FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN LAGOS STATE: A DUAL LENS ON ENTRY MODES AND LEADERSHIP STYLES

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Abstract
This study critically examined the modes of entry and leadership styles among female entrepreneurs in Lagos State, Nigeria, with a view to interrogating the socio-cultural and strategic dimensions of women's participation in entrepreneurship. The study employed a mixed methods research design, combining survey data from 1,200 female entrepreneurs across six Local Government Areas and five trade associations with in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. This approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis of naturally occurring variables through both descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as thematic content analysis. Findings indicated that most women entered entrepreneurship via apprenticeship and skill-based learning, with fewer respondents identifying with emergent or accidental modes of entry. Moreover, participants favoured participative and transformational leadership styles, exhibiting high levels of collective decision-making, strategic communication, and interpersonal competence, despite limited self-identification as leaders. These insights challenge essentialist narratives that conflate female entrepreneurship with necessity and highlight the value of contextually grounded, gender-sensitive frameworks in entrepreneurial discourse. The study concludes by offering targeted recommendations for rethinking entrepreneurial education, leadership development, and policy design in support of female-led enterprises in emerging economies.

Keywords: Female entrepreneurship, Modes of entry, Leadership styles, Women in Business, Nigeria,

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged as a dynamic catalyst for economic development, social transformation, and innovation, particularly within emerging economies where institutional fragilities often constrain formal economic structures (Adejumo, 2001; Ojo, 2009). In the Nigerian context, where persistent challenges such as youth unemployment, gender inequality and regional disparities prevail, entrepreneurship offers a pragmatic pathway to socio-economic advancement. Notably, women constitute a significant proportion of the active labour force and have increasingly ventured into entrepreneurial activities despite deep-rooted patriarchal norms, limited access to capital and institutionalised gender discrimination (Ibru, 2009; Eniola, 2023).

Female entrepreneurship in Nigeria has emerged not merely as an economic phenomenon but as a strategic response to systemic marginalisation and the inadequacy of the formal employment sector to absorb the burgeoning population of educated and economically active women. It is now well established that women's entrepreneurial ventures serve as critical mechanisms for addressing chronic unemployment, fostering self-reliance, enhancing household income, and promoting community resilience in times of economic volatility (Akanji, 2006; Okonkwo & Amaechi, 2022). Empirical evidence suggests that female-owned enterprises contribute significantly to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with women reportedly owning nearly 30% of registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (SMEDAN/NBS, 2023; Agwuncha, 2024). These enterprises are not only sources of livelihood for their proprietors but also engines of inclusive growth, given their propensity to engage local labour, stimulate informal trade networks, and promote indigenous skills (Bello & Olayemi, 2022).

Despite the growing attention to female entrepreneurship in Nigeria, scholarly discourse often lacks analytical depth, frequently relying on reductive and essentialist frameworks that obscure the diversity of women's entrepreneurial experiences. Much of the existing literature adopts a universalising lens that fails to critically engage with the complex interplay of socio-cultural dynamics, structural limitations, and the strategic agency uniquely exercised by female entrepreneurs (Afolabi, 2015; Okafor & Amalu, 2010). Consequently, critical gaps persist in understanding the differential modes of entry into entrepreneurship, the gendered constraints shaping entrepreneurial trajectories, and the leadership styles adopted by women in managing their businesses.

In particular, modes of entry into entrepreneurship among Nigerian women are highly heterogeneous and influenced by intersecting factors such as marital status, educational attainment, prior employment experience, and socio-cultural expectations (Nwoye, 2021). Some women are necessity-driven entrepreneurs (motivated by economic hardship and unemployment), while others are opportunity-driven, having identified market gaps or leveraged previous professional exposure. However, existing studies inadequately capture these distinctions, thereby overlooking the structural and subjective logics underpinning women's entrepreneurial entry points (Eze & Obu, 2023).

Leadership within female-owned enterprises also warrants more rigorous academic inquiry. The dominant discourse in entrepreneurship literature often privileges masculine leadership norms (such as assertiveness, risk-taking, and individualism) thereby marginalising alternative leadership approaches that women may employ. Emerging studies suggest that Nigerian female entrepreneurs frequently adopt transformational and relational leadership styles, prioritising employee well-being, ethical business practices, and long-term community impact over short-term profit maximisation (Chukwuemeka & Yusuf, 2024). Such leadership orientations reflect a broader and collective upliftment, which is largely absent from conventional leadership theories derived from Euro-American contexts (Nwachukwu, 2023).

