Riset, dan Teknologi No. 158/E/KPT/2021
Tersedia online http://journal.ipb.ac.id/index.php/jurnaltin

ENHANCHING MENTORSHIP FOR SMALL FOOD BUSINESS: ROLE OF INTERACTION FREQUENCY ON ENTREPRENEURIAL EFFORT AND COMMITMENT

MENINGKATKAN PROSES PENDAMPINGAN UNTUK USAHA KECIL BIDANG PANGAN: PERAN FREKUENSI INTERAKSI TERHADAP UPAYA DAN KOMITMEN KEWIRAUSAHAAN

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Paper: Received December 18, 2024; Revised April 23, 2025; Accepted Mei 09, 2025

ABSTRAK

Usaha kecil di bidang pangan seringkali terkendala sumber daya dan kapasitas yang terbatas, sehingga sulit mempertahankan upaya yang konsisten serta mencapai tujuan jangka panjang. Mentorship yang efektif menjadi solusi untuk mengatasi tantangan ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh langsung frekuensi interaksi dengan mentor terhadap upaya, serta dampak upaya terhadap penyelesaian tugas dan komitmen tujuan usaha dalam konteks usaha kecil bidang pangan. Penelitian juga mempertimbangkan peran moderasi dari sikap positif mentor, pengalaman wirausaha, dan profil bisnis. Dengan menggunakan metode Experience Sampling Methodology, data dikumpulkan dari 111 pemilik usaha kecil bidang pangan di Indonesia melalui studi diary longitudinal. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa interaksi mentor-mentee yang tinggi secara signifikan dapat meningkatkan upaya wirausaha, dan berakibat pada meningkatnya penyelesaian tugas usaha. Namun, upaya tidak memiliki efek langsung yang signifikan terhadap komitmen tujuan usaha. Hal ini dapat disebabkan oleh faktor lain seperti persepsi kemajuan yang stabil dan keyakinan akan pencapaian tujuan usaha. Adapun analisis moderasi menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman wirausaha dan profil bisnis secara signifikan memoderasi hubungan antara frekuensi interaksi dan upaya, namun tidak dengan sikap positif mentor. Hasil ini menyoroti pentingnya memaksimalkan frekuensi interaksi dengan mentor untuk meningkatkan kinerja pengusaha. Hal ini dapat dicapai dengan menyesuaikan program mentorship sesuai dengan tingkat pengalaman pengusaha dan profil bisnisnya. Dengan kata lain, program mentorship tidak bisa disamaratakan untuk semua pengusaha, tetapi harus disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan dan tahap perkembangan bisnis mereka.

Kata kunci: frekuensi interaksi, upaya kewirausahaan, usaha kecil bidang pangan, pendampingan

ABSTRACT

Small food businesses often face challenges due to limited resources and capacity, making it difficult to maintain consistent effort and achieve long-term goals. Effective mentorship has emerged as a crucial solution. Small food businesses often face challenges due to limited resources and capacity, making it difficult to maintain consistent effort and achieve long-term goals. Effective mentorship has emerged as a crucial solution. This research examined the direct impact of interaction frequency on entrepreneurial effort and its influence on task completion and venture goal commitment within the context of small food businesses. The study also considers the moderating roles of mentor attitude, entrepreneurial experience, and business profile. Data were collected from 111 small food industry owners in Indonesia using the Experience Sampling Methodology through longitudinal diary studies. The findings demonstrate that frequent mentor-mentee interactions significantly enhance entrepreneurial effort, leading to improved task completion. However, effort did not have a significant direct effect on venture goal commitment. This might be attributed to factors such as perceived steady progress and the entrepreneur's belief in achieving the goals. Moderation analysis reveals that entrepreneurial experience and business profile significantly moderate the relationship between interaction frequency and effort, while mentor attitude does not. These findings highlight the importance of maximising interaction frequency with mentors to improve business performance. Mentorship programs should be tailored to the entrepreneur's experience level and the business's profile. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, mentorship formats and materials should be adjusted based on the business's developmental stage.

