Gordon Institute of Business Science
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The role of mentorship in building entrepreneurial resilience and its influence on entrepreneurial action

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of mentorship in developing entrepreneurial resilience and promoting entrepreneurial action, focusing on the South African entrepreneurial landscape. Through a quantitative method using a survey instrument, entrepreneurs in mentorship relationships were sampled. The research examines how both generic and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship fosters resilience which in turn leads to entrepreneurial action. The findings highlight a strong relationship between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship in building resilience and facilitating entrepreneurial action. This study offers practical recommendations for mentorship programs aimed at building resilient entrepreneurial communities.

KEY WORDS

Mentorship, Generic Mentorship, Entrepreneurial-Specific Mentorship
Entrepreneurial Resilience, Entrepreneurial Action, Social Cognitive Theory,
Opportunity Discovery, Opportunity Exploitation

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

1.1. Introduction

The study investigates the influence of mentorship (generic and entrepreneurial) on the relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action. It includes a brief background, theoretical relevance, and a business rationale to support the proposed study. The objectives of the study are articulated to clarify its intentions. Additionally, the report reviews the existing literature on mentorship, resilience, entrepreneurial action, and the interactions between these variables

1.2. Background to study

1.2.1. Entrepreneurship challenges and opportunities

The prevailing view is that entrepreneurship may be the silver bullet in addressing South Africa's social ills such as inequality, unemployment, suppressed economic growth and poverty. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, led by the National Planning Commission (NPC), underscores the essential purpose of entrepreneurship in economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation, proposing strategies to develop an inclusive entrepreneurial environment (National Planning Commission (NPC), 2012). Additionally, the 2022/2023 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) South Africa report highlights the crucial role of entrepreneurship in driving economic growth and societal development; it enhances societal health, alleviates poverty, promotes local community development, and fosters cultural and social changes (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). Entrepreneurship significantly contributes to job creation, aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). Despite the positive impact of entrepreneurship in South Africa, it faces challenges, including high inequality, unemployment, and slow economic growth; thus, fostering a dynamic and innovation-led growth trajectory is vital for enhancing social cohesion and economic development (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023).

Entrepreneurship requires navigating complex challenges and taking advantage of emerging opportunities in this uncertain context (Fisher et al., 2020; McMullen Jeffery S, 2006; Wood et al., 2021). Entrepreneurial settings in South Africa are often characterised by uncertainty further exacerbated by the country's political instability,

energy crises, and economic inequality (Sarkodie & Adams, 2020; Hanto et al., 2021). The ability of entrepreneurial ventures to emerge, persist, and achieve success is heavily influenced by how entrepreneurs manage and adapt to these challenging conditions (Williams & Shepherd, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurs face a monumental challenge in identifying and evaluating profitable opportunities amid a rapidly evolving and uncertain landscape (Unger et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2021). The task is further complicated the fact that entrepreneurs must operate with limited resources, necessitating creative approaches to securing funding, assembling teams, and introducing products or services to the market (G. Fisher et al., 2020). The broader entrepreneurial ecosystem, characterized by a mixture of challenges and opportunities, is significantly influenced by government policies, access to finance, and cultural norms (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). Entrepreneurial success hinges on the ability to effectively leverage knowledge, experience, and networks to navigate these complexities and transform perceived opportunities into viable ventures (McMullen Jeffery S, 2006). It is crucial to build support systems and networks to help entrepreneurs, one way of ensuring that entrepreneurs are supported, adapt and thrive can be through mentorship.

1.2.2. Role of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial cction

Mentorship is a foundation for personal and professional growth across diverse disciplines (Batara & Woolgar, 2017; Bin Ghali et al., 2021; Bunin et al., 2020; Faloye et al., 2021). It cultivates a supportive and collaborative environment where a more experienced individual (mentor) imparts knowledge, experience, and guidance to a less experienced individual (mentee)(Arab & Saeedi, 2024). This critical relationship fosters a variety of benefits; mentees gain valuable knowledge and skills in their field, experience increased self-esteem and interest in their work, and benefit from career advancement opportunities (Bunin et al., 2020; Faloye et al., 2021; Leary et al., 2016; Mubuuke et al., 2020). Mentorship also enhances mentees' critical thinking, successful decision-making, and emotional intelligence, equipping them for future challenges (Leners et al., 2006). The impact of mentorship extends beyond individual development, with research highlighting its role in fostering job resilience, promoting diversity within fields, and contributing to overall well-being (Perry & Parikh, 2021). Mentorship is a powerful tool that fosters personal and professional growth, improves

career satisfaction, and contributes to the success of individuals and organisations across various fields. The role and benefit of mentorship can be applied to entrepreneurs and the businesses that entrepreneurs run by making them resilient while equipping them to continually run these businesses.

The prevailing view is that mentorship aids in building resilience and equips individuals with the necessary resources to navigate challenges, enhancing positive self-belief, coping skills, and social support (Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024; Shahram et al., 2021). This positive impact is evident in fields like medicine, where mentorship strengthens resilience in both residents and medical students (Eskander et al., 2021; Jordan et al., 2019). The effectiveness of mentorship extends beyond professional settings, with studies highlighting its role in building resilience in families (Black & Lobo, 2008) and programs supporting vulnerable youth (Ssewamala et al., 2014). Generally, mentorship fosters resilience by providing supportive relationships that equip individuals with the tools to thrive in the face of challenges (Quay, 2017). The contribution of mentoring to an individual thriving personally and professionally can be harnessed to build resilience and further entrepreneurial action that could address some of the social ills experienced within South Africa. Entrepreneurial action includes opportunity discovery and exploitation (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Entrepreneurial success depends on resilience, the ability to bounce back from setbacks (Dewi, 2024). Mentorship emerges as an essential lever in fostering this resilience within entrepreneurs. Mentorship provides support, empowering individuals to navigate the inherent uncertainties and roadblocks associated with the entrepreneurial journey (Dewi, 2024). Through this supportive relationship, entrepreneurs acquire the essential skills, mindset, and connections necessary to recover from setbacks and adapt to changing circumstances in the entrepreneurial setup. Therefore, this study will look at the interplay between mentorship, resilience and entrepreneurial action.

1.3. Theoretical relevance

The theoretical relevance of this research is centered on its potential to bridge significant gaps in the existing literature on generic mentorship, entrepreneurial mentorship, resilience, and entrepreneurial action. Firstly, the study contributes to theoretical understanding of how mentorship influences entrepreneurial resilience

and action. While previous studies have acknowledged the importance of mentorship in entrepreneurial development, more detailed exploration still needs to be done into how mentorship enhances resilience and drives entrepreneurial action (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Kunaka & Moos, 2019; Ukil & Almashayekhi, 2024). Osabohien (2024) supports this by emphasizing the need for future studies to explore how effective mentorship programs and innovative approaches can enhance entrepreneurial performance and resilience, particularly in regions like Nigeria.

Several academic papers have identified gaps in understanding how mentorship affects entrepreneurial action and entrepreneurial resilience. Marshall et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of working with multiple mentors to expand networks and better prepare for future professional ventures, suggesting a gap in exploring the impact of diverse mentorship experiences on entrepreneurial resilience. Additionally, Perry and Parikh (2021) underscored the critical role of mentorship in ensuring resilience, adaptability, and future growth of businesses during times of crisis, indicating a need to understand how mentorship can bolster entrepreneurial resilience in challenging environments. These studies point towards further research's need to elucidate the relationship between mentorship, entrepreneurial action, and entrepreneurial resilience to inform effective mentorship practices that foster entrepreneurial success. While research has consistently linked mentoring to broad entrepreneurial outcomes, such as increased self-efficacy, confidence, and business survival, these general benefits only scratch the surface of mentoring’s potential impact. There is a critical need to go deeper and examine how mentorship directly shapes specific entrepreneurial actions such as opportunity recognition, decision-making, and resource acquisition that are essential to business success (E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012).

Entrepreneurial mentoring is distinguished from generic mentoring by its focus on supporting individuals engaged in the process of starting and developing their own businesses (Owhoeke, 2021; Prastyaningtyas et al., 2023; E. St-Jean et al., 2018; St-Jean, 2012). This specialized form of mentoring aims to cultivate entrepreneurial competencies that may include cognitive, skill-based and affective learning that will ultimately lead to improved business performance and positive contribution to the economy (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Entrepreneurial mentors, who are usually experienced entrepreneurs, provide practical advice based on their own

experiences, guidance on navigating market dynamics and access to networks (Prastyaningtyas et al., 2023; St-Jean & Audet, 2012). This contrasts with generic mentoring, which includes a wider range of personal and professional development goals, spanning diverse fields and skill sets(Owhoeke, 2021; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Generic mentoring emphasis fostering personal and professional growth, potentially within existing organizations, through advice, guidance, skill development, and support for career advancement (Eesley & Wang, 2017; St-Jean & Audet, 2012).Both forms of mentoring share the fundamental principle of fostering learning and development through the guidance of a seasoned individual, but they exhibit distinct variations in specific objectives, mentor qualifications, and approaches.

While the main distinction between entrepreneurial and generic mentoring, is specialized knowledge and skills offered by experienced entrepreneurs (Prastyaningtyas et al., 2023), it is vital to acknowledge the potential interconnectedness of these mentoring styles in fostering entrepreneurial action. Generic mentoring, encompassing broader personal and professional development goals, can build foundational skills such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving, which are transferable to the entrepreneurial context (Eesley & Wang, 2017). Throughout their careers, entrepreneurs might benefit from different types of mentoring, starting with generic mentorship early on and then moving on to entrepreneurial mentoring at a later stage for entrepreneurial-specific guidance (Kunaka & Moos, 2019).There is a case for moving beyond a narrow focus of entrepreneurial mentoring and thus cultivating a more inclusive and supportive environment. The distinctive effects of these mentorships still need to be explored in current research, necessitating a comprehensive study that portrays their respective contributions to entrepreneurial resilience and action. By examining generic and entrepreneurship-specific mentorship, this study aims to delve deeper into how entrepreneurial mentorship uniquely influences the development of entrepreneurial resilience and the propensity for entrepreneurial action.

Resilience can be viewed as a mediator between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. Mentorship as a resource can be used to foster resilience(Kao et al., 2014); while resilience can be a driver for entrepreneurial action (Branicki et al., 2018a; Kao et al., 2014). Thus, mentorship indirectly promotes entrepreneurial action by fostering resilience in entrepreneurs (Kao et al., 2014). In summary, mentorship offers support

that nurtures resilience in entrepreneurs which in turn leads to entrepreneurial action. Mentorship viewed through the social cognitive theory lens can contribute to entrepreneurial resilience and action through the interplay of personal factors, behaviour and environmental factors(Bandura Albert, 1977; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). Mentors can bolster an entrepreneur's self-efficacy which is a key personal factor through guidance, support, role modelling and feedback (McGee & Peterson, 2019; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). The influence on entrepreneurial behaviour can be through providing opportunities for observational learning from mentors; and additionally influence on environment can be done by providing valuable insights into industry dynamics, connecting them with relevant networks, and advocating for them(Lin et al., 2023; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). Therefore, by applying the threefold model of social cognitive theory, research can better explain the mechanisms through which mentorship contributes to entrepreneurial resilience and action.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the broader theoretical discourse on entrepreneurship by integrating concepts from mentorship, social cognitive theory, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. By doing so, it seeks to offer a comprehensive model that explains the multifaceted role of mentorship in building resilient entrepreneurs capable of sustained entrepreneurial action (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2022; Cope & Watts, 2000). This theoretical advancement is crucial for developing effective mentorship programs and policies that support entrepreneurial success in various economic contexts.

1.4. Business rationale

The research aims to address several pressing challenges and leverage critical opportunities within South Africa's entrepreneurial landscape. South Africa faces significant economic hurdles, such as high unemployment rates, political instability, energy crises, and economic inequality. With the unemployment rate rising from 32.9% in the first quarter of 2024 to 33.5% in the second quarter of 2024, the situation is becoming increasingly dire (Statistics South Africa, 2024a, 2024b). Entrepreneurship emerges as a possible solution to these challenges, offering pathways for job creation, economic growth through Small, medium and microenterprises (SMMEs), innovation, and skill development. Moreover, the study's emphasis on the South African entrepreneurial landscape provides a unique

perspective on how mentorship and resilience interact in emerging markets.

Entrepreneurial resilience is crucial for the survival and growth of entrepreneurs, enabling them to withstand and adapt to adversity. Resilient businesses can better endure economic disruptions and maintain operations during adverse conditions, which is particularly important in South Africa's context of frequent economic and social challenges (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2022). According to Bushe (2019), over 70% of Small, Medium, and Micro enterprises (SMMEs) in South Africa fail within the first five to seven years; effective mentorship programs can play a vital role in equipping entrepreneurs with the necessary resilience to navigate these challenges and increase their chances of success.

Limited access to entrepreneurial mentorship can perpetuate inequalities in entrepreneurial ventures, as evidenced by the high number of business failures in the early stages. Research by Bushe (2019) highlights the causes and impact of business failure among small to medium enterprises in South Africa, underscoring the challenges businesses face in their initial phases. While generic mentorship is valuable for building foundational skills and offering emotional support, essential for overall career progression and personal development, this form of mentorship does not explicitly address entrepreneurship's unique challenges and requirements (Unger et al., 2011).

The findings from this study are expected to inform the development of tailored mentorship programs that effectively foster entrepreneurial resilience and action. These programs will significantly benefit emerging markets like South Africa, helping entrepreneurs navigate specific economic and social challenges (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2022; Birthare Neelam & Bhargava Shivganesh, 2022).

This research holds substantial practical value in fostering a resilient and dynamic entrepreneurial journey that drives economic growth and societal development. Businesses can implement effective mentorship programs to enhance their resilience and success, thus contributing to broader economic stability and growth.