Furthermore, the political economy of entrepreneurship in Nigeria is characterised by unequal access to capital, land, networks, and digital resources; all of which disproportionately affect women (Ogunlana & Adediran, 2024). Despite national policy frameworks such as the National Gender Policy (2006) and targeted financial interventions like the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL), and Agri-Business/Small and Medium Enterprise Investment Scheme (AGSMEIS), implementation gaps and bureaucratic red tape often exclude women from meaningful participation (Ogundana et al., 2023). Structural biases within financial institutions further constrain women's access to credit, as they are often required to present collateral that many do not possess due to customary land tenure systems that favour male inheritance (Adewale, 2022).

In light of these dynamics, this study seeks to interrogate the predominant modes of entrepreneurial entry among Nigerian women and critically analyse the leadership styles they deploy in navigating a complex and often hostile business environment. In doing so, it aims to contribute to the growing corpus of gendered entrepreneurship studies in sub-Saharan Africa by foregrounding the lived realities, strategic choices, and socio-cultural negotiations that characterise female entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The study holds implications for both theory and practice, particularly in designing gender-responsive entrepreneurial support mechanisms that move beyond tokenistic inclusion to substantive empowerment.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

i. ascertain the predominant mode of entry for female entrepreneurs;
ii. identify the array of leadership styles employed by female entrepreneurs in managing their varied enterprises.

Research Questions

1. Which Mode of Entry into Entrepreneurship is the most predominant among female entrepreneurs?
2. What are the leadership styles employed by female entrepreneurs in managing their varied enterprises?

Literature Review

Conceptualising Female Entrepreneurship

Female entrepreneurship encompasses the initiation, organisation, and strategic management of business ventures by women, frequently in environments marked by entrenched gender-based structural impediments (Brush et al., 2009). These impediments include discriminatory legal frameworks, limited property rights, financial exclusion, and sociocultural norms that constrain women’s autonomy and decision-making power. Entrepreneurship, for women in such contexts, extends beyond economic activity, it becomes a form of resistance, negotiation, and socio-economic positioning in male-dominated spheres (Jamali, 2009; Akinboye, 2022).

In Nigeria, female entrepreneurship is gaining increased scholarly and policy attention as a vital space of economic participation and a vehicle for exercising social agency. This emerging recognition is shaped by a constellation of intersecting factors including education, cultural expectations, access to finance, institutional frameworks, and the broader policy environment (Nwoye, 2007; Abimbola & Agboola, 2011; Okonkwo & Ojo, 2023). Educational attainment, for instance, plays a pivotal role not only in enhancing women's entrepreneurial competencies but also in challenging restrictive gender ideologies that undermine their legitimacy as economic actors (Oladejo, 2021). However, disparities in access to formal education, especially in Northern Nigeria, continue to inhibit the full participation of women in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Ibrahim & Ahmed, 2022).

Modes of Entry

The classification of entrepreneurial entry into opportunity-driven and necessity-driven categories provides a foundational framework for understanding individual motivations and broader systemic influences in entrepreneurial behaviour (Acs et al., 2005). Opportunity-driven entrepreneurship emerges when individuals proactively identify unmet market needs or innovate within existing markets to create value. It is typically associated with higher levels of innovation, scalability, and formalisation (Shane, 2003). Conversely, necessity-driven entrepreneurship is largely reactive—individuals enter business not from a desire to exploit opportunities but due to a lack of viable employment options, often as a survival strategy (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2022).

In the Nigerian context, this dichotomy is particularly salient. Empirical studies consistently highlight that the majority of female entrepreneurs enter the business landscape out of economic compulsion rather than opportunity-seeking motives (Olutunla, 2008; Okafor & Mordi, 2023). High levels of unemployment, underemployment, and gender discrimination in the formal labour market disproportionately affect women, pushing many into entrepreneurship as a last resort rather than a calculated career choice (Adeyeye, Olayemi, & Abodunrin, 2022).