Keywords: mentor-mentee interaction frequency, entrepreneurial effort, small food businesses, mentorship

INTRODUCTION

The small food industry significantly contributes to global economies, particularly through job creation and f ostering local development. In Indonesia, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including those in the food sector, represent over 99% of the country’s businesses and employ a

**Coressponding Author*

large portion of the labor force (Tambunan, 2019). These businesses are characterized by adaptability and reliance on local resources and networks. Operating on a smaller scale, they often produce specialty or niche products tailored to local preferences. Most small food businesses are family-owned or managed by small teams, enabling flexible decision-making and close customer relationships. Low entry barriers, such as minimal capital requirements and fewer regulatory hurdles, make it relatively easy to start a small food business. However, high exit barriers—such as emotional attachment, financial investments, and difficulty selling niche operations—can pose challenges for entrepreneurs (BPS, 2020; Glendoh, 2001).

Despite their importance, small food businesses face numerous challenges that hinder growth and sustainability. These challenges include limited access to resources, insufficient knowledge, and difficulty fostering an innovative culture (Depken and Zeman, 2018; Khursanaliyev and Solidjonov, 2024; Khan *et al*., 2022; Najah *et al*., 2018). Competing with larger corporations remains a significant struggle, as these competitors benefit from economies of scale, advanced marketing capabilities, and efficient distribution networks (Beck *et al.*, 2005). While previous studies have highlighted these challenges, there is limited focus on interventions like mentorship that could address such constraints effectively.

Mentorship has emerged as a critical support mechanism for small industry owners, offering knowledge transfer, networking opportunities, emotional support, and accountability (Osabohien *et al.*, 2024). Mentors help entrepreneurs navigate regulatory complexities, identify market opportunities, and implement best practices to ensure business success (St-Jean and Audet, 2009). However, the management of mentorship programs in small food industries remains underexplored. Effective mentorship programs require structured organization to foster meaningful mentor-mentee interactions, align objectives, and maximize value (Kar and Sarangi, 2020). Without proper management, these programs risk becoming inconsistent, limiting their potential impact on entrepreneurial outcomes.

Previous research emphasizes the importance of mentor-mentee interactions. Regular and constructive communication fosters accountability and motivates mentees to remain engaged in their goals (Chiodi and Montes-Rojas, 2022; Ayoobzadeh, 2019). However, limited studies have explored how the quantity and quality of mentor-mentee interactions impact entrepreneurial effort in small food businesses. This leaves a significant gap in understanding the mechanisms that drive mentorship effectiveness. Addressing this gap is crucial for optimizing mentoring programs tailored to the unique challenges of the small food business.

This study focuses on the relationship between mentor-mentee interactions and entrepreneurial effort within small food industries. Entrepreneurial effort, defined as the persistence and energy dedicated to business growth, is critical for overcoming challenges such as market competition and resource constraints (Baum and Locke, 2004). High effort levels promote perseverance, innovation, and adaptability, which are essential for entrepreneurial success (Carter *et al*., 2017; Hayward *et al*., 2010). This research investigates how the frequency of mentor-mentee interactions influences the effort exerted by mentees.

The study also explores the impact of entrepreneurial effort on task completion and venture goal commitment. Persistent effort drives entrepreneurs to meet planned objectives, fostering business growth (Smith *et al*., 2001). Completing tasks reinforces progress and strengthens long-term commitment to venture goals, which are vital for sustained success in the small food industry (Markman *et al*., 2005). By examining these relationships, this research aims to provide insights into how mentorship supports these outcomes.