1.5. Purpose statement

This study aims to investigate how entrepreneurial resilience mediates the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. The study will employ social cognitive theory to address a critical gap in current literature by examining the specific mechanisms through which mentorship fosters entrepreneurial resilience and drives entrepreneurial action.

Furthermore, this research addresses the limited understanding of the complex relationship between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. It seeks to equip entrepreneurs with findings that can assist in formulating more effective strategies and targeted actions. Ultimately, the study aims to establish a comprehensive model that demonstrates the multifaceted role of mentorship in cultivating resilient entrepreneurs. These resilient entrepreneurs can then sustain and grow their ventures amidst challenges. The derived knowledge will inform the development of effective mentorship programs and policies that support entrepreneurial success across diverse economic contexts. The objectives of the study are:

Objective 1: To investigate the impact of mentorship on the development of entrepreneurial resilience among entrepreneurs.

Objective 2: To explore the influence of mentorship on entrepreneurial action.

Objective 3: To examine the impact of entrepreneurial resilience on entrepreneurial action.

Objective 4: To investigate the mediating effect of entrepreneurial resilience, developed through mentorship, on the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action.

1.6. Significance of the study

1.6.1. Business growth and economic development

Mentorship fosters entrepreneurial resilience that benefits businesses and the national economy (Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). These resilient businesses are better equipped to absorb the shock in economies; subsequently, these businesses can protect employment, thereby fostering economic growth in the process (Branicki et al., 2018b). The knock-on effects of resilience trickle down to benefit the real economy. Resilient businesses are likely to develop with the use of new technology

and create jobs. Additionally, they will be in a better position to compete on global markets and attract investment. This will then contribute to higher economic growth, productivity, and standards of living.

1.6.2. Impact on learning and research

In this study, the aim is to go further in developing entrepreneurship research and education by addressing the critical gaps related to mentorship impacting entrepreneurial resilience and action. Based on calls from extant literature, such as that of St-Jean and Audet (2012) and St-Jean and Tremblay (2020), for an understanding of mentorship with respect to deeper nuances in fostering specific entrepreneurial behaviours, including decision-making, opportunity recognition, and resource acquisition. An additional contribution to the existing literature on entrepreneurship education is by giving clarity on mechanisms through which mentorship may influence self-efficacy and resilience.

This study does have several practical implications for effective mentorship curriculum design in educational settings, thereby informing the development of training materials, tailored support frameworks, and associated evaluation tools. Mentorship, throughout the life course, is a process of adaptive resilience, as identified by theories discussed in Fisher et al. (2016) and St-Jean and Mathieu (2018); mentorship in entrepreneurship should, therefore, be approached as something that evolves in tandem with the career stage of entrepreneurs. It thereby reinforces, through this approach, a culture of continuous learning in which entrepreneurs, at any moment in their careers, can mentor and support long term growth and resilience of businesses.

1.6.3. Policy and decision-making

The findings from this study will help policymakers and stakeholders within an ecosystem in the design of mentorship programs that will assist the growth of entrepreneurship. The research on mentorship programs and the effectiveness of mentorship programs at building resilience provides a foundation upon which policymakers can make empirically driven decisions regarding the design and implementation of such programs. Policymakers will be assured of what works, why it works, how to make wise investments of resources, and how to design programs

that conform to evidence-based practice (Branicki et al., 2018b; R. Fisher et al., 2016; E. St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022; Ukil & Jenkins, 2023). This guidance points out the importance of mentorship programs in policy frameworks; particularly, this is so for areas that are economically disadvantaged and perhaps lacking in support or resources. By understanding the key ingredients of successful mentoring, policymakers could build programs that will contribute to the development of entrepreneurs.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter covers the review of the literature by delving into how social cognitive theory supports the study. Second, the section delves into the definition of mentorship, highlighting the difference between generic and entrepreneurial mentorship, and their philosophical and practical aspects within the entrepreneurial context. Third, the review explored resilience, and dived deeply into entrepreneurial resilience as a mediator, its importance, and its broader impact on the entrepreneurial journey. Following this, the conversation transitioned to entrepreneurial action, exploring its definition and phase of discovery and exploitation.

A discussion on the connections between mentorship and entrepreneurial resilience ensued, showcasing how mentorship relationships facilitate resilience among entrepreneurs. The review then assessed the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action, followed by the relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action, emphasizing resilience's vital role as a mediator in successful entrepreneurial endeavours.

Finally, the influence of mentorship on the linkage between entrepreneurial resilience and action was analysed. This comprehensive review set the stage for a conclusion that integrated these elements, demonstrating how they collectively contributed to a robust entrepreneurial environment capable of thriving in dynamic environments.

2.2. Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura explains human behaviour as a result of the interplay between personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences, highlighting the importance of self-efficacy (one of its key concepts), which is the belief in one's capabilities to achieve goals (Bandura, 1986, 1991). Social cognitive theory’s three-way reciprocal causation model posits that these three factors interact bi-directionally with each influencing the other (Bandura, 1991). The theory is particularly relevant for understanding how mentorship could enhance

resilience and promote entrepreneurial action by focusing on developing cognitive and emotional capacities. Self-efficacy influences motivation and action; mentorship could significantly enhance an entrepreneur's self-efficacy by providing encouragement, feedback, and opportunities to succeed in challenging tasks (McGee & Peterson, 2019). Higher self-efficacy leads to greater resilience as individuals believe in overcoming obstacles and persisting in adversity.

Mentors act as role models, demonstrating practical strategies for dealing with challenges, allowing mentees to adopt similar strategies, and enhancing their resilience and ability to take decisive actions (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, social cognitive theory's concept of reciprocal determinism highlighted the dynamic interaction between personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. In a mentoring relationship, this interaction fosters a supportive environment that reinforces positive behaviours and attitudes, enhancing resilience and entrepreneurial action (Williams & Shepherd, 2016).

In contrast, social learning theory, also developed by Bandura, emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and modelling; it lacks social cognitive theory's comprehensive focus on cognitive processes and self-efficacy. Social learning theory primarily addresses learning from the environment through observation, which is part of mentoring but does not fully account for the internal cognitive and emotional changes emphasized by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Social cognitive theory extends social learning theory by integrating self-efficacy and the reciprocal nature of personal, behavioural, and environmental influences, making it a more robust framework for understanding the multifaceted impact of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action (McGee & Peterson, 2019). This comprehensive approach is one of the strengths of social cognitive theory that allowed a deeper exploration of how mentorship builds the psychological resilience necessary for entrepreneurial success. However, due to the complex and intertwined nature of personal, behavioural and environmental factors it's difficult to point out the distinct effect of each factor(Bandura, 1977).

Utilising social cognitive theory provided a more detailed framework for examining how mentorship influences entrepreneurial resilience and action. By focusing on self-efficacy and the reciprocal interactions between personal and environmental factors,

social cognitive theory offered valuable insights into how mentorship could foster resilient entrepreneurs. This theoretical underpinning is essential for developing effective mentorship programs and policies to enhance entrepreneurial success in various contexts (Bandura, 1986; McGee & Peterson, 2019).

2.3. Mentorship

Mentorship is often defined as a developmental relationship in which a more experienced or knowledgeable individual guides and directs a less experienced or less knowledgeable person; it can provide significant benefits, including career guidance, psychosocial support, and role modelling (Kram, 1985). Mentorship as part of human capital development can be generic or entrepreneurship-specific which is related to the business venturing tasks. The relationship between human capital and venture success is significantly more potent when the human capital is task-related and consists of outcomes of human capital investments such as knowledge and skills (industry-specific) compared to investments in education and experience (Unger et al., 2011).

Generic mentorship is a broad foundational approach and aims at personal and professional growth, while entrepreneurial-specific mentorship focuses on business-related knowledge and skills, including opportunity recognition, business planning, and strategic thinking (Kram, 1983; Owhoeke, 2021). Entrepreneurial mentors provide targeted advice, insights, and strategies relevant to the entrepreneurial process, whereas generic mentors may provide more general personal development support. Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship is directly tied to business performance, innovation, and entrepreneurial success, whereas generic mentorship addresses broader career personal development (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021).

Entrepreneurship-specific mentorship zeroes in on the unique challenges and skills required for starting and running a business (Owhoeke, 2021; E. St-Jean et al., 2018). These mentors, typically experienced entrepreneurs themselves, offer tailored and relevant advice on topics like opportunity identification and evaluation, business plan development, financial management, marketing strategies, and navigating the complexities of the entrepreneurial ecosystem(Owhoeke, 2021). The advice provided by the mentors based on firsthand experiences can provide insights, helping mentees avoid common pitfalls and make more informed decisions. The

significance of the relationship suggested that entrepreneurship-specific mentorship, which enhanced entrepreneurial capabilities and strategic decision-making, were more effective in fostering entrepreneurial success than generic mentorship. This valuable insight into the importance of industry-specific mentorship in enhancing entrepreneurial outcomes favoured entrepreneurial mentorship over generic mentorship programs to support entrepreneurial success. This further supported the role of generic mentorship in providing a solid foundation, specialised mentorship (within a specific field) often requires additional expertise and knowledge.

2.3.1. Generic mentorship

Generic mentorship is a supportive relationship based on life guidance, advice, and support. In contrast to mentorship programs tailored to specific fields, generic mentorship cultivates a supportive relationship centered on the mentee's overall personal development (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). This broader approach prioritises holistic growth, helping mentees become well-rounded individuals capable of adapting to various life challenges. Generic mentors act as advisors, providing guidance across various facets of the mentee's life, including emotional well-being, navigating career paths, and developing general skills like communication, problem-solving, and time management (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021).

Generic mentorship offers a valuable framework for navigating diverse life challenges. Emotional support and guidance can foster resilience, self-confidence, and a growth mindset, all crucial for effective adaptation and success in various endeavours. Overall, generic mentorship is a valuable life tool, equipping individuals with the personal foundation and transferable skills necessary for success in a dynamic and ever-changing world.

2.3.2. Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship

On the other hand, entrepreneurial mentorship is specific to entrepreneurial actions and/or business activities. This type of mentorship is tailored to the entrepreneurial context. It includes sharing business experiences, providing insights into managing and growing a business, and offering emotional and psychological support unique to the entrepreneurial journey. Entrepreneurial mentorship delves into challenges and

opportunities related to the entrepreneur's business operations (St-Jean & Audet, 2012).

Cope and Watts (2000) argue that entrepreneurial mentoring provides a platform for entrepreneurs to engage in reflective learning processes, where they can analyse their entrepreneurial experiences, learn from their mistakes, and develop strategies for future entrepreneurial challenges. This process is integral to building the entrepreneurial resilience necessary to withstand the uncertainties and pressures of entrepreneurial life while making sense of the operational environment. Entrepreneurial mentorship addresses challenges and opportunities related to business operations, offering practical guidance during crises, emotional support, and insights to navigate entrepreneurial challenges (Eesley & Wang, 2017; Kunaka & Moos, 2019; Owhoeke, 2021; Prastyaningtyas et al., 2023). This form of mentorship is crucial for managing stress, building confidence, and maintaining motivation, contributing to the entrepreneur's success.

While generic mentorship provides broad life guidance and fosters overall personal development, entrepreneurial mentorship is focused on entrepreneurial-specific support. It helps entrepreneurs develop the resilience and skills needed to succeed in the dynamic business landscape. Both types of mentorships are essential, but they serve different purposes and offer unique benefits suitable for the mentee’s needs.

2.4. Entrepreneurial resilience

Resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt, and recover from adversity. This dynamic process involves successfully adjusting to significant challenges, such as trauma or major life changes (Luthar et al., 2000). This concept is multifaceted, encompassing various psychological, social, and biological factors contributing to an individual's capacity to bounce back from challenging circumstances (Masten, 2014).

Entrepreneurial resilience extends the general concept of resilience to the context of entrepreneurship. It refers to an entrepreneur's capacity to sustain and develop their venture in the face of challenges, uncertainties, and setbacks specific to the business world (Fisher et al., 2016). It includes the ability to persist through failures, adapt to market changes, and keep a positive outlook despite obstacles.

As detailed by Williams and Shepherd (2016), entrepreneurial resilience is characterised by entrepreneurs' proactive utilisation of internal capabilities and resources to address and rectify setbacks, making it crucial for effectively navigating adversities. This resilience involves the ability to swiftly restore positive personal functioning after organisational, individual, or environmental challenges, essential for managing and adapting business operations during or after disruptive events (Shepherd et al., 2020). Furthermore, resilience encompasses sustained efforts to bolster cognitive and emotional resources, vital for continuous entrepreneurial engagement and overcoming obstacles (Shepherd et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2017).

Montoro-Fernández et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of proactive coping mechanisms in mitigating the negative impacts of business challenges by transforming setbacks into learning opportunities and seeking social support. This approach enhances resilience in dynamic and uncertain environments, enabling entrepreneurs to turn challenges into growth experiences. Moreover, resilience is crucial for organisational survival and success, extending beyond mere adaptation to challenges. It includes anticipating, preparing for, responding to, and adjusting to incremental and sudden changes impacting organisations, individuals, families, and communities; this broad impact highlights the importance of resilience at multiple levels (Birthare & Bhargava, 2022).

Resilience is a dynamic capability that enables organisations and, by extension, the individuals within them to not only endure but also thrive in volatile environments. This adaptability and agility are essential for prospering amid uncertainty. The comprehensive view of resilience underscores it as a dynamic and constructive response to challenges, showcasing the capacity of entrepreneurs to leverage their inherent strengths across various adverse situations (Birthare & Bhargava, 2022).

In conclusion, entrepreneurial resilience is a multifaceted construct that involves a proactive and sustained effort to utilise internal and external resources to overcome challenges. It is essential for surviving and thriving in dynamic and uncertain environments. This resilience fosters a robust entrepreneurial mindset critical for long-term success and sustainability in adversity.