Leadership Styles

Leadership, within the context of entrepreneurship, encompasses the strategies, behaviours, and interpersonal dynamics through which business owners influence organisational direction, motivate team members, and navigate the complexities of enterprise management (Northouse, 2019). In the case of female entrepreneurs, leadership is not merely a managerial function but a strategic and adaptive response to both internal organisational demands and external socio-economic constraints. This gendered landscape of leadership necessitates an inquiry into styles that not only drive performance but also resonate with the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs in patriarchal and resource-constrained environments such as Nigeria.

Two leadership styles (transformational and participative), have gained prominence in the discourse on effective female entrepreneurship. Transformational leadership, as articulated by Bass and Avolio (1994), involves the articulation of a compelling vision, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. Female entrepreneurs who exhibit this style are often noted for their relational competencies, emotional intelligence, and ability to foster organisational cohesion and loyalty (Eze & Eze, 2021). In Nigeria, where female-led enterprises often face credibility deficits and institutional scepticism, transformational leadership becomes a strategic tool for legitimacy-building, talent retention, and innovation, especially in micro and small enterprises (Ifekwem & Okey-Nwosu, 2023).

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to facilitate a comprehensive examination of the research objectives. The study population comprised female entrepreneurs aged 18 years and above who were registered members of any of five major female-dominated trade associations in Lagos State, Nigeria, between 2008 and 2018. These associations included the Lagos State Association of Professional Wedding Engagement Coordinators, the Lagos State Barbing, Hairdressing and Cosmetology Association, the Lagos State Caterers and Decorators Association, the Lagos State Tailors and Fashion Designers Association, and the Lagos State Tie and Dye Association.

A total sample of 1,200 participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. First, Lagos State was purposively selected due to its concentration of female entrepreneurial activity. Thereafter, the state was stratified into three senatorial districts, from which two Local Government Areas (LGAs) with the highest density of female entrepreneurs in each district were purposively selected based on official data from the Lagos State Ministry of Wealth Creation and Employment. The selected LGAs were Alimosho and Ajeromi-Ifelodun (Lagos West), Kosofe and Ikorodu (Lagos East), and Surulere and Eti-Osa (Lagos Central). From each of the six LGAs, forty female entrepreneurs were randomly selected from each of the five identified trade associations.

Data collection involved the use of a standardised instrument; the Female Entrepreneurship Questionnaire, which consisted of three validated scales: Mode of Entry, Leadership Styles, Risk-Taking and Innovation. In addition to the questionnaire, qualitative data were collected through In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), aimed at capturing deeper insights into the motivations, strategies, and contextual experiences of female entrepreneurs. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were content analysed.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: Which Mode of Entry into Entrepreneurship is the most predominant among female entrepreneurs?