Additionally, this study addresses gaps in the literature by examining moderating factors that may enhance or limit mentorship effectiveness. These factors include mentor positive attitude, entrepreneurial experience, and business profile. A positive mentor attitude fosters mentee confidence and decision-making abilities, strengthening the mentoring relationship (Steelman *et al.*, 2004). Entrepreneurial experience and an established business profile provide a foundation for addressing challenges and amplifying mentorship impact. However, the absence of these factors may reduce mentorship effectiveness, limiting growth opportunities for mentees (de Janasz and Sullivan, 2004).

The findings of this study are expected to contributes to the existing literature by addressing the limited understanding of mentorship effectiveness in small food industries. The findings are expected to provide actionable recommendations for optimizing mentorship programs. By identifying specific factors that enhance mentor-mentee relationships, this study offers insights for policymakers, business incubators, and entrepreneurial support networks to tailor initiatives to the unique needs of small food businesses. Ultimately, these insights aim to empower small food entrepreneurs to navigate competitive markets, innovate, and scale their operations more effectively

RESEARCH AND METHODS

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study can be observed in Figure 1.

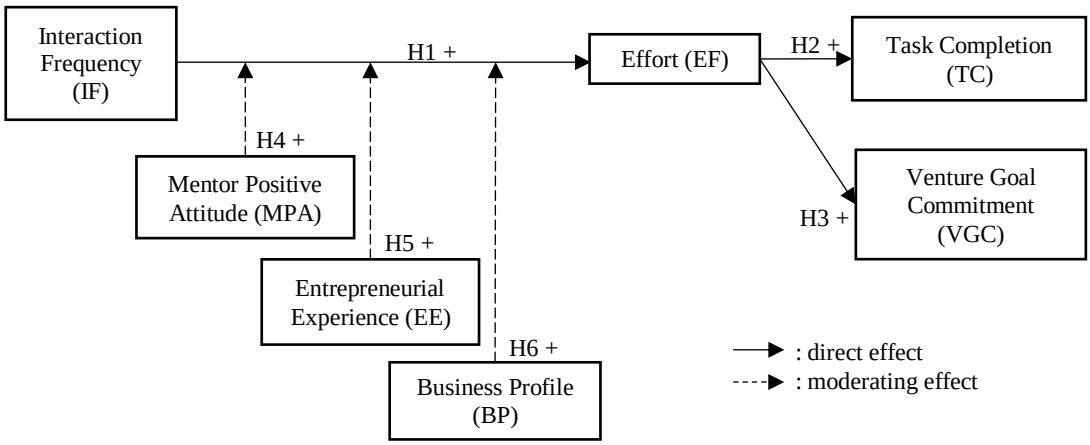

Figure 1. Conceptual research framework

The formulation of the hypotheses explains the direct relationship between interaction frequency and effort, as well as the relationship between effort, task completion, and venture goal commitment. It also outlines the role of moderator variables, including mentor positive attitude, entrepreneurial experience, and business profile, in the relationship between interaction frequency and effort.

Hypothesis

H1: Mentor-mentee interaction frequency (IF) is positively associated with entrepreneurial effort (EF).

H2: Entrepreneurial effort (EF) is positively associated with task completion (TC).

H3: Entrepreneurial effort (EF) is positively associated with venture goal commitment (VGC).

H4: The relationship between mentor-mentee interaction frequency (IF) and entrepreneurial effort (EF) is stronger when the when the mentor demonstrates a more positive attitude.

H5: The relationship between mentor-mentee interaction frequency (IF) and entrepreneurial effort (EF) is stronger when the entrepreneur has greater experience.

H6: The relationship between mentor-mentee interaction frequency (IF) and entrepreneurial effort (EF) is stronger when the entrepreneur's business profile (BP) is more established.

Participants

The sample participants were selected from the targeted population of small food industry business owners in Indonesia. Recruitment was conducted through collaboration with the Industrial Education and Training Centre of Makassar, business incubators, and personal networks. Participants were required to meet specific criteria, including current enrollment in a mentoring program and active management or ownership of a small food business. These businesses, excluding catering and restaurants, produce a variety of food products such as chips, cookies, and bakery items, which they sell directly to consumers (B2C). Additionally, participants were required to be at least 18 years old. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the study.