2.5. Entrepreneurial action

Entrepreneurial action, as defined by McMullen and Shepherd (2006), refers to the purposeful and consequential human activity in which entrepreneurs engage to introduce something new to the world. This activity occurs under conditions of uncertainty, while entrepreneurs formulate visions and interact with other actors and social structures to create new patterns of interaction (McMullen Jeffery S, 2006; Wood et al., 2021). This definition emphasises that entrepreneurial action involves the decision to act and the execution of behaviour in response to perceived opportunities, which are inherently uncertain and require judgmental decisions (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Wood et al., 2021). There are two phases involved in entrepreneurial action; the discovery phase and exploitation phase.

2.5.1. Discovery

According to Leong (2023), entrepreneurial action refers to opportunity realisation. It includes identifying opportunities, mobilising resources, and implementing strategies to establish and grow a business. Entrepreneurial action is characterised by proactive behaviour, innovation, and the ability to navigate uncertainty (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). For entrepreneurial action to be successful, there needs to be entrepreneurial resilience. Resilient entrepreneurs are more active, persistent, and ready to take risks, which makes them more successful in their businesses; therefore, they are the originators of entrepreneurial activity in different fields (Hartmann et al., 2022). Opportunity discovery to identifying and evaluating of new ideas and possibilities that includes actions such as searching for new information, making connections among different pieces of information, and understanding unmet customer needs (Botha & Pietersen, 2022).

2.5.2. Exploitation

In essence, entrepreneurial action is characterised by recognising potential opportunities and having the motivation to pursue these opportunities despite the uncertainty involved. This framework highlights the importance of both knowledge (to identify opportunities) and motivation (to act on these opportunities), making entrepreneurial action a dynamic interplay of cognitive and motivational factors

(McMullen & Shepherd, 2006). Opportunity exploitation includes steps taken to resource and implement the identified opportunity with actions such as creating a business plan, securing funding, hiring employees and marketing and selling the product or service (Botha & Pietersen, 2022).

2.6. Mentorship and Entrepreneurial resilience

Kunaka and Moos (2019) emphasise that mentoring is critical to entrepreneurs' personal and professional development by facilitating resilience. These mentoring relationships bolster entrepreneurs' resilience and help develop a robust entrepreneurial mindset indispensable for long-term success. St-Jean and Audet (2012) further assert that mentoring is crucial in building resilience among entrepreneurs by enhancing their learning experiences and arming them with practical knowledge for tackling unpredictable entrepreneurial challenges. In alignment with these observations, St-Jean and Jacquemin (2022) acknowledge mentorship as an effective strategy for enhancing entrepreneurial resilience, particularly in environments where external support systems are available, enhancing their ability to adapt and thrive in the dynamic business environment. Through these relationships, entrepreneurs enhance their business acumen and cultivate the resilience to navigate and succeed in dynamic and challenging environments.

Entrepreneurial mentorship enhances entrepreneurial action by assisting mentees in building resilience when challenges are experienced in the entrepreneurial journey. While generic mentors offer practical advice, share their experiences, and help mentees navigate the complexities of life which may not be entrepreneurial-related, entrepreneurial-specific mentorship is more suited to the business environment and empowers mentees to make informed decisions and take strategic actions leading to better resilience outcomes compared to generic mentorship (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Therefore, while both forms of mentorship are valuable, entrepreneurial mentorship provides more tailored support for business success and resilience.

2.7. Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Action

Mentorship boosts individuals' confidence in entrepreneurial actions; the relationship

inspires potential entrepreneurs to take the necessary steps to start and grow their ventures despite their challenges (Schmutzler et al., 2018). This increased confidence enhances their ability to recognise and seize opportunities, exploit the opportunities and fosters resilience, enabling them to navigate the uncertainties and setbacks inherent in entrepreneurial endeavours. As a result, mentored entrepreneurs are more likely to persist in their efforts and achieve long-term success.

Entrepreneurial mentorship enhances entrepreneurial action by equipping entrepreneurs with the necessary traits to pursue business opportunities. Mentors provide practical advice, share their experiences, and offer insights into managing and growing a business, enabling mentees to make informed decisions and take proactive steps in their entrepreneurial journey (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021).

In contrast, generic mentorship offers broader guidance and support across various aspects of life (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). While valuable, generic mentorship does not explicitly address the unique challenges and opportunities in the entrepreneurial context. Entrepreneurial mentorship, tailored to the business context, is more effective in enhancing entrepreneurial action outcomes than generic mentorship.

2.8. Entrepreneurial Resilience and Entrepreneurial Action

Resilience and entrepreneurial action are intricately connected. Studies have shown a positive connection between entrepreneurial resilience and venture performance (Emueje et al., 2020). Resilient entrepreneurs are more likely to persist in their endeavours, surmount obstacles, and stay committed to their business objectives despite setbacks (Branicki et al., 2018b; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024; Ukil & Jenkins, 2023). This adaptability and perseverance are crucial for sustained entrepreneurial action, enabling entrepreneurs to navigate a dynamic environment, learn from failures, and actively pursue their goals. Resilient individuals are more adept at seizing opportunities, managing uncertainties, and remaining focused on their entrepreneurial goals (Branicki et al., 2018b; Korber & McNaughton, 2018; Ukil & Jenkins, 2023). Thus, resilience is an essential tool for achieving entrepreneurial action. Elaborating on the dynamic nature of entrepreneurial action, Stevenson et al. (2024) explore how resilience functions as a reactive type of entrepreneurial action.

They suggest that resilience is closely linked to how entrepreneurs adapt to daily fluctuations in their identity, passion, and cognitive flexibility, affecting various entrepreneurial behaviours.

The study has leveraged an existing theory on mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action to generate new insights. For example, Branicki et al. (2018) explored how entrepreneurial resilience contributes to generating resilient small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), shedding light on entrepreneurs' emotional and cognitive abilities to bounce back from failures. Additionally, Ukil and Jenkins (2022) investigated the relationship between resilience and fear of failure in entrepreneurial intentions, offering insights into the psychological aspects influencing entrepreneurial actions.

Moreover, Korber and McNaughton (2018) conducted a systematic literature review on resilience and entrepreneurship, identifying various research streams at the intersection of these concepts, such as resilience as a trigger for entrepreneurial intentions and the role of entrepreneurial behaviour in enhancing organisational resilience. Building on these studies and others like Fisher et al. (2017) on entrepreneurial passion and Alshebami (2022) on psychological features influencing entrepreneurial intention, the proposed study aimed to deepen the understanding of how mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action drove entrepreneurial action and/or success.

Cope and Watts (2000) elaborated on the interplay between mentoring, entrepreneurship, and resilience, emphasising how these elements collectively foster entrepreneurial learning and success. They highlighted the significance of experiential learning in entrepreneurship, amplified by mentoring that imparts practical skills and knowledge crucial for navigating complex business scenarios. St-Jean and Audet (2012) emphasised that entrepreneurial mentorship fosters resilience by providing emotional and psychological support, enhancing entrepreneurs’ ability to take entrepreneurial action. Resilience is a critical factor that supports continuous entrepreneurial engagement and the successful execution of entrepreneurial activities.

Entrepreneurial mentorship not only enhances entrepreneurial action but also builds

resilience. This resilience, in turn, supports continuous entrepreneurial engagement and the successful execution of entrepreneurial activities. By providing emotional and practical support, mentors help entrepreneurs develop the resilience to navigate challenges, fostering sustained entrepreneurial action (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021). Entrepreneurial resilience is pivotal in mediating the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. Duchek (2017) underscored the importance of resilience mechanisms in enabling organisations to navigate challenges effectively, highlighting resilience as a dynamic construct essential for organisational adaptation and change processes and emphasising the critical role of resilience in enhancing adaptability and success in entrepreneurial ventures. The study sought to analyse and advance knowledge in the field by utilising quantifiable data gathered through questionnaires, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the mediating role of entrepreneurial resilience in the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action.

2.9. Summary of literature review

The literature review underpinned the intricate, reciprocal relationship between entrepreneurial mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action; revealing how these factors collectively contribute to entrepreneurial success. Both generic and entrepreneurial mentorships provide essential support in aiding the development of skills critical in entrepreneurship; fostering self-efficacy rooted in social cognitive theory and offering emotional reinforcement which are crucial in the volatile, often isolating environment of entrepreneurship. Specifically, entrepreneurial mentorship had been shown to to be more effective in directly enhancing entrepreneurial action and/or success than generic mentorship, particularly in areas of opportunity identification, crisis management and skill development.

Additionally, the review highlighted resilience as a core competence for entrepreneurs, as it enables them to navigate adversity, persist in face of challenges and adapt to market changes. Resilience, defined as a dynamic capacity involving both psychological and practical coping mechanisms, proves essential for entrepreneurial longevity and sustainability. Mentorship plays a vital role in developing resilience through offering guidance which develops strategies to manage stress, overcome obstacles and convert setbacks into opportunities. To this

end, resilience improves entrepreneurial action by arming entrepreneurs with the capacity to take risks, pursue opportunities and maintain persistence in a volatile entrepreneurial environment.

Drawing on social cognitive theory, the literature further emphasised the role of self-efficacy in facilitating both resilience and entrepreneurial action. Mentorship strengthens self-efficacy by providing feedback, encouragement and opportunities for skill development; thus, promoting a mindset conducive to entrepreneurial innovation and adaptability. The social cognitive framework also posits that personal, behavioural and environmental factors interact reciprocally in mentorship relationships, enhancing the multifaceted influence of mentorship on entrepreneurship outcomes.

In conclusion, the interdependence of mentorship, resilience and entrepreneurial action create a robust ecosystem that is critical for entrepreneurial success. The interconnected relationship cements the necessity of mentorship programs that emphasise resilience building and self-efficacy, enhancing decision-making and ability to thrive in uncertain environments.

2.10. Literature review: Summary Table

Section	Key Themes/Concepts	Key Authors	Key Findings
Social Cognitive Theory	Self-efficacy, reciprocal causation, resilience enhancement	Bandura (1986, 1991); McGee & Peterson (2019)	Mentorship can enhance resilience by boosting self-efficacy and providing a supportive environment.
Mentorship	Developmental guidance, career support, human capital development	Kram (1985); Unger et al. (2011)	Mentorship is vital for skill development and guidance, contributing to human capital that supports business success.
Generic Mentorship	Life guidance, holistic development, general skills	St-Jean & Audet (2012); Kubberød & Ladegård (2021)	Generic mentorship supports holistic growth, fostering resilience, confidence, and adaptability.
Entrepreneurial-Specific Mentorship	Business skills, practical guidance, entrepreneurship-specific support	Owhoeke (2021); St-Jean et al. (2018)	Entrepreneurial mentorship directly enhances business-related skills, aiding decision-making and resilience.
Entrepreneurial Resilience	Adaptation, persistence, growth under adversity	Luthar et al. (2000); Masten (2014); Fisher et al. (2016)	Resilience is essential for entrepreneurial survival and growth, especially under dynamic market conditions.
Entrepreneurial Action	Discovery and exploitation of opportunities	McMullen & Shepherd (2006); Wood et al. (2021)	Entrepreneurs identify opportunities and take calculated risks despite uncertainty.Discovery and explotation phases
Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Resilience	Building resilience through mentorship, tackling challenges	Kunaka & Moos (2019); St-Jean & Jacquemin (2022)	Mentorship aids resilience by helping entrepreneurs develop a mindset that can withstand setbacks.
Mentorship and Entrepreneurial Action	Confidence, opportunity recognition, resilience through mentorship	Schmutzler et al. (2018); Kubberød & Ladegård (2021)	Mentorship enhances confidence, opportunity recognition, and persistence through targeted support.
Entrepreneurial Resilience and Entrepreneurial Action	Resilience as a mediator in entrepreneurial success	Emueje et al. (2020; Stevenson et al. (2024)	Resilience supports entrepreneurial actions by helping entrepreneurs stay focused and adaptable.
Summary of Literature Review	Interconnectedness of mentorship, resilience, and entrepreneurial action	Branicki et al. (2018); Cope & Watts (2000); Shepherd et al. (2020)	Mentorship, resilience, and entrepreneurial action collectively foster a robust, resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Table 1: Literature review summary table

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

3.1. Introduction

Drawing on the literature review undertaken in Chapter two, this research investigates the contribution of generic and entrepreneurship-specific mentorship to enhanced entrepreneurial resilience, secondly on entrepreneurial action. additionally, the study investigates how entrepreneurial resilience plays a mediating role fostering entrepreneurship action. The conceptual framework upon which the hypotheses in this study are anchored and the hypotheses are outlined.

3.2. Conceptual model

The research's primary objective is understanding how mentorship influences entrepreneurial resilience and subsequently impacts entrepreneurial action. The following research questions embody the study's primary objectives.

3.2.1. Main research question

What is the impact of generic and entrepreneurial mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience, which ultimately results in entrepreneurial action?
The Sub Questions are:

1. What is the impact of generic and entrepreneurial mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience?
2. What is the impact of entrepreneurial resilience on entrepreneurial action?
3. What is the mediating role of entrepreneurial resilience on the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action?