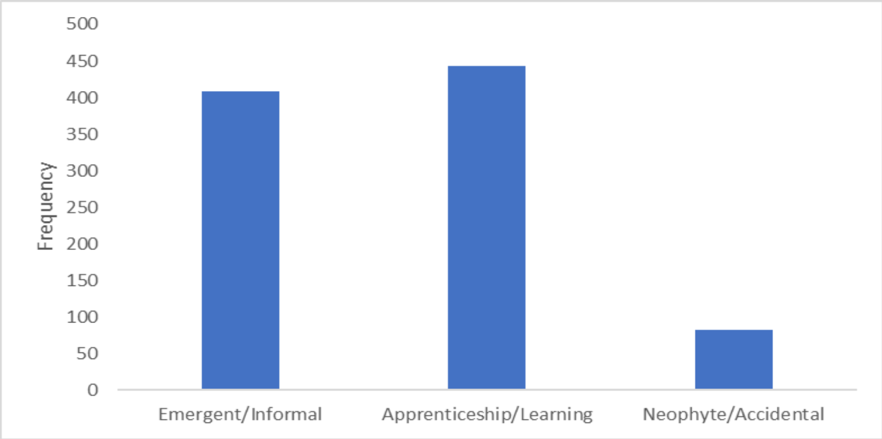

Figure 1: Female Entrepreneurs' Mode of Entry into Businesses

Figure 1 revealed that the female entrepreneurship mode of entry as indicated by 61.5 percent of respondents who strongly agreed that their mode of entry into female entrepreneurs is apprenticeship/Learning, 35.2 percent agreed, 1.8 percent disagreed while 1.5 percent strongly disagreed ($\bar{x}$=3.58). More so, 17 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their mode of entry into female entrepreneurs was by emergent/informal mode, 20.3 percent agreed, 25.1 percent disagreed and 37.6 percent strongly disagreed ($\bar{x}$=2.14) which is less than the weighted mean (2.94). In addition, 11 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that female entrepreneurs' mode of entry was by Neophyte/Accidental mode, 15.5percent agreed, 38.8 percent disagreed and 35.7 strongly disagreed ($\bar{x}$=1.51) which is less than the grand mean implying that few respondents were accidental/neophyte female entrepreneurs. This reinforces the notion that an apprenticeship requires some type of learning. The research results from Table 4.1 indicate the mode of entry into entrepreneurship for female entrepreneurs. The data reveals that 35.2 percent agreed, 1.8 percent disagreed, and 1.5 percent strongly disagreed that they started their businesses after working as an employee in a similar. Additionally, 61.5 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their mode of entry into female entrepreneurship was apprenticeship/learning. The mean score for this mode of entry is calculated as $\bar{x}$=3.58, indicating a significantly high agreement among the respondents.

Furthermore, the results shed light on how these women entered the world of entrepreneurship. Interestingly, 17% of respondents strongly agreed that they started with little to no prior experience. Driven by their ideas, they learned the ropes as their businesses grew. This "emergent or informal" entry mode received an average score of 2.14 on a 4-point Likert scale (likely ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). The lower score compared to the overall average (2.94) suggests there was less consensus among respondents about how prevalent this approach was. Similarly, 11% strongly agreed they launched their businesses based on an idea but also had some existing knowledge or experience. However, agreement on this entry mode (mean score of 1.51) was also lower than the average. This indicates that while some women entered entrepreneurship with limited experience, it was not necessarily the most common approach.

These results suggests that most women entered entrepreneurship through some form of apprenticeship or learning. This indicates that acquiring skills and knowledge through some form of learning is an important aspect of their mode of entry. On the other hand, fewer respondents identified with the emergent/informal and neophyte/accidental modes, indicating that these pathways were less common among the surveyed female entrepreneurs. The finding that a significant proportion of female entrepreneurs entered the field through apprenticeship or learning aligns with existing literature on entrepreneurial learning and skill acquisition. As Lortie (2002) highlights, this mode of entry involves aspiring entrepreneurs gaining practical knowledge and skills through hands-on experience with mentors or seasoned business owners. This approach, as Wei, Liu, and Sha (2019) suggest, equips individuals with the essential skills, knowledge, and networks needed to navigate the challenges and opportunities of starting a business. This resonates with Gibb's (1999) proposition that learning from experienced entrepreneurs offers valuable insights and helps mitigate the risks inherent in launching a new venture. The current study's findings provide further support for the importance of apprenticeship in female entrepreneurship. In essence, the survey suggests that many women benefited from this learning approach before embarking on their entrepreneurial journeys.

This result aligns with the responses from the IDI respondents who said:

> To be sincere with you, the experience cannot be bought in the market. Even as a graduate, I have realised that some skills cannot be taught in the classroom. I am grateful to one of my friends who encouraged me to go for training and introduced me to my boss who trained me in this business. The training helped me more than I can even explain *(IDI respondent; Surulere Local Government Area; 26/2/2020; See plate 9*)

Similarly, another respondent said:

> Most of the young business owners in our midst were trained by the elderly ones. And there is a lot of respect from the young ones to the older ones because the experiences the young ones have, the mistakes they made, and the lessons they learned were only possible. After all, the older ones made their businesses available as a training ground. (*IDI respondent; Ajeromi/Ifelodun Local Government Area; 24/1/2020; See plate 3)*.

The lower agreement among respondents regarding the emergent or informal mode of entry is consistent with the literature that highlights the challenges and uncertainties associated with this pathway. The emergent mode of entry refers to situations where entrepreneurs venture into business opportunities that arise unexpectedly or without prior planning. This mode of entry is characterised by a lack of formal business education or predefined strategies and is often associated with higher risks and resource constraints (Moore, 1994). The lower agreement among respondents may reflect the perception that this mode of entry requires a high level of improvisation, adaptability, and risk-taking, which may deter some female entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the finding that only a small number of respondents identified as neophyte or accidental female entrepreneurs supports the literature emphasising the importance of prior entrepreneurial experience. Neophyte or accidental entrepreneurs are those who enter entrepreneurship without deliberate intention or prior business experience (Ropęga, 2020). The low agreement in this category suggests that most female entrepreneurs in the study had some level of intentional engagement and preparedness for their entrepreneurial journey. This finding reinforces the importance of preparation, as research has shown that prior industry knowledge, entrepreneurial experience, and being well-prepared can significantly reduce the risk of failure and lead to greater success (Marcin, 2016).