Data Collection

The data collection used the Experience Sampling Methodology (ESM) through diary surveys to capture real-time data on participants' behaviors, thoughts, and feelings in their natural environments. Diary surveys were chosen because they record momentary experiences and reduce recall biases common in retrospective methods. This approach allowed researchers to assess within-person variability more accurately. The surveys were created using Qualtrics and distributed online via WhatsApp.

The survey consists of a baseline survey and a diary survey. The baseline survey collected general demographic information, such as age, gender, and educational background, as well as data about the participants' businesses to provide context for the analysis. It included questions related to several variables, such as mentor positive attitude (Steelman *et al.*, 2004), entrepreneurial experience (measured by total years of experience as an entrepreneur), and business profile (which includes the age of their primary business venture and the number of employees). In the diary survey, participants were asked to report the frequency of interactions with mentors (a dimension of the mentor-mentee interaction frequency variable), the effort (the amount of time dedicated to their primary business venture, a dimension of the entrepreneurial effort variable), and venture goal commitment, which was measured using a scale developed by Uy *et al.* (2015).

Data collection began with the baseline survey, followed by diary survey. This phase lasted three weeks, during which participants were asked to complete the diary survey twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays upon prompts at 9:30 AM or 7:00 PM local time (WIB). Each diary survey took approximately 2–5 minutes to complete. To ensure data integrity, participants were given a briefing at the start of the study with clear instructions. Reminders were sent throughout the study to encourage timely responses. Regular monitoring and follow-ups were

conducted to maintain participant compliance. Additionally, incentives were provided as motivation for participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 29.0.1.0 and Mplus version 8.11 (Muthén and Muthén, 2018). Descriptive analysis, including correlation analysis, was performed to assess the relationships between the variables. Regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the dependent variable and one or more independent variables. In this study, both direct effects and moderation effects were tested to explore the impact of various factors on the outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 152 business owners from the small food industry in Indonesia were initially recruited for this research. Among them, 144 participants completed the baseline survey. After screening for eligibility based on predefined criteria—such as enrollment in a mentoring program and ownership of a small food business—126 respondents met the inclusion criteria. Of these, 111 provided complete and usable data for analysis. Fifteen participants were excluded due to identical responses across all time points or indications of potential outliers. The final sample consisted of 111 valid participants, yielding a response rate of 73% after considering both eligibility and completeness. From the 111 participants, a total of 539 responses were obtained from the diary survey, which was conducted across 6 data collection points.

Retention Rate

One of the challenges in data collection during longitudinal studies is maintaining a high participant rate throughout the data collection period (Fisher and To, 2012). The results can be shown in Figure 1 indicate an exceptionally high retention rate ranged from 68 - 96% at each data collection point, while the dropout rate remained low, ranging from -6 - 11%, highlighting strong participant engagement throughout the study period.

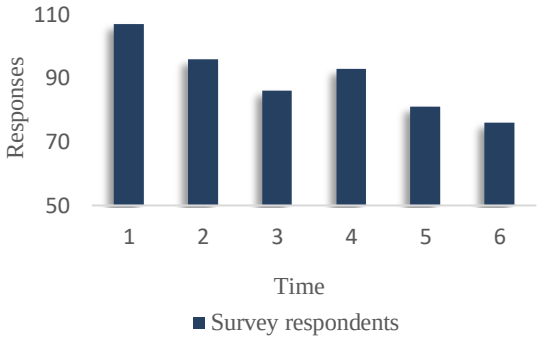

Figure 2. Retention rate over the data collection period

Respondent Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the study sample are summarized in Table 1. The majority of respondents are female, comprising 86.49% of the sample. In terms of educational, 45.05% of participants have completed high school or vocational high school, while 43.24% hold a diploma or bachelor's degree. The age distribution of respondents varies, with the modal age being 34 years. The sample includes both novice and habitual entrepreneurs. Most participants are involved in young businesses at the startup or early growth stage. Based on the number of employees, these businesses are classified as small enterprises.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for each of the key variables are presented in Table 2. The data provide insight into the overall correlation within the sample for each variable. Notably, the independent and dependent variables are significantly correlated, establishing a basis for hypothesis testing.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