The proposed conceptual model for the research study is represented below:

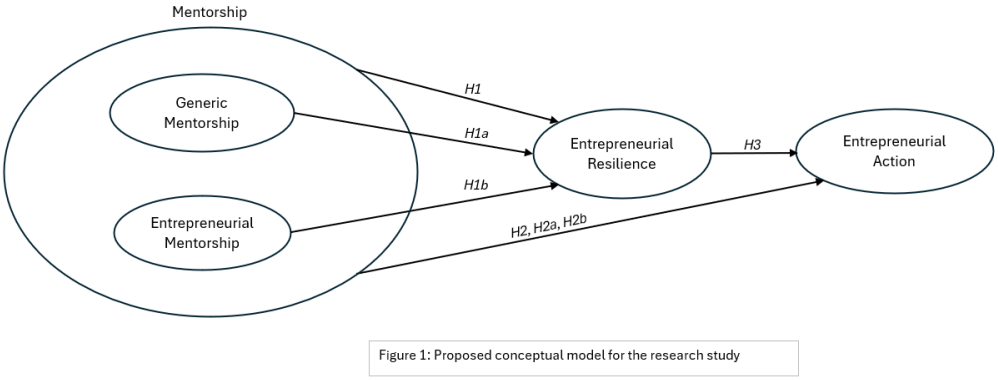

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model for the research study

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model for the study

The role of mentorship in enhancing entrepreneurial resilience and its impact on entrepreneurial action, with entrepreneurial resilience as a mediator between mentorship and entrepreneurial action

3.3. Hypotheses and sub hypotheses

3.3.1. Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 posits that mentorship significantly enhances the resilience of entrepreneurs by equipping entrepreneurs with the necessary skills and mindset to navigate challenges and succeed in competitive markets(Branicki et al., 2018b; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). The impact of generic mentorship on broad personal development contrasts sharply with the more targeted effects of entrepreneurship-specific mentorship (Unger et al., 2011). Entrepreneurial resilience is demonstrated by the ability to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity, enabling entrepreneurs to overcome setbacks and capitalize on opportunities(Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024).

The hypothesis considers the two types of mentoring; generic and entrepreneurial-specific and how they influence entrepreneurial resilience. Therefore, the first hypothesis was:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): **There is a positive relationship between mentorship received and entrepreneurial resilience developed by entrepreneurs.**

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): There is a positive relationship between generic mentorship received and entrepreneurial resilience developed by entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): There is a positive relationship between

entrepreneurial mentorship received and entrepreneurial resilience developed by entrepreneurs.

3.3.2. Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 suggests mentorship can have a positive effect on entrepreneurial action by influencing entrepreneurial self-efficacy, particularly in opportunity recognition and skill developing skills (Prastyaningtyas et al., 2023; É. St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). While existing research broadly recognizes mentorship's positive impact on entrepreneurs, it predominantly focuses on general benefits such as resilience, learning, and self-efficacy (Kunaka & Moos, 2019; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012; É. St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020) often without distinguishing between the outcomes of generic versus entrepreneurship-specific mentorship. Entrepreneurial action involves the processes of discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities to create future goods and services (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Thus, we can view entrepreneurial action in two phases: the discovery and the exploitation phases.

Therefore, the second hypothesis states:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): **Mentorship positively influences entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation).**

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): Generic mentorship positively influences entrepreneurial action.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): Entrepreneurial mentorship positively influences entrepreneurial action.

3.3.3. Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 proposes that entrepreneurial resilience developed through mentorship enhances an entrepreneur's ability to recognise and seize business opportunities (Hartmann et al., 2022; Emueje et al., 2020; É. St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). Despite these benefits, there needs to be more understanding of how different aspects of resilience specifically influence entrepreneurial action. Research highlights the need to explore the distinct mechanisms by which resilience impacts entrepreneurial action, as current studies primarily focus on resilience in crisis contexts without detailing its effect on proactive business behaviours (Montoro-Fernández et al.,

2022).

Therefore, the third hypothesis states that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): **Entrepreneurial resilience positively influences entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation).**

3.3.4. Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 posits that the entrepreneurial resilience developed through mentorship mediates the relationship between mentorship experiences and successful entrepreneurial outcomes, suggesting that mentorship impacts entrepreneurial action indirectly through its effect on resilience (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021). Despite the recognised importance of resilience, there is a significant gap in understanding how mentorship specifically cultivates entrepreneurial resilience and how this, in turn, influences entrepreneurial success. Montoro-Fernández et al. (2022) highlight that resilience in entrepreneurship is often built through intrapersonal processes but lacks a detailed exploration of mentorship's role. Duchek (2020) emphasises that resilience should be viewed as a dynamic process involving activation, response, and learning, yet this idea does not fully address the impact of mentorship in developing resilience.

Therefore, the fourth hypothesis states that:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): **Entrepreneurial resilience developed through mentorship mediates the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action.**

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented the research hypotheses and conceptual framework that anchor the study. The next chapter will describe the research methodology and research design. Chapter five will present the findings from the analysis of data, followed by their discussion in detail in Chapter six. Finally, Chapter seven will provide the conclusion to this study, indicating implications of the findings, practical applications, and suggestions for further research

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1. Introduction

The chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the research methodology and design, to understand how the data was collected, analysed, and interpreted. This study used a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional design with a positivist philosophical foundation. The chapter will discuss the quantitative method and statistical analysis utilized in the study. It also explains the data collection strategy. The chapter covers the population focus, unit of analysis, sampling method and size, measurement instruments, the data collection process, quality control measures and methodological limitations.

4.2. Research methodology

4.2.1. Research philosophy

The philosophy applied in the study was post-positivist. According to Saunders and Lewis (2018), the adoption of a positivist perspective was necessary for objectivity in the data collection process and to minimise personal subjectivities. This approach allowed information to be sense-checked, warranting the study. Underpinning this approach, scientific methodological principles that provided guidelines and effectively explored and assessed the relationship between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action also informed the analytical and evaluative framework of study (Leitch et al., 2010).

The research philosophy included perspectives of ontology, epistemology and axiology. Ontological perspective represents the researcher's perception of reality from collected data; epistemological perspective emphasises objectivity of data by using empirical data and axiological perspective addresses the influence of the researcher's values on the study (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Ontological considerations shaped the research focus, epistemology informed data collection and interpretation, and axiology influenced research choices.

The study utilised quantifiable data by analysing data collected from distributed

surveys. The respondents from whom entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action were tested, are considered objective and not influenced by researchers' values. Positivism emphasises objectivity from observation through data collection, eliminating subjectivity that may emanate from researcher or researcher's values. While positivism strives for objectivity based on exclusion of researcher's opinions and values, a degree of subjectivity may be unavoidable (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This may be demonstrated in areas such as selection of research approaches and the interpretation of findings.

4.2.2. Research approach

Building on the research approaches of deduction, induction, and abduction outlined by Saunders and Lewis (2018), this study adopted a deductive approach within the positivist paradigm (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). It aligned with the research objective of testing hypotheses on whether entrepreneurial resilience mediates in the mentorship-entrepreneurial-action relationship. The strengths of the deductive approach as elaborated by Kennedy and Thornberg (2018), made it suitable for this study.

The study is based on social cognitive theory which is highly suitable for investigating mentorship's effects on entrepreneurial resilience and action due to its foundation on the reciprocal relationships between personal factors, behaviour, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977; Schmutzler et al., 2019). It utilised established theory to guide hypotheses development, problem definition, and variable identification (Holmström et al., 2009). The multiple advantages of this methodological choice facilitated a structured and analytically rigorous exploration of the links between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding.

Bryman and Bell (2022) posit that a deductive approach integrates theory and research by the process of logical generalisation from observed data. This study follows that approach by using established frameworks, allowing for empirical testing of hypotheses around mentorship types, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. The results, whether confirming or rejecting the four proposed hypotheses and sub hypotheses, will be reported in Chapter five following the

analysis. This structured approach not only provides replicability but also ensures reliability of data acquired, making it an ideal fit for testing the relationships between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

4.2.3. Research design purpose

This research employed a post-positivist philosophy design to investigate the role of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action. Through this design, the researcher examined the relationships between three constructs mentorship (categorized as generic and entrepreneurial-specific), entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action without altering or manipulating these constructs (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Aligned with previous studies in entrepreneurship that describe and explain the impact of mentorship on resilience and entrepreneurial behaviour, this research contributes to the growing body of literature by investigating these relationships within a mentorship context. Additionally, the study examines the mediating effect of entrepreneurial resilience between mentorship and entrepreneurial action, particularly within the South African entrepreneurial ecosystem. The goal is to assess the current dynamics between these constructs and provide insights into how mentorship impacts entrepreneurial resilience and action, thus supporting the application of a post-positivist philosophy (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the dependent variables in their natural state, thus strengthening the theoretical foundation for mentorship's role in entrepreneurship.

4.2.4. Methodological choice

The primary research question in this study required a quantitative methodological approach. Quantitative studies are mostly anchored in previous research and academic literature before data collection begins (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), which was the case for this study. Prior research and literature emphasised the multifaceted role of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and action, highlighting it as an invaluable support system for entrepreneurs. Mentorship is a powerful tool for

fostering entrepreneurial resilience and action by building self-efficacy and fostering opportunity recognition (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021; E. St-Jean et al., 2018; É. St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020).

The research adopted a mono-method design focusing on mentorship as the independent variable to examine its impact on the dependent variables of entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action. This approach involved quantitative data collection to statistically analyse the proposed relationships, providing empirical evidence to support the study's objectives as posited by Sharma et al. (2009). Resource constraints, such as limited time, budget, and research expertise, made the mono-method approach appealing, highlighting the practical challenges that hinder the adoption of mixed methods (Vizcarguenaga-Aguirre & López-Robles, 2020).

4.2.5. Research strategy

The data collection strategy in this research was a survey, which would allow the collection of primary data on beliefs, opinions, and demographics such as age, gender, level of education, entrepreneurial experience, and type of mentorship (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).Surveys provide a structured means to collect quantitative data, that might be needed for studying the relationship that exists between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. Additionally, surveys collect primary data efficiently from large samples making them ideal for gathering demographic information across a wide populations; the efficiency of surveys follows through to their accuracy, affordability, and speed of implementation (Al-Ababneh, 2020). However, surveys also have some disadvantages, such as being time-consuming to administer and analyse, and they can be prone to bias if not carefully designed and executed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2.6. Research time horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon was employed, and it enabled the completion of the research within a limited time frame. Unlike longitudinal studies, where one may observe changes occurring over a period of time, cross-sectional studies take a snapshot of data at a single point in time. As Saunders and Lewis (2018), and

Rindfleisch et al. (2008) note, this allows one to capture current trends and compare phenomena at specific points in time. The design was suitable as its objective was to examine past phenomena. Cross sectional research is also known as correlational research as it enables collecting and analysing of data on the independent and dependent variables concurrently, providing a view of the relationship at a specific time.

4.3. Research design

4.3.1. Population

In accordance with the definition provided by Saunders and Lewis (2018), the population for the study will include entrepreneurs operating within South Africa. This focus ensured that the study investigated a population segment exhibiting the relevant entrepreneurial context to address the research objectives concerning the relationships between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. However, due to the practical constraints of time and resources, and also the accessibility to the target population, a sample was drawn from this. Specific sampling has included entrepreneurs who are currently either in generic or entrepreneurial mentorship relationships for deep insight into the impact of mentorship. The focus will enable the research to capture a holistic view of how mentorship nurtures entrepreneurial resilience and, subsequently influences entrepreneurial actions and behaviours.

To ensure relevance to the research focus, the sample was drawn to include entrepreneurs currently involved in either a generic or entrepreneurial-specific mentoring relationship to capture comprehensive insights on the impact of mentorship. The approach followed in this study replicates similar studies conducted to investigate the effect of mentorship on entrepreneurs, such as studies by Kunaka and Moos (2019) and St. Jean and Trembley in (2020), with sample sizes of 209 and 106 respectively to assess the effects of mentorship on self-efficacy and outcomes. For this study, a target sample size of 120 was deemed adequate, as online survey forms were used to collect data, maximizing reach and feasibility for sample size.

4.3.2. Unit of analysis

This study adopted an individual-level unit of analysis to investigate the complex relationships between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and finally entrepreneurial action for each entrepreneur. The social cognitive theory framework provided the theoretical lens for this investigation. To this effect, the approach, as established by Kunaka and Moos (2019), allows for a clear analysis of how entrepreneurial mentorship shapes individual entrepreneurial resilience, which translates into specific entrepreneurial actions. Individual-level data analysis was thus applied with the aim of capturing such nuanced interplay of these variables within each entrepreneur's journey. In focusing on the individual as the unit of analysis, an in-depth exploration could be afforded of processes underlying the mentorship-entrepreneurial resilience-entrepreneurial action relationship and a more personalized and detailed approach to entrepreneurial development. Through the lens of social cognitive theory, the study shed light on how personal factors, behaviours, and environmental influences interact to shape the development of resilience and entrepreneurial actions within each entrepreneur. Ultimately, this individualised focus was crucial for understanding the unique contributions of mentorship and resilience to entrepreneurial success across diverse contexts.

4.3.3. Sampling method and size

Given the impracticality of accessing a complete list of entrepreneurs in South Africa (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), the study employed a non-probability sampling technique. Among the available options, purposive sampling was selected as the most suitable approach. As Saunders and Lewis (2018) described, this method allows for the deliberate selection of participants who best align with the research objectives due to their relevant characteristics. Entrepreneurs were purposefully selected by use screening questions at the beginning of the survey, these questions verified whether respondents met the study’s criteria before they proceeded.

While an adequate sample size is essential for robust statistical analysis and generalisability of results (Köhler et al., 2017), a balance must be struck. Tabachnik and Fidell (2007) highlight the benefits of larger samples in revealing relationships and acknowledge the potential drawbacks of huge samples. Therefore, determining the optimal sample size will require careful consideration. Based on studies by Kabelele et al. (2023) and Yu et al. (2022), which had sample sizes of 132 and 126

participants, respectively, it was reasonable to estimate a final sample size of around 120 for this study, which would be adequate for hypothesis testing. The final sample size was 121.