Research Question 2: What are the various leadership styles used by female entrepreneurs in managing their various enterprises?

To understand the leadership styles employed by female entrepreneurs across their businesses, we analysed the data using descriptive statistics. The results are presented in Figures 4.8 to 4.11.

Figure 4.8 sheds light on the leadership styles adopted by the female entrepreneurs. A significant portion (nearly all - 96%) of the respondents agreed (43.8% strongly agreed and 52.2% agreed) that they believe teams function best when everyone is involved in decision-making. The average score for this statement ($\bar{x}$ =3.39) is higher than the overall average (grand mean) of 2.84, suggesting this collaborative style is prevalent among the respondents.

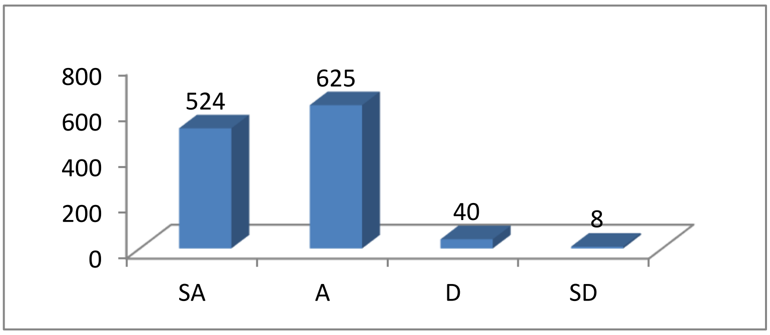

Figure 2: Teams work best when everyone is involved in making decisions

Figure 2 shows that 8.0 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that they are good at bringing out the best in other people 16.5 percent agreed, 52.1 percent disagreed and 23.4 strongly disagreed ($\bar{x}$=2.09) this is less than the grand mean of 2.84.

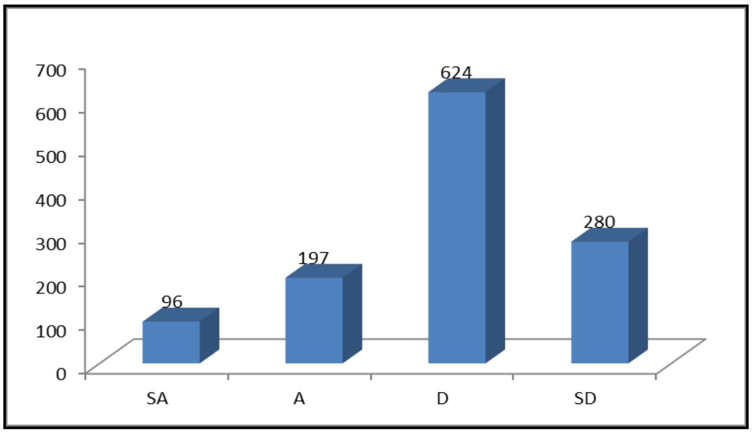

Figure 3: Bringing out the best in other people

Figure 3 illustrates that 31.8 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that they could assume a leadership role when necessary but didnot perceive themselves as 'leaders', 33.0 percent agreed, 22.7 percent disagreed and 12.5 percent strongly disagreed ($\boxed{\bar{x}}$=2.84) which is equal to the grand mean of 2.84.