Variable		Freq.	Percent
Gender			
Male		15	13,51
Female		96	86,49
Educational Background			
Junior High School (or equivalent)		8	7,21
High School/Vocational High School		50	45,05
Diploma/Bachelor's Degree		48	43,24
Master's Degree/Doctorate		5	4,50
	Min	**Max**	**Mode**
Age (year)	19	57	34
Experience as an entrepreneur (year)	1	20	5
Age of primary business venture (year)	1	17	3
Number of employee(s)	1	25	1

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. IF	2,2134	2,2840						
2. EF[a]	3,7421	1,1169	,199**					
3. TC	52,0968	34,7763	,153**	,168**				
4. VGC	3,4583	0,4508	,100*	,290**	,175**			
5. MPA	3,7528	0,5426	,211**	,151**	,100*	,343**		
6. EE	4,7421	3,3001	,123**	,233**	0,0540	-0,0040	-0,071	
7. BP	3,8191	2,6971	,122**	,262**	,168**	-0,0360	0,003	,519**

N = 539; IF = Mentor-mentee Interaction; EF ; Effort; TC = Task Completion VGC = Venture Goal Commitment; MPA = Mentor Positive Attitude; EE = Entrepreneurial Experience; BP = Business Profile.

[a] 1 = 0 to 30 mins, 2 = 1 to 2hrs, 3 = 3 to 4 hrs, 4 = 5 to 6 hrs, 5 = above 6 hrs;

Table 3. Direct effects hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Estimate	SE	95% CI		z-value	p
			Lower	Upper		
H1. IF → EF	0,097	0,021	0,056	0,137	4,669	0,000
H2. EF → TC	5,290	1,327	2,690	7,891	3,988	0,000
H3. EF → VGC	0,091	0,135	-0,174	0,314	0,675	0,500

IF = Interaction Frequency; EF = Entrepreneurial Effort; TC = Task Completion; VGC = Venture Goal Commitment

Direct Effect

The regression results for H1, which tests the direct effect of mentor-mentee interaction frequency (IF) on entrepreneurial effort (EF), reveal a positive and statistically significant relationship. The estimate for this effect is 0.097, with a standard error of 0.021, and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.056 to 0.137. With a z-value of 4.669 and a p-value of <0.05, this relationship is significant, indicating that frequent interactions between mentors and mentees are associated with increased entrepreneurial effort. This supports the idea that regular mentorship engagement motivates mentees to invest more effort in their entrepreneurial activities likely due to the increased guidance, accountability, and motivation provided by the mentoring process. Therefore, we accept the hypothesis H1.

For H2, which tests the direct effect of entrepreneurial effort (EF) on task completion (TC), the results indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship. The estimate for this effect is 5.290, with a standard error of 1.327 and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 2.690 to 7.891. The z-value of 3.988 and p-value of <0.05 reinforce the strength of this association, suggesting that higher levels of entrepreneurial effort are strongly linked to increased task completion. This finding aligns with the expectation that greater effort enhances task outcomes. Therefore, we accept the hypothesis H2.

In contrast, H3, which examines the direct effect of entrepreneurial effort (EF) on venture goal commitment (VGC), does not show a statistically significant relationship. The estimate is 0.091, with a standard error of 0.135, and the 95% confidence interval ranging from -0.174 to 0.314. The z-value of 0.675 and a p-value of 0.500 indicate that this relationship is not significant, suggesting that increased entrepreneurial effort does not directly contribute to greater commitment to venture goals. As a result, we reject the hypothesis H3. These results can be explained from the study by Uy *et al.* (2015) who argue that while effort is critical for immediate task completion and short-term achievements, it may not directly influence an entrepreneur's commitment to long-term goals. Seo *et al.* (2017) further emphasize that goal commitment is strengthened not only by effort but also when it is combined with clear implementation intentions.