By focusing on entrepreneurs in active mentorship relationships, the sample offered valuable insights into how mentorship fosters entrepreneurial resilience. This resilience, in turn, was expected to mediate the translation of mentorship experiences into concrete entrepreneurial actions. This deliberate focus aligned perfectly with the research question, which centres on evaluating the impact of mentorship on the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action, with entrepreneurial resilience as a potential mediating factor. Moreover, this sampling strategy aligns with recent scholarly discourse by Abbasianchavari and Moritz (2021), who emphasise the importance of understanding the influence of mentors on entrepreneurial paths.

4.3.4. Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria through elimination questions specified respondents needed to be entrepreneurs currently and further, be engaged in a mentorship relationship (generic or entrepreneurial). This approach facilitated the investigation of mentorship's influence on entrepreneurial resilience, hypothesised to mediate the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action This clarity ensured that the survey reached individuals who could provide insights aligned with the study's goals. In this study, while entrepreneurial action is a key outcome of interest, the inclusion criteria focused on active entrepreneurs currently engaged in mentorship relationships rather than on specific forms or measures of entrepreneurial action activity. This approach is justified based on the study's primary objective: to explore mentorship's role in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and its influence on entrepreneurial action broadly, rather than examining specific actions or business activities. As Saunders and Lewis (2018) highlight, purposive sampling in research prioritizes selecting participants whose characteristics align with the broader research aims.

4.3.5. Measurement instrument

An online questionnaire was the most appropriate research instrument. This format was ideal to elicit structured data from a large sample in an effort to investigate the theoretical relationships (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The questionnaire was structured to include questions on mentorship types (generic and entrepreneurial-specific), entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation phases), organized to capture relevant constructs based on the study's objectives.

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the variables, the respondents used this scale to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to the constructs being investigated. The structured format allowed effective data quantification and analysis. This approach mirrored previous research methodologies, such as the scales utilized by Scandura (1992) to measure mentorship functions and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003) for resilience measurement. The 5-point Likert scale was selected for consistency across constructs, allowing for comparison and statistical analysis.

The mentorship construct was measured using the Mentoring Functions Questionnaire (MFQ-9) (Scandura, 1992)evaluates three mentoring functions: vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modeling. This study adapted this shorter, validated version of the original MFQ-20 that did not sacrifice robust psychometric reliability for brevity. Furthermore, questions about mentorship were further differentiated to show whether the experience had been generic or entrepreneurial-specific.

To assess entrepreneurial resilience, the adapted 25-item CD-RISC was used to measure entrepreneurial resilience, a previously validated tool that has been widely used across disciplines in measuring resilience. The scale encompasses various dimensions of resilience; hence, it is an appropriate fit for the goals of the study in understanding how mentorship influences resilience in entrepreneurship (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The statements of agreement, as shown, were rated using the 5-point Likert scale, hence effectively quantifying and allowing analysis of the resilience levels among the respondents.

Entrepreneurial action was measured with a 17-item scale derived from the Panel

Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED), as applied in the study by Botha and Pietersen (2022). This scale captures actions essential for business formation and growth, categorized into discovery-oriented and exploitation-oriented actions. Participants responded to questions on entrepreneurial actions using a 5-point Likert scale, which enabled both categorization and in-depth analysis of the two phases of actions.

The questions in the survey were arranged into sections aligned with each construct, ensuring a logical flow that helped respondents navigate the survey easily. This structured design, coupled with the 5-point Likert scale, maintained measurement consistency across all sections of the survey. By grounding the instrument in established scales, the study upheld measurement validity and reliability, allowing for accurate analysis of mentorship's role in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and action.

4.3.6. Questionnaire structure

The questionnaire was divided into four key sections:

Demographic Information: This section collected information about the entrepreneur and the business venture, including its stage of development as defined by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023) classifications (Nascent, New, Established).

Mentorship: This section explored the entrepreneur's mentorship experience through questions regarding vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modelling provided by mentors. The questions were grouped into generic mentorship and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship.

Entrepreneurial Resilience: This section assessed the entrepreneur's resilience using an adapted Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)(Connor & Davidson, 2003).

Entrepreneurial Action: The questions in this section focused on the actions taken by entrepreneurs to achieve business objectives adapting questions from Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED) and the work of Carter et al. (1996), as utilised by Botha and Pietersen (2022).

4.3.7. Operationalisation of the constructs

Independent variable:

Entrepreneurial mentorship: The study employed the 9-item Mentoring Functions Questionnaire (MFQ-9)(Scandura, 1992) to assess the mentoring construct. The MFQ-9 assesses vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modelling provided by mentors (Scandura, 1992). The MFQ-9 is a shorter version of the original 20-item MFQ and has the advantage of brevity; further, its psychometric properties have been rigorously established through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (Hu, 2008). Further, the questions had to be classified into questions that were related to generic mentorship and questions that related to entrepreneurial mentorship. Responses for the Mentoring Functions Questionnaire (MFQ-9) items were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), enabling a nuanced measure of mentorship effectiveness. The reliability of this construct was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha, which achieved a high score ($\alpha = 0.93$), indicating strong internal consistency for the MFQ-9 within this study's context.

Mediator:

Entrepreneurial resilience: The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)(Connor & Davidson, 2003) was adapted to assess the construct of entrepreneurial resilience. The CD-RISC is a well-established and validated instrument employed across diverse contexts to measure resilience, for example, in studies by Zhang and Sun (2023) and Safori et al. (2021). Its successful application in areas like stress management, coping with adversity, and general resilience challenges made it an appropriate choice for this investigation.

The adapted CD-RISC comprised of 25 items to capture various aspects of entrepreneurial resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with statements about their entrepreneurial resilience using a 5-point Likert scale. The construct's reliability was confirmed with Cronbach's alpha of 0.94, demonstrating strong internal consistency for the resilience items in this study. This structured format facilitated effective quantification and subsequent analysis of the collected data.

Dependent variable:

Entrepreneurial action: This study adopted a 17-item scale capturing various actions essential for business formation and growth to assess entrepreneurial action. These actions were derived from the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (PSED) and the work of Carter et al. (1996), as utilised by Botha and Pietersen (2022). Examples included finding market opportunities and securing funding, categorized into two broad categories: discovery-oriented and exploitation-oriented actions (Botha & Pietersen, 2022). Participants indicated the frequency of their engagement in each activity using a 5-point Likert scale, which was used to score and analyse the responses to get an in-depth understanding of the two categories of activities. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.89, indicating good internal consistency across items and supporting its use for analysing the frequency of engagement in these entrepreneurial activities.

Control variables:

It was crucial to control certain variables to isolate the effect of the independent variable (mentorship). Controlling variables included prior entrepreneurial experience, educational background, industry sector, and age. These variables were chosen to ensure that the observed changes in entrepreneurial resilience and action could be explicitly attributed to mentorship intervention. By controlling specific variables, the internal validity of the study was confirmed. The appropriate causal relationships were also better understood (Fiss, 2011).

4.4. Pilot study

To optimize the online format, the research prioritized a questionnaire design that was engaging, concise, and easy to navigate. Given the digital nature of the survey, brevity and clarity were essential to sustain participant interest and ensure accurate responses (Dillman et al., 2017). To achieve this, the questionnaire underwent a pilot testing phase, which lasted three days and included ten respondents. Feedback from the pilot test highlighted two design and issues. Firstly, the mentorship qualifier question was not terminating survey if answered negatively, during the first day. Secondly, in the section for entrepreneurial action not all questions had been made

mandatory. The two issues were resolved by adjusting the settings on Survey Monkey within the first two days.

Additionally, the pilot feedback provided insights, and two questions were rephrased for clarity as seven of the respondents commented that the questions were not clear. Following these amendments, the final version of the questionnaire was ready for full distribution according to the data collection plan. This pre-testing process ensured that the survey was both user-friendly and well-aligned with the study's objectives.

4.5. Data collection

A primarily online survey method was thus adopted due to the geographical dispersion of the target population. The SurveyMonkey tool was a convenient and effective means of conducting the distribution and collection of responses (Deutskens et al., 2004). Moreover, the platform enhanced data quality by automating processes, minimising errors associated with manual data entry, and promoting an efficient and accurate data collection experience (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

The questionnaire was disseminated via a link on email and messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Linkedin and Telegram. Purposive sampling was combined with snowball sampling, where initial respondents were encouraged to share the questionnaire link with other individuals in their networks who met the specified criteria. This strategy was used to increase the reach to relevant participants while maintaining the purposive sampling focus.

To ensure a sufficient response rate, the data collection period spanned eight weeks, which was two weeks more than the six weeks suggested by Saunders and Lewis (2018). In that period, efforts were made to maximise participation by sending generic reminders after the first week and halfway through the data collection period (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Once the data collection phase was complete, the consolidated data was analysed using relevant statistical methods to examine relationships between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. Social cognitive theory and other relevant theories and frameworks were used to guide the analysis and interpretation of data.

4.6. Data analysis

Prior to commencing the data analysis, data cleaning and preparation process was undertaken. This step was crucial to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Data cleaning involved assigning codes to the relevant variables and examining the data for inconsistencies or errors.

Following data preparation, both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed using IBM SPSS software. Descriptive statistics provided a comprehensive overview of the critical constructs within the sample. Inferential statistics were then utilised to explore the relationships between these constructs and test the research hypotheses. The study used a comprehensive set statistical measures to analyse the data effectively while ensuring data quality, model validation and testing of the hypotheses. Each measure was selected for its specific purpose in validating the dataset and hypotheses. The data was tested at a significance level of 95%; therefore, the alpha was 0.05.

Data preparation began with checks for missing values and outliers, revealing no major concerns. This was done using missing value analysis and outlier-boxplot to test based on three times interquartile range rule. The missing value analysis confirmed that there were no missing responses across the dataset, meaning all participants completed the questionnaire fully this is essential as missing data can introduce biases and reduce the representativeness of the dataset. The three times interquartile range-based outlier-boxplot was used to identify extreme cases, this analysis provides a robust foundation for interpreting the data.

Common Method Variance (CMV) was assessed using Harman's single factor test to prevent biases in correlations that could lead to erroneous findings (Fuller et al., 2016). In assessing Common Method Variance (CMV) using Harman's single factor test, the expectation was to determine whether a significant portion of the variance in the dataset could be attributed to a single factor. A high CMV could indicate that responses across variables are influenced by a common source, such as the survey method, response style, or environmental factors, rather than by actual underlying relationships among the constructs of interest. The purpose of this test was to avoid Type 1 errors or false positives that might incorrectly indicate significant relationships

between variables.

Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, confirmed that the data was normally distributed, a critical assumption for reliable parametric analysis. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted to establish the model's validity and reliability. CFA helps to establish the trustworthiness of the measurement instrument ensuring the subsequent analysis of relationships between constructs is based on sound and reliable data. By conducting CFA, we can have greater confidence in the validity and reliability of the findings, which is essential for drawing meaningful conclusions from the research.

Measures such as Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) demonstrated good construct validity and internal consistency, strengthening the model's foundation. To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.5, indicating strong construct validity; and the Composite Reliability (CR) should exceed 0.7, signifying high internal consistency among the items measuring the construct. Model fit indices, such as standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the squared Euclidean distance (d_ULS) and normed fit index (NFI) confirmed the model's suitability, while Fornell-Larcker and heterotrait monotrait (HTMT) tests established that the constructs measured were distinct from one another, achieving discriminant validity.

To explore relationships among mentorship, resilience, and entrepreneurial action, Pearson's correlation provided foundational insights into the strength and significance of relationships between these variables, as recommended by Cohen (1988). Structural equation model (SEM) path coefficients and t-statistics provided further insights, allowing the study to confirm or refute specific hypotheses based on statistical significance. The Stone-Geisser Q^2 value confirmed high predictive relevance, and a post-hoc power analysis using GPower demonstrated that the sample size was more than adequate, lending robustness to the findings. Overall, these statistical measures supported the model's validity, reliability, and accuracy in evaluating the impact of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience and action. By combining these analytical techniques, the study achieved a comprehensive

examination that quantifies and elucidates the dynamics of entrepreneurial mentorship within the entrepreneurial process, aligning with the research objectives.

4.7. Quality controls

The importance of ensuring the reliability and validity of data collection instruments in quantitative research is well-established (Chan & Idris, 2017). By examining educational aspects, exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha were conducted to test the internal consistency and reliability of the survey instrument. The high Cronbach's Alpha indicated reliable survey items, and Composite Reliability (CR) values validated the measured constructs showing internal consistency. This two-pronged approach enhanced data reliability and validity while contributing to the overall strength and credibility of the research findings.

Convergent validity was demonstrated by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, indicating that constructs explained the variance in their indicators. Discriminant validity was proven with the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, confirming that each construct was distinct from the others. Together, these methods validated the model’s reliability and ensured its accuracy in examining mentorship’s impact on entrepreneurial resilience and action

4.8. Limitations

This study examined the influence of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience and action entrepreneurial action and acknowledged several limitations inherent to the chosen methods. The cross-sectional design, while efficient (Rindfleisch et al., 2008), restricted the ability to establish cause-and-effect relationships. However, this design aligned with the study's initial exploratory phase. Similarly, the quantitative approach, powerful for hypothesis testing and uncovering large-scale patterns (Field, 2013), might have missed the nuanced, qualitative aspects of mentorship experiences. It is essential to note these limitations, the methods we chosen purposively to meet the aims of this study and to adhere to practical constraints. However, they influence how we interpret the findings and guide future research.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

5.1. Introduction

The study investigated the role of mentorship in the building entrepreneurial resilience and its influence on entrepreneurial action**.** This chapter starts with the preparation of empirical data by assessing the missing values, extreme outliers, and variance of the common method variance. The final data comprised 121 responses and were used for further analysis. All respondents were entrepreneurs and had received some form of mentorship; either generic, (life and personal), and/or entrepreneurial-specific (business-specific). The analysis starts with demographic information, which details the characteristics of the empirical data, followed by the descriptive statistics and reliability analysis. This is followed by the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the validity and reliability of the model. The next section tests the hypotheses using the structural model of the structural equation model (SEM).