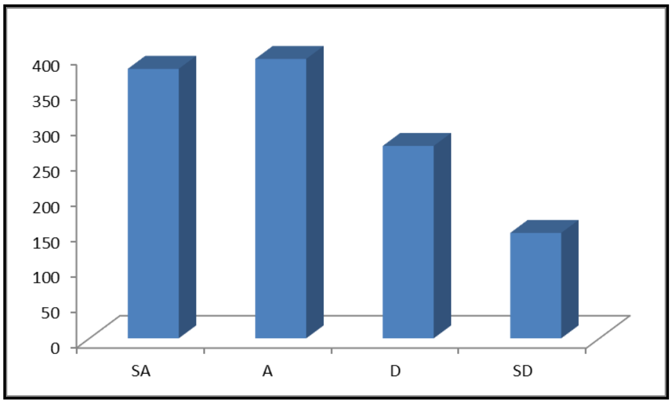

Figure 4: Taking on a leadership role but not considering myself as a leader

Figure 4.11 shows that 46.8 percent strongly agreed that they are happy to act as the spokesperson for our business, 37.8 agreed, 12.0 disagreed and 3.4 percent strongly disagreed ($\boxed{\bar{x}}$=3.03) which is greater than the grand mean of 2.84.

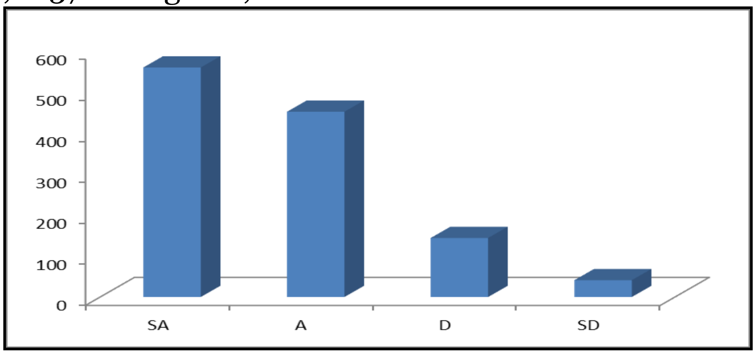

Figure 5: Acting as the spokesperson for our business

The weighted mean of 2.84 was lower than the mean scores in items 1 and 4, but higher than the mean score in item 2 and equal to the mean score in item 3. In general, the findings from respondents regarding the leadership styles of female entrepreneurs are favourable when compared with the grand mean which is 2.84. Overall, the response of the respondents in terms of the leadership style of female entrepreneurs is positively favourable with a grand mean of 2.84 as opposed to the benchmark of 2.5.

The table shows the grand mean of 2.84 > 2.50 is greater than the weighted mean. This implies that the various leadership styles used are high. That is, there are various leadership styles used by female entrepreneurs in managing their various enterprises

This indicates that female entrepreneurs in Lagos State endorse the idea that optimal team performance involves collective decision-making. Moreover, it suggests their ability to bring out the best in others, being capable of assuming leadership positions when required, despite not seeing themselves as 'leaders'. Additionally, many of them are inclined to act as spokespersons for their businesses and find contentment in doing so.

Female entrepreneurs exhibit leadership styles characterised by relational attributes like mutual empowerment, collaboration, knowledge sharing, empathy, and nurturing. As per Tende (2016), the distinct traits of women in social skills and empathy forecast improved performance in enterprises established and managed by female entrepreneurs. This is attributed to their adeptness in communication, facilitating better interactions with employees, suppliers, and customers.

One of the in-depth interview respondents confirmed this, stating that demonstrating interest in their employees by consulting and involving them in decision-making has aided the development and success of their businesses. She said:

> Some of us (the wedding engagement coordinators also known as the Alagas have a consistent set of rules to guide our business and we make concerted efforts to ensure that these rules are strictly abide by. There are sanctions attached to these rules. Erring employees are sanctioned when necessary. As much as I carry my staff along in the running of my business, there is no room for any form of indiscipline. *(IDI respondent; Surulere Local Government Area; 26/2/2020; See plate 9)*

The following is an excerpt from the transcript of the interview conducted with the Director, SMEDAN. He had this to say regarding the leadership styles of female entrepreneurs:

> Oftentimes, women come with members of their team to visit us but I realise that whenever they needed to provide information about their business, the female entrepreneurs were quite quick to talk on behalf of their staff members. (KII respondent; SMEDAN; 22/9/2020; See plate 17).

This opinion was supported by another respondent from LSETF who said:

> There is something I have observed over the years. When female entrepreneurs want to introduce themselves and

> their staff, they often refer to their staff as their teammates. You'll hear something like my name is so so so and this is my team or These are my teammates. Male entrepreneurs are different. They let us know that their staff is their staff and they are the boss. I believe that the different mindsets are a reflection of how both genders lead their businesses. (KII respondent; LSETF; 1/9/2020; See plate 16).