Moderating Effect

The results of the moderation effect test can be seen in Table 4. For H4, which hypothesized the moderating role of MPA (mentor positive attitude) on the relationship between IF and EF, show a non-significant effect (β = 0.154, SE = 0.17, z-value = 0.903, p = 0.367). The confidence interval ranges from -0.18 to 0.488, indicating that MPA does not significantly alter the relationship between mentor-mentee interaction frequency and entrepreneurial effort. This suggests that, the mentor's positive attitude does not strengthen or weaken the effect of interaction frequency on mentee effort.

In contrast, the results for H5 reveal a significant moderating effect of EE (entrepreneurial experience) on the relationship between IF and EF (β = 0.012, SE = 0.003, z-value = 4.572, p < 0.05). The confidence interval of 0.007 to 0.017 does not include zero, indicating a reliable moderation effect.

Table 4. Moderating effects hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Estimate	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	z-value	p
H4. Moderation role of MPA on IF → EF	0.154	0.17	-0.18	0.488	0.903	0.367
H5. Moderation role of EE on IF → EF	0.012	0.003	0.007	0.017	4.572	0.000
H6. Moderation role of BP on IF → EF	0.023	0.004	0.015	0.03	5.939	0.000

IF = Interaction Frequency; EF = Entrepreneurial Effort; TC = Task Completion; VGC = Venture Goal Commitment

This finding implies that the relationship between interaction frequency and entrepreneurial effort is stronger for entrepreneurs with greater experience. In other words, experienced entrepreneurs appear to benefit more from frequent interactions with mentors, suggesting that their accumulated knowledge and skills may enhance the effectiveness of mentorship.

Similarly, H6 shows a significant moderating effect of BP (business profile) on the IF-EF relationship ($\beta = 0.023$, SE = 0.004, z-value = 5.939, $p < 0.05$), with a confidence interval ranging from 0.015 to 0.03. This result indicates that business profile significantly impacts the strength of the relationship between mentor-mentee interaction frequency and entrepreneurial effort. A more established business profile amplifies the positive effect of interaction frequency on effort, suggesting that businesses with a solid foundation or structure can more effectively leverage frequent mentor interactions to drive entrepreneurial effort.

Figure 2 below presents a simple plot to illustrate the moderation effect of entrepreneurial experience (EE). Individuals with high entrepreneurial experience (EE) consistently maintain higher levels of effort compared to those with less experience. However, as interaction frequency (IF) increases, those with high experience show only a slight increase in effort. In contrast, individuals with less experience exhibit a significant increase in effort when interaction frequency becomes higher or more frequent.

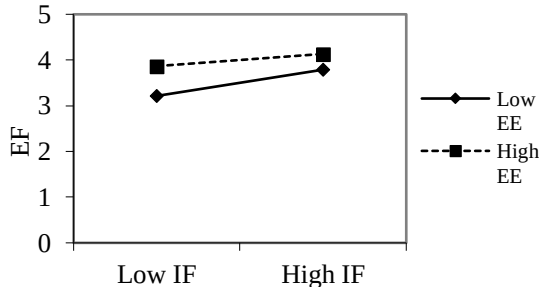

Figure 2. Moderating effect of entrepreneurial experience on relationship between interaction frequency and effort

A similar result is shown in Figure 3. The results show that variations in business profile, specifically the age of the business and the number of employees, significantly influence the levels of effort applied in response to the frequency of mentor interactions. Entrepreneurs with a high business profile, such as businesses that have been operating longer and have more employees, consistently demonstrate higher levels of entrepreneurial effort regardless of interaction frequency. However, in these businesses, there is a slight increase in effort as interaction frequency rises. In contrast, for entrepreneurs with a low business profile, businesses that are newer and have fewer employees, a significant increase in entrepreneurial effort is observed when mentor interactions are more frequent.