5.2. Preparation of data

Data preparation was carried out by determining missing value analysis, extreme outliers, and common method variance (CMV). The data had no issue with missing values as there were no variables with missing values higher than the threshold of 5% proposed by Schafer (1999). This was followed by the extreme outlier analysis using boxplots that checked if there were observations at three times interquartile range or more. There were no issues with extreme outliers and the data were then analysed for common method variance. A Harman's single factor test was conducted for CMV using Principal Axis Factoring as an extraction method. CMV can either artificially increase or decrease correlations, creating a bias that can lead to incorrectly determining the existence of a relationship, thus increasing the likelihood of a type I error (Fuller et al., 2016). The results show that there were no problems with CMV with extracted variance less than 50% (% variance = 46.9%)

5.3. Respondents' profiles

The demographic profile of the respondents was analysed based on their age,

gender, and education, as the first characteristics (Table 2). This is followed by business-related, which includes the industry of operation, confirmation of being an entrepreneur, received mentorships, type of mentorship, tenure operating business, business stage, and previous business ownership (Table 3).

The final total sample was 121 respondents. The age groups 30 to 39 years and 40 to 49 years were dominant, comprising 28.9% (n = 35), followed by respondents aged 20 to 29 years, who made up 23.1% (n = 28). Respondents under 20 years of age and those aged 50 to 59 had the smallest representation, each comprising 8.3% (n = 10). Gender distribution demonstrated that females were the majority at 62.8% (n = 76), while males made up 36.4% (n = 44), with only one respondent preferring not to disclose their gender.

With reference to education the highest level achieved by most respondents was a Bachelor's degree, representing 39.7% (n = 48), followed by those holding a Certificate or Diploma at 24.0% (n = 29). Table 3 provides a more detailed breakdown of these demographic characteristics.

Demographics		Frequency (n)	Percentage Frequency
Age	Under 20	10	8.3%
	20 - 29	28	23.1%
	30 - 39	35	28.9%
	40 - 49	35	28.9%
	50 - 59	10	8.3%
	60 and above	3	2.5%
Gender	Male	44	36.4%
	Female	76	62.8%
	Prefer not to say	1	0.8%
Education	Other	2	1.7%
	Matric	23	19.0%
	Certificate/ Diploma	29	24.0%
	Bachelor's	48	39.7%
	Postgraduate diploma / Honours	13	10.7%
	Masters	6	5.0%

Table 2: The biographic profile of the respondent

Regarding business-related aspects, respondents working in the "other" industry category were predominant, constituting 41.3% (n = 50). Those in agriculture

accounted for 29.8% (n = 36), while retail and wholesale trade made up 21.5% (n = 26). The manufacturing sector had the fewest participants with only a percentage of 3.3% (n = 4).

All respondents identified as entrepreneurs and confirmed having received mentorship, either in a generic or entrepreneurship-specific format. Entrepreneurship-specific mentorship was more common with 62.0% (n = 75) of respondents, while those who received generic mentorship accounted for 38% (n = 46). A significant proportion of respondents (40.5%, n= 49) had been operating their business for one to three years, followed by those with four to six years of experience (23.1%, n=28). Business tenure of seven to ten years was reported by 14.0% (n=17) of respondents.

Entrepreneurs in the nascent stage (up to three months of operation) made up only a small percentage, while those classified as new entrepreneurs (3 to 42 months of operation) constituted 47.9% (n=58). Established entrepreneurs (operating for over 42 months) made up 46.3% (n=56). Lastly ownership history revealed an even split with 50.4% (n=61) having previously owned or managed a business and 49.6% (n=60) not having prior ownership experience. Table 3 provides further details on business-related profile of respondents.

Demographics		Frequency (n)	Percentage Frequency
Industry	Other	50	41.3%
	Manufacturing	4	3.3%
	Agriculture	36	29.8%
	Retail and Wholesale trade	26	21.5%
	Information and communication Technology (ICT)	5	4.1%
Entrepreneur	Yes	121	100.0%
Received mentorship	Yes	121	100.0%
Type of mentorship	Generic mentorship	46	38.0%
	Business-specific mentorship	75	62.0%
Tenure operating business	Less than 1 year	16	13.2%
	1 -3 years	49	40.5%
	4 – 6 years	28	23.1%
	7 – 10 years	17	14.0%
	More than 10 years	11	9.1%
Business stage	Nascent	7	5.8%
	New	58	47.9%
	Established	56	46.3%
Previous Business ownership	Yes	61	50.4%
	No	60	49.6%

Table 3: Business-related profile of respondents

5.4. Descriptive statistics and reliability of the constructs

5.4.1. Mentorship

The mentorship construct was assessed as an independent variable with a focus on two distinct categories: generic mentorship and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree." Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for each mentorship item (MET1 to MET9), divided between the two categories.

The generic mentorship category included MET4, MET6, and MET8, which focused on emotional support, providing a sounding board for ideas, and inspirational support. Among these, MET8, "My mentor inspires me to overcome obstacles and persevere in my business endeavours," had the highest mean (M = 4.37, SD = 0.776), with a median of Mdn = 4.00. This suggests that inspirational support is a highly valued aspect of generic mentorship among respondents.

The entrepreneurial-specific mentorship category comprised MET1, MET2, MET3, MET5, MET7, and MET9, focusing on more targeted business support, including active development support, goal setting, opportunity identification, sharing entrepreneurial experiences, and serving as a role model. Within this category, MET4, "My mentor offers emotional support as I navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship," had a high mean of M = 4.36 (SD = 0.805). MET3, "My mentor assists me in identifying new business opportunities," had the lowest mean (M = 3.84, SD = 1.068) among the entrepreneurial-specific items but still received a generally positive response. Each mentorship item displayed normal distribution characteristics, with skewness and kurtosis values within acceptable ranges (±2 for skewness and ±7 for kurtosis).

The results underscore the distinct contributions of generic and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship to entrepreneurial resilience, with respondents showing appreciation for both motivational support and entrepreneurial guidance.

Item	Statement	Category	Mean (M)	Median (Mdn)	Std. Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis
MET1	My mentor actively supports the development of my entrepreneurial venture/s.	Entrepreneurial-Specific	4	4	0.992	-0.782	0.058
MET2	My mentor helps me set realistic business goals.	Entrepreneurial-Specific	3.9	4	1.068	-0.927	0.274
MET3	My mentor assists me in identifying new business opportunities.	Entrepreneurial-Specific	3.84	4	1.204	-0.828	-0.343
MET4	My mentor offers emotional support as I navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship.	Generic	4.36	4	0.805	-2.004	6.018
MET5	My mentor shares their entrepreneurial experiences and lessons learned with me.	Entrepreneurial-Specific	4.02	5	1.228	-1.009	-0.309
MET6	My mentor serves as a sounding board for my business ideas and challenges.	Generic	4.24	4	0.931	-1.506	2.473
MET7	My mentor serves as a role model for entrepreneurial behavior.	Entrepreneurial-Specific	4.02	5	1.235	-0.966	-0.499
MET8	My mentor inspires me to overcome obstacles and persevere in my business endeavors.	Generic	4.37	4	0.776	-1.847	5.287
MET9	My mentor exemplifies the qualities I aspire to have as an entrepreneur.	Entrepreneurial-Specific	4.03	5	1.303	-1.049	-0.348

Table 4: The descriptive statistics of mentorship

5.4.2. Entrepreneurial action

The assessment of entrepreneurial action is based on a 17-item scale adapted from Botha and Pietersen (2022), using a 5-point Likert scale, where respondents indicated their engagement levels in various entrepreneurial activities over the past three years. The scale ranges from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Regularly). These activities are divided into two categories: discovery and exploitation activities.

Among the items, ETA10, which corresponds to "I have invested some of my own money in a business," recorded the highest mean (M = 4.24, SD = 0.806), suggesting high engagement in personal financial investment among respondents. Both ETA11 ("I have requested for and received financial assistance to start my business") and ETA12 ("I have facilities and equipment in place that assisted me in starting a business") had identical means of M = 3.84, with respective standard deviations of SD = 1.297 and SD = 1.176.

Lower engagement was noted in items related to formalization and administrative tasks, specifically ETA7 ("I have organized a start-up team") and ETA8 ("I have created a legal entity"), with means of M = 2.99 and M = 2.98, respectively. ETA8 registered the lowest mean (M = 2.98) with a standard deviation of SD = 1.396.

Median values for most items (ETA1, ETA2, ETA3, ETA4, ETA5, ETA6, ETA8, ETA10, ETA11, ETA12, ETA13, and ETA14) were Mdn = 4.00, while ETA7 and ETA9 had a median of Mdn = 3.00. Skewness and kurtosis analyses indicated that

the data was normally distributed, as all values were within the acceptable range of ±2, supporting the reliability of descriptive insights (Table 5). This data highlights variations in entrepreneurial actions, showing stronger engagement in activities requiring personal investment and resource allocation, while administrative and structural setup activities have lower frequencies of engagement among respondents.

Respondents demonstrate regular engagement with discovery-oriented activities, such as identifying market opportunities (ETA2) and preparing a business plan (ETA3). These activities reflect proactive foundations laid in planning, with mean scores generally above 3, showing regular involvement. This suggests that respondents prioritize conceptualizing and exploring viable business ideas, at the early-stage entrepreneurial processes. Engagement in exploitation activities was less consistent (focused on operationalizing and scaling the business). Higher mean scores in activities like investing personal funds (ETA10) and seeking financial assistance (ETA11) show respondents' willingness to commit resources to growth. In contrast, lower engagement in tasks like legal formalities (ETA8) and patent applications (ETA16) indicate potential challenges or lower focus on certain structural aspects of business development.

While both discovery and exploitation activities are considered to be of equal value, the consistently higher engagement in discovery (ETA1 to ETA6) compared to the variable engagement in exploitation (ETA7 to ETA17) indicates a strong initial focus on planning. However, translating these plans into actionable business operations appears less uniform, possibly due to resource or regulatory barriers. This divergence suggests that while interest may be ample in the generation of ideas, scaling these operationally may pose more sophisticated challenges.

Item	Description	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Category
ETA1	I have spent a lot of time thinking about starting a business before I actually started my business.	3.51	4	0.976	-0.583	-0.479	Discovery
ETA2	I have identified market opportunities.	3.83	4	0.901	-0.553	-0.332	Discovery
ETA3	I have prepared a business plan.	3.44	4	1.168	-0.693	-0.394	Discovery
ETA4	I have developed models or procedures for a product/service.	3.3	4	1.202	-0.507	-0.713	Discovery
ETA5	I have selected a business name.	3.68	4	1.043	-0.53	-0.725	Discovery
ETA6	I am devoted full time to the business.	3.73	4	1.183	-0.742	-0.435	Discovery
ETA7	I have organized a start-up team.	2.99	3	1.221	-0.124	-1.005	Exploitation
ETA8	I have created a legal entity.	3.26	4	1.196	-0.289	-1.014	Exploitation
ETA9	I have registered with the tax authorities.	2.98	3	1.396	-0.007	-1.266	Exploitation
ETA10	I have invested some of my own money in a business.	4.24	4	0.806	-0.853	0.16	Exploitation
ETA11	I have requested for and received financial assistance to start my business.	3.84	4	1.297	-0.983	-0.097	Exploitation
ETA12	I have facilities and equipment in place that assisted me in starting a business.	3.84	4	1.176	-0.876	-0.043	Exploitation
ETA13	I have purchased or leased major items, like equipment, facilities, or property.	3.69	4	1.323	-0.872	-0.397	Exploitation
ETA14	I have purchased raw materials, inventory, or other supply.	4.07	4	1.146	-1.281	0.82	Exploitation
ETA15	I have started marketing or promotional activities.	3.62	4	1.28	-0.709	-0.598	Exploitation
ETA16	I have applied for licenses or patents.	3.05	3	1.499	-0.101	-1.415	Exploitation
ETA17	I have appointed employees.	3.34	4	1.464	-0.414	-1.268	Exploitation

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of entrepreneurial action

5.4.3. Entrepreneurial resilience

The analysis of entrepreneurial resilience shows high mean scores across all items, indicating strong self-assessed resilience among respondents. ETS9, which measures the perception of oneself as a strong and determined entrepreneur, had the highest mean score (M = 4.26, SD = 0.824), reflecting a robust sense of resilience. ETS4, addressing the view that overcoming challenges strengthens entrepreneurial skills, followed closely with a mean of M = 4.25 (SD = 0.829). The lowest mean score was recorded for ETS7, related to maintaining focus under business pressures, with M = 3.64 and a higher standard deviation (SD = 1.139), suggesting greater variability in responses.

The median for all items (ETS1–ETS10) is consistently Mdn = 4.00, reinforcing the overall high level of resilience in this sample. Skewness and kurtosis values remain

within acceptable ranges for normal distribution, indicating that the data for resilience is approximately normally distributed.

This resilience scale, adapted from the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 10), utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Not true at all" (0) to "True nearly all the time" (4), effectively capturing respondents' perceptions of their resilience in adapting to market changes, handling setbacks, and coping with stress related to entrepreneurship.

Item	Description	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
ETS1	I am able to adapt my business strategy when market conditions change.	3.68	4	0.798	-0.251	-0.298
ETS2	I can handle unexpected challenges and setbacks in my business.	3.84	4	0.827	-0.418	0.211
ETS3	I try to find opportunities in business problems.	3.97	4	0.865	-0.485	-0.444
ETS4	Overcoming business challenges makes me a stronger entrepreneur.	4.25	4	0.829	-0.761	-0.376
ETS5	I can recover quickly from business setbacks or hardships.	3.93	4	0.858	-0.5	0.076
ETS6	I believe I can achieve my business goals, even if there are obstacles.	4.12	4	0.871	-0.783	0.308
ETS7	Under business pressure such as deadlines or financial targets, I maintain focus.	3.64	4	1.139	-0.33	-1.176
ETS8	I am not easily discouraged by business rejections or negative feedback.	4.05	4	1.015	-0.781	-0.329
ETS9	I consider myself a strong and determined entrepreneur.	4.26	4	0.824	-0.801	-0.284
ETS10	I can handle emotional stress and uncertainty that come with running a business such as financial losses, market downturns, and tough competition.	3.96	4	1.052	-0.615	-0.689

Table 6:Descriptive statistics of entrepreneurial resilience

5.5. Evaluation of measurement model

5.5.1. Evaluation of model through confirmatory factor analysis

The measurement model was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

within a structural equation model (SEM) framework (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Two predominant types of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) are typically used: covariance-based (CB-SEM) and Partial Least Squares-based (PLS-SEM). Dash and Paul (2021) explained that CB-SEM is based on covariance analysis, while the PLS-SEM aims to maximise explained variance, specifically utilising partial least squares. The measurement model for this study is presented in Figure 1. The model required adequate loading factors (λ) for all constructs, around 0.70 and higher so as to confirm construct validity. The results demonstrated strong factor loading across all constructs. Generic mentorship achieved loading between λ = 0.820 and 0.906, and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship ranged between, λ = 0.863 to 0.929. For entrepreneurial action, the loading factors for discovery sub-constructs ranged from λ = 0.776 to 0.846, with ETA1 (I have spent a lot of time thinking about starting a business before I actually started my business) excluded due to low loading factor. For exploitation sub-construct loadings ranged from λ = 0.693 to 0.848, after exclusion of ETA9 (I have registered with the tax authorities), ETA11 (I have requested for and received financial assistance to start my business) and ETA14 (I have purchased raw materials, inventory, or other supply). For entrepreneurial resilience demonstrated a strong loading factor ranging from λ = 0.768 to 0.870, with all the items retained.

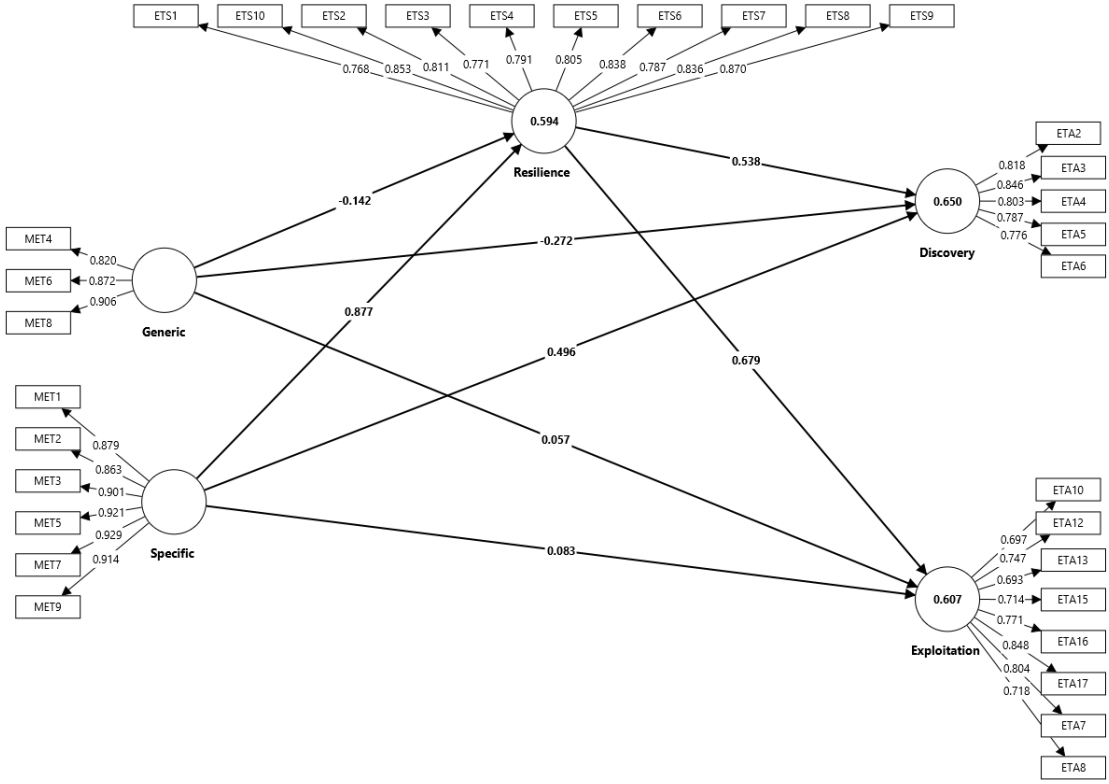

Figure 2: Measurement model

5.5.2. Evaluation of model fit indices

The model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, focusing primarily on the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) which is considered one of the more reliable fit indicators, together with d_ULS (squared Euclidean distance), d_G (the geodesic distance) and the Normed Fit Index (NFI) to provide a comprehensive picture of the model fit. The SRMR is the most reliable while the others should be cautiously treated. The model fit indices are provided in Table 7 shows the results where the SRMR is 0.074. This indicates a good model fit, within the recommended threshold SRMR < 0.08 (L. Hu & Bentler, 1998). This SRMR value points to a strong alignment between the model and observed data, supporting the reliability of the model's fit.

Indices	Saturated model	Estimated model
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.072	0.074
Squared Euclidean Distance (d_ULS)	2.71	2.876
Geodesic Distance (d_G)	1.637	1.674
Chi-square	977.944	987.667
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.74	0.737

Table 7: Model fit of the indices

5.5.3. Evaluation of model for validity and reliability

The measurement model was used to test the convergence validity, composite reliability, internal consistency and discriminant validity. The convergence validity was measured using average variance extracted (AVE) metric with acceptable AVE values being equal to or greater than 0.50 (AVE ≥ 0.50) for all constructs. Entrepreneurial-specific and generic mentorship showed strong convergence with AVE values of 0.813 and 0.751 respectively. Constructs related to entrepreneurial action also had an acceptable convergence validity, discovery had an AVE value of 0.651 while exploitation had an AVE value of 0.563. Entrepreneurship resilience recorded an AVE value of 0.662 (see Table 8).

Composite reliability for each construct was measured using rho_a and rho_c both

were higher than 0.70 which indicated a strong internal consistency. The range for rho_c for all constructs ranged from 0.900 to 0.963 and rho_a from 0.841 to 0.956. Additionally, the Cronbach alpha for all constructs was above 0.70 (α = 0.834 to 0.954) supporting the internal consistency and reliability of the model.

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Discovery	0.866	0.868	0.903	0.651
Exploitation	0.888	0.891	0.911	0.563
Generic	0.834	0.841	0.9	0.751
Resilience	0.943	0.944	0.951	0.662
Entreprenuarial-specific	0.954	0.956	0.963	0.813

Table 8:Reliability and convergence validity metrics for measurement model constructs

5.5.4. Evaluation of discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was analysed using Fornell Larcker and confirmed with Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Hamid et al., 2017). Fornell Larcker criterion evaluates the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct against the correlation with latent constructs. The discriminant validity is achieved if each construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs. This was achieved in this model, indicating discriminant validity within the model (Table 9).

	Discovery	Exploitation	Generic	Resilience	Entrepreneurial-specific
Discovery	0.807				
Exploitation	0.729	0.751			
Generic	0.406	0.489	0.867		
Resilience	0.771	0.774	0.541	0.814	
Entrepreneurial-specific	0.696	0.648	0.779	0.766	0.901

Table 9: Discriminant validity using Fornel-Larcker criterion

HTMT was also calculated to confirm discriminant validity, with all HTMT values below the conservative threshold of 0.90 (HTMT90), indicating acceptable discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). This approach further reinforces that constructs are adequately distinct from each other, supporting the model's reliability

for hypothesis testing.

Table 11. Discriminant validity assessment using HTMT ratio

	Discovery	Exploitation	Generic	Resilience	Entrepreneurial - specific
Discovery					
Exploitation	0.812				
Generic	0.463	0.56			
Resilience	0.844	0.839	0.606		
Entrepreneurial - specific	0.756	0.695	0.872	0.804	

Table 10: HTMT for discriminant validity

The results from Fornell-Larcker and HTMT confirms validity and reliability of the model, for subsequent hypotheses with a structural model.

5.6. Scatter plot analysis and correlation matrix

Scatter plots were generated to visually explore potential relationships between the study's key constructs: discovery, exploitation, resilience, generic mentorship, and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship (see Figure 3). The results show that there is a positive association between the individual constructs. This suggests that mentorship (both generic and entrepreneurial-specific) may contribute positively to entrepreneurial action sub-constructs such as discovery and exploitation (Figure 3)

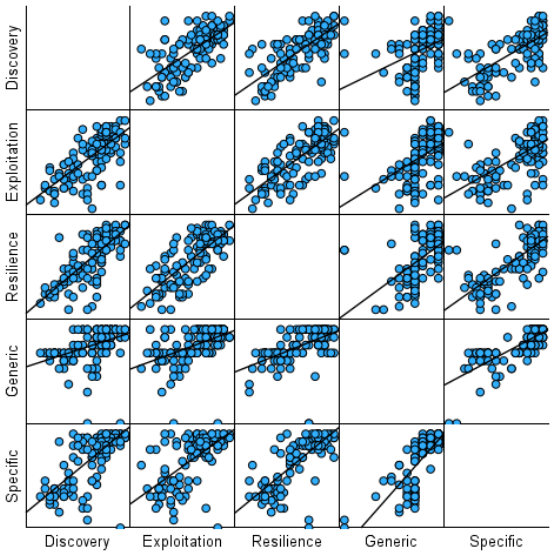

Figure 3: Scatter plots

A Pearson correlation matrix was calculated to further analyse the results, quantifying the strength and significance relationship between constructs. According to Pallant (2010); correlations range from 0.10 to 0.29 demonstrate weak relationships; correlations range from 0.30 to 0.49 indicate moderate strength while correlations above 0.50 indicate strong relationships.

The results show that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between discovery and exploitation (r = 0.704, p < .01). This correlation had was strong based on the guidelines of Pallant (2010) where r = 0.090 – 0.029 is weak, r = 0.30 – 0.49 is has medium strength and r ≥ 050 is strong. There was also a statistically significant positive relationship that is strong between discovery (r = 0.765) and resilience as well as exploitation and resilience (r = 0.761, p < .01). There was also statistically significant positive correlation between discovery and generic mentorship (r = 0.398, p < .01) and discovery and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship (r = 0.692, p <.01) with medium and strong strengths, respectively. There were also statistically significant positive correlation between exploitation and generic (r = 0.479, p <.01) and exploitation and entrepreneurial-specific (r = 0.637, p < .01).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Discovery					
2. Exploitation	,704**				
	<.001				
3. Resilience	,765**	,761**			
	<.001	<.001			
4. Generic	,398**	,479**	,541**		
	<.001	<.001	<.001		
5.Entrepreneurial specific	,692**	,637**	,765**	,777**	
	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11: Correlation matrix

5.7. Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses were tested with the structural model, but a predictive relevance study was conducted before that took place. The predictive relevance is assessed using Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value. This evaluates the cross-validated predictive relevance of the PLS path model, which in this model is entrepreneurial action and entrepreneurial resilience. Table 9 shows that the model had a good $Q^2 > 0$. The Q^2 for discovery is 0.494, while that of exploitation is 0.361 and resilience 0.537. In this model the predictive relevance is large with all $Q^2 > 0.35$ (Chin, 2010).

	Q^2predict	RMSE	MAE
Discovery	0.494	0.723	0.534
Exploitation	0.361	0.810	0.600
Resilience	0.537	0.692	0.498

Table 12:Predictive relevance of the model

Figure 4 presents the structural model with the path coefficient and statistical significance. Table 13 presents direct, total and specific indirect effect.

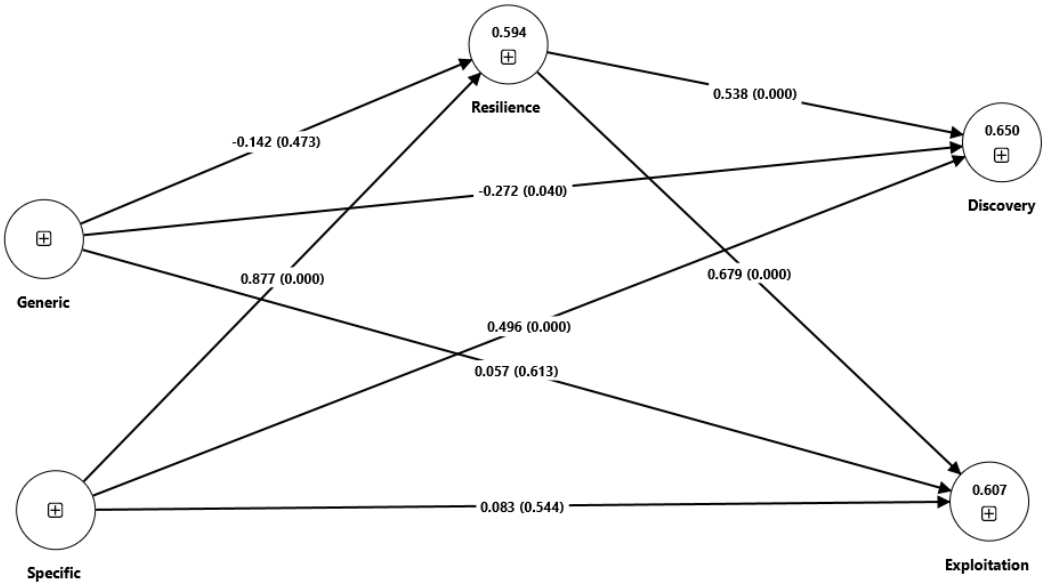

Figure 4:Path coefficient of the model

The first hypothesis tested was whether there is a positive relationship between mentorship received and entrepreneurial resilience developed by

entrepreneurs. Two hypotheses (hypotheses 1a and 1b) were tested. The results indicate that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and resilience with the path, entrepreneurial-specific -> Resilience (H1b: β = 0.866, t- statistics = 6.781, p <.001). In contrast, the path for generic mentorship and resilience (Generic -> Resilience) were not statistically significant with a p-value greater than 5% (p > .05). As such, hypothesis 1 is partially supported.

Hypothesis 2 whether mentorship positively influences entrepreneurial action. Four paths were tested, generic mentorship has statistically significant negative influence on the discovery, Generic -> Discovery (H2aa: β = -0.258, t- statistics = 6.781, p <.001) and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship had a statistically significant positive influence on the discovery, Entrepreneurial-specific -> Discovery (H2ba: β = 0.496, t- statistics = 3.812, p <.001). The Generic -> Exploitation and Entrepreneurial-specific -> Exploitation paths were not statistically significant, with a p-value higher than .05. As such hypothesis 2, is partially supported.

Hypothesis 3 tested whether entrepreneurial resilience positively influences entrepreneurial action. The results show that entrepreneurial resilience positively influences entrepreneurial action for both paths, resilience -> Discovery (H3a: β = 0.532, t- statistics = 5.686, p <.001) and Resilience -> Exploitation (H3b: β = 0.677, t- statistics = 6.381, p <.001). These results confirm that hypothesis 3 is supported.
Hypothesis 4 tested whether entrepreneurial resilience developed through mentorship mediates the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. The entrepreneurial-specific indirect effects for the paths, entrepreneurial-specific -> resilience -> discovery, and Entrepreneurial-specific -> resilience -> exploitation were statistically significant. With the direct effect and total path also statistically significant, entrepreneurial resilience has a complementary mediation effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and the discovery entrepreneurial action. Also, with statistically significant total effect, the entrepreneurial resilience has a complementary mediation effect on the relationship between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and the exploitation entrepreneurial action. As such hypothesis 4 is partially supported because the Generic -> Resilience -> Discovery/Exploitation path did not show statistical significance. This suggests that while entrepreneurial-specific mentorship positively influences entrepreneurial

resilience and subsequently discovery and exploitation actions, generic mentorship does not demonstrate the same indirect effect. Thus, entrepreneurial resilience plays a complementary mediating role specifically within the context of entrepreneurial-specific mentorship.

	Paths	β	T-stats	P values	Hypothesis	Decision
Direct effect	Generic -> Discovery	-0.258	2.058	0.04	H2aa	Supported
	Generic -> Exploitation	0.061	0.506	0.613	H2ab	Not supported
	Generic -> Resilience	-0.122	0.718	0.473	H1a	Not supported
	Resilience -> Discovery	0.532	5.686	0	H3a	Supported
	Resilience -> Exploitation	0.677	6.381	0	H3b	Supported
	Specific -> Discovery	0.496	3.812	0	H2ba	Supported
	Specific -> Exploitation	0.086	0.607	0.544	H2bb	Not supported
	Specific -> Resilience	0.866	6.781	0	H1b	Supported
Total effect	Generic -> Discovery	-0.33	1.831	0.067		
	Generic -> Exploitation	-0.023	0.221	0.825		
	Generic -> Resilience	-0.122	0.718	0.473		
	Resilience -> Discovery	0.532	5.686	0		
	Resilience -> Exploitation	0.677	6.381	0		
	Specific -> Discovery	0.961	7.895	0		
	Specific -> Exploitation	0.672	5.325	0		
	Specific -> Resilience	0.866	6.781	0		
Specific indirect effect	Specific -> Resilience -> Discovery	0.465	3.826	0	H4c	Supported
	Specific -> Resilience -> Exploitation	0.586	4.618	0	H4d	Supported
	Generic -> Resilience -> Discovery	-0.072	0.692	0.489	H4a	Not supported
	Generic -> Resilience -> Exploitation	-0.084	0.699	0.485	H4b	Not supported

Table 13: Direct effect, total effect and specific effect

5.8. Post hoc confirmation of sample size

Post hoc confirmation of the sample size adequacy was conducted with GPower 3.1 (Figure 5). The analysis was based on three predictors (generic, entrepreneurial-specific, and resilience) and their path coefficients. The results show that the sample size was adequacy with statistical power at 0.999, which is higher than the acceptable threshold of 0.8 (80%).

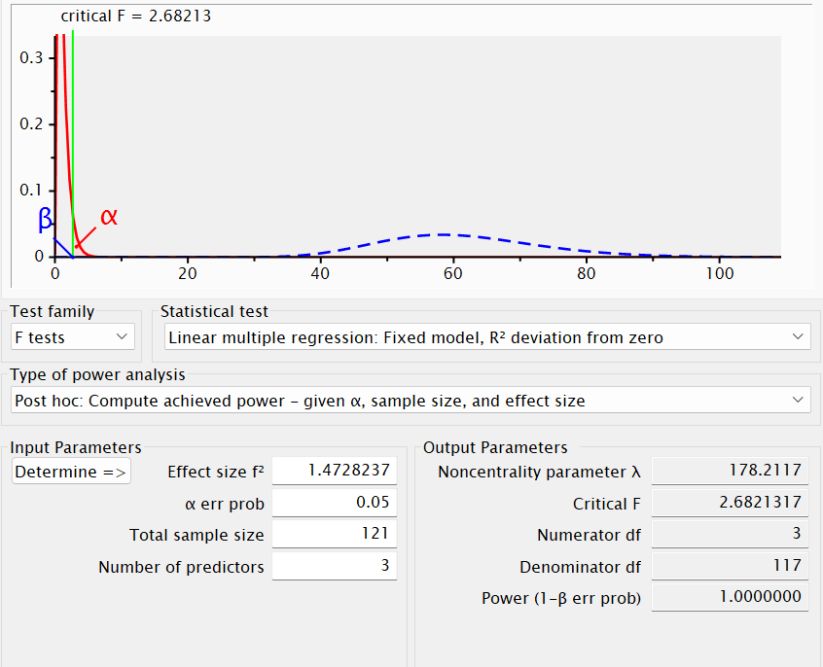

Figure 5: Adequacy of the sample size with GPower

5.9. Conclusion

The study had 121 responses from entrepreneurs who had undergone generic and/or entrepreneurial-specific entrepreneurship. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and resilience. Furthermore, the results revealed that generic mentorship has a statistically significant negative influence on entrepreneurial action in the statistical discovery phase, while entrepreneurial-specific mentorship positively influenced the discovery. The results show that entrepreneurial resilience positively influences entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation). Lastly, entrepreneurship resilience mediates the relationships between the entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and entrepreneurial actions (discovery and exploitation). However, it did not manage to confirm this mediation for generic mentorship, which would reveal the low impact of such kinds of mentorship on entrepreneurial outcomes.

These findings confirm that entrepreneurial-specific mentoring not only directly encourages the resilience and discovery action but also is benefitted from resilience acting as a mediator to support comprehensive entrepreneurial action. The implications of this study, along with detailed interpretations of these results, are

further discussed in Chapter 6, while the limitations that put a framing on these findings are detailed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the findings are summarized based on the results presented in Chapter Five, where the data analysis process yielded valuable insights into the effects of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience and action. This section interprets the results from both statistical and descriptive analyses, delving into the significance of generic and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship in fostering resilience among South African entrepreneurs. The discussion also draws connections between the current study's findings and established theories and research presented in Chapter Two. By aligning these insights with prior literature, the study underscores the multifaceted role of mentorship in enhancing entrepreneurial capabilities, adaptability, and overall success. The study contextualizes its results by comparing the tested hypotheses with the literature review, reinforcing the broader implications of mentorship in entrepreneurship.

6.2. Summary of Results

6.2.1 Data Collection

This study explored the pivotal role of mentorship in shaping entrepreneurial resilience and action among South African entrepreneurs across various sectors. Out of the survey's 121 respondents, participants included those who had experienced generic mentorship, which offered broad guidance on personal and professional skills, as well as those who had received entrepreneurial-specific mentorship that focused on addressing entrepreneurial challenges. This distinction allowed for a deeper analysis of how different types of mentorship influence resilience and entrepreneurial action. A study by Fischer et al. (2016) contributes to the reliability of findings on resilience's influence within mentorship frameworks, they suggest that there is a link between entrepreneurs displaying high levels of resilience and entrepreneurial success; they also posit that entrepreneurs are more resilient than other population groups.

By including participants who benefited from both types of mentorships, the study reflects Korber and McNaughton (2018) observations on the evolving definitions and

applications of entrepreneurial resilience, especially as mentorship supports a spectrum of outcomes; from overcoming doubt to fostering long-term strategic thinking. This diverse dataset thus enabled a detailed exploration of resilience within mentorship contexts, underscoring mentorship's pivotal role in equipping entrepreneurs to sustain action and overcome challenges dynamically (E. St-Jean et al., 2018).

The data collection process was conducted rigorously, incorporating thorough data cleaning and outlier analysis, which yielded a highly reliable dataset representative of South Africa's diverse entrepreneurial landscape. Thus, agrees with the findings of Branicki et al., who found that resilience among entrepreneurs, especially those in SMEs, comes from their ability to negotiate uncertain environments and harness challenges; qualities partly nurtured through mentorship. The demographic rich diversity sample provided a basis for examining resilience as it emerges through varied mentorship experiences.

The study's demographic diversity across age, gender, and educational background further supports its applicability across contexts, enhancing the study's representativeness and relevance. In tune with various findings of the valued role mentor-mentee can play in reducing entrepreneurial doubt, this study has captured data that recognized the importance of mentorship's differential impact on individual entrepreneurial confidence and choice-making (E. St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022). This demographically rich sample contributed to significant variability in the results of this study and made sure that insights into the impact of mentorship were robust and applicable across different contexts.

6.2.2 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model, based in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), posits that mentorship serves as an important environmental influence that boosts entrepreneurial resilience and self-efficacy ultimately facilitating entrepreneurial action (Bandura, 1986; R. Fisher et al., 2016). Studies confirm that mentorship has positive effects on resilience through support, encouragement and the strategies to cope with challenges (Korber & McNaughton, 2018; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012; E. St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022; Ukil & Almashayekhi, 2024). Mentorship functions as a critical environmental influence, shaping an entrepreneur's mindset and actions.

Within this framework, resilience serves as a mediator that amplifies mentorship's impact on entrepreneurial action, enabling entrepreneurs to persist through difficulties (Branicki et al., 2018b; R. Fisher et al., 2016; Shepherd et al., 2020; E. St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022; Ukil & Almashayekhi, 2024). Tailored mentorship, particularly situational and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship, meets entrepreneurs' unique needs more effectively than generic mentorship ((Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021; Kunaka & Moos, 2019; Owhoeke, 2021; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). These findings highlight the crucial role of resilience when boosted by tailored mentorship; it plays a pivotal role in translating mentorship into practical entrepreneurial action, allowing entrepreneurs to adapt, persist, and thrive in challenging environments. Generic mentorship, while beneficial, may not always provide the specialized insights necessary for entrepreneurial success (Eesley & Wang, 2017; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Conversely, entrepreneurial mentorship, characterized by industry-specific knowledge and experience, can enhance the entrepreneur's self-efficacy, instilling confidence in their ability to tackle obstacles and seize opportunities.

The research employs structural equation modeling (SEM) to rigorously test the proposed hypotheses, aiming to validate the influence of mentorship and resilience on entrepreneurial outcomes. SEM is a powerful tool for examining multiple relationships simultaneously; in this case between mentorship, resilience, and entrepreneurial action, offering a comprehensive view of how these variables interact to drive entrepreneurial success (Dash & Paul, 2021). Since mentorship's influence on entrepreneurial resilience and outcomes is an evolving research area, partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM) is well-suited for initial exploration and model development (Dash & Paul, 2021). This understanding can inform evidence-based design of mentorship programs aimed at fostering entrepreneurial resilience by uncovering pathways through which mentorship and resilience impact entrepreneurial actions which could ultimately leading to enhanced success rates among aspiring entrepreneurs in dynamic and competitive environments (Chin, 2010).

6.2.3 Pilot Phase

The pilot phase was important for refining the questionnaire, so as to enhance reliability, validity and overall quality of data obtained before the full-scale distribution

(Beets et al., 2020; Fuller et al., 2016). Conducted over three days, this pre-testing phase involved ten respondents who provided feedback on various aspects of the survey. Initially, several issues arose from survey form settings such as, survey failing to terminate when respondents answered negatively to the mentorship qualifier question and the absence of mandatory response settings on for certain entrepreneurial action questions. It was crucial to address these issues to mitigate potential bias while ensuring data accuracy.

In response to these challenges, adjustments were made within the first two days by updating the settings on SurveyMonkey. This ensured that required responses were enforced, thereby enhancing the overall survey flow and addressing the concerns raised by the pilot participants. The adjustments addressed common method variance (CMV) and common method bias (CMB) and additionally helped clarify item selection for SEM analysis (Fuller et al., 2016). Effective pilot testing reduces the risk of bias associated with single-item measures and improves data integrity (Beets et al., 2020).

Furthermore, feedback from the respondents highlighted specific areas that needed rephrasing. Seven respondents indicated a lack of clarity in two questions, prompting revisions for better comprehension. Feedback from the pilot contributed to enhancing the likelihood of obtaining high quality data that would accurately reflect the study's constructs