The leadership style categories established in this study are referred to as the "friend," the "father," the "mother," and the "ambidextrous." these address the overlooked challenges faced by female entrepreneurs. Unlike existing typologies that might apply broadly to entrepreneurs, these specifically acknowledge female-specific traits. Leveraging these traits properly can assist female entrepreneurs in overcoming hurdles they face while implementing innovation in their enterprises (Mohamed, 2021).

Female entrepreneurs have a special way of interacting with their subordinates. As a result, they are much more likely to rely on personal qualities like charm, interpersonal skills, and personal connections rather than organisational status. This demonstrates benign leadership behaviours among female entrepreneurs since they are more participative and include their staff more in the company's activities. Numerous female entrepreneurs interviewed highlighted that their connections with employees were rooted in mutual trust and respect. The Nigerian socio-cultural context, along with distinctions in male and female household roles, might contribute to why women exhibit stronger leadership than men.

The findings also revealed that some female entrepreneurs perceive themselves as bureaucratic and set stringent boundaries for their personnel. This is in line with empirical research, which reveals that transactional leadership, in which the focus is on the exchange between entrepreneurs and employees, is practised by a small number of females. This is centred on female entrepreneurs communicating what is expected of them with their employees, as well as the conditions and prises that will be given if the requirements are met. While female entrepreneurs generally demonstrate transformational leadership skills, they may also be transactional leaders whenever necessary to achieve defined objectives (Lincoln, 2017).

Several experts, including Northouse (2007), concurred that female leaders are becoming stronger and macho in their leadership approaches without abandoning their feminine attributes. As a result, more jobs are assigned to higher-skilled subordinates. Female entrepreneurs did not agree that they are uncertain of their leadership abilities or that they lack the requisite qualities to be strong leaders, and they believe that they are better leaders than their male counterparts in three regions of England and Wales (Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore & Nikolopoulos, 2015).

Many female entrepreneurs also claimed that, as a result of their devotion to their homes and families, they tend to include their staff more in decision-making by granting them some degree of responsibility (Adesua, 2012). In a community-oriented nation like Nigeria, the emphasis on family ties remains strong, so this discovery is not unexpected. As expressed by a female owner/manager, employees had some freedom in their decisions, but for more intricate choices they were required to seek their supervisor's input first.

The results indicate that the laissez-faire or passive leadership approach is not prominent among female entrepreneurs in Lagos State. All respondents mentioned active participation in decision-making and execution within their enterprises. A majority of the interviewed female entrepreneurs mentioned their practice of handpicking particular staff members for various levels of responsibility within the company. According to the data, females were more active in fostering or mentoring their staff for leadership succession.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the modes of entry and leadership styles among female entrepreneurs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that the predominant pathway into entrepreneurship for women is through apprenticeship or structured learning, underscoring the centrality of informal and non-formal education in female entrepreneurial development. This reflects a broader pattern in which skill acquisition and experiential learning (not merely economic necessity), shape entrepreneurial entry, thereby complicating binary narratives of opportunity versus necessity-driven entrepreneurship. The limited representation of emergent or neophyte entrepreneurs further suggests that spontaneous or accidental business ventures are less common among Nigerian women, who often undertake deliberate, if informal, forms of preparation before business initiation.

In terms of leadership, the study provides compelling evidence that female entrepreneurs favour participative and transformational leadership approaches. Respondents demonstrated a strong preference for collective decision-making, shared responsibility, and relational engagement, often prioritising group performance over hierarchical dominance. This reinforces existing scholarship on gendered leadership, which associates female leadership with inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and team cohesion. Importantly, while many participants did not self-identify as ‘leaders’ in a conventional sense, they nonetheless displayed functional leadership traits such as strategic communication, motivation, and the capacity to represent and advocate for their enterprises.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Given that apprenticeship and informal learning are key entry points into entrepreneurship for women, government agencies, NGOs, and development partners should invest in formalising and scaling up these pathways. Policies should support mentorship schemes, vocational hubs, and community-based training initiatives that integrate digital tools, financial literacy, and business development skills.
2. Capacity-building programmes should move beyond generic leadership models and develop contextually relevant training that reflects the relational and participatory leadership styles adopted by female entrepreneurs. Modules should empower women to recognise and harness their leadership potential without requiring them to conform to masculinised notions of authority.

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