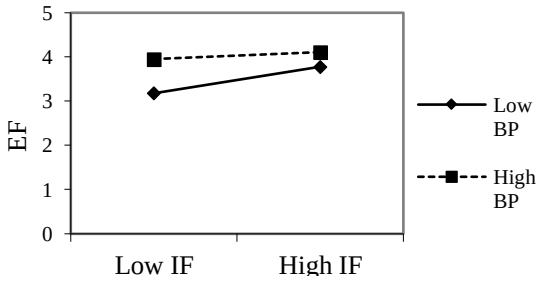

Figure 3. Moderating effect of entrepreneurial experience on relationship between interaction frequency and effort

The findings highlight the importance of frequent mentor-mentee interactions in motivating entrepreneurs to invest more effort in their ventures, which enhances task completion, a key indicator of business growth. This process can be made more effective and impactful by structuring mentorship programs to account for the entrepreneur's experience level and the business's profile. These insights offer valuable guidance for designing tailored mentorship programs for small food businesses. Rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach, mentorship formats and materials should align with the business's developmental stage to ensure relevance and effectiveness. For experienced entrepreneurs and more established businesses, the format of interaction can be made more flexible, avoiding rigid schedules or highly structured mentorship sessions. Instead, the focus should be on providing strategic guidance and advanced problem-solving techniques to support incremental improvements in effort. In contrast, for less experienced entrepreneurs and newer or smaller businesses, the format of interaction should be

intensive. Mentorship for this group should emphasize foundational business skills and motivation, as they demonstrate significant increases in effort when interaction frequency is higher.

Despite these insights, the study has some limitations that warrant consideration. First, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, such as social desirability or self-perception biases, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings. Additionally, the sample was limited to a specific geographic and demographic context, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other cultural or industrial settings. Future research could address these limitations by using more objective measures of effort and exploring mentorship dynamics in different industries. Expanding studies to include a broader range of geographic locations and business sectors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of mentorship effectiveness across diverse entrepreneurial contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The findings indicate that frequent mentor-mentee interactions play a crucial role in increasing entrepreneurial effort. When mentors and mentees engage regularly, mentees are more motivated to invest energy and resources into their business endeavors. This increased effort has a direct and positive impact on task completion, as mentees are better equipped and more determined to accomplish daily business tasks effectively. However, while enhanced effort supports task completion, it does not directly strengthen commitment to long-term venture goals, indicating that additional factors may be necessary to sustain dedication to these overarching objectives. The relationship between mentor-mentee interaction frequency and entrepreneurial effort is not moderated by the mentor's positive attitude but becomes particularly impactful when mentorship is tailored to the specific characteristics of the mentee's business profile as well as the entrepreneur's experience level. For instance, smaller or younger businesses, as well as less experienced entrepreneurs, may benefit more from frequent, hands-on guidance that helps them navigate the immediate challenges of business growth. In contrast, more established businesses and seasoned entrepreneurs may benefit from strategic insights that help them refine processes and sustain long-term growth.

Recommendations

To improve data reliability and address the limitations of self-reported measures, future studies could incorporate alternative data collection methods, such as observational assessments or third-party evaluations. Additionally, expanding the scope to include perspectives from mentors would enable a more holistic view of mentor-mentee dynamics, providing insights into how mentors perceive the effectiveness and structure of the program. Moreover, while this study provides valuable insights into the mentoring process, it also opens opportunities to explore additional moderating variables that could influence mentorship outcomes. Future research could examine factors such as the intensity and duration of interactions, as well as mentor expertise, to determine their impact on mentee effort and development.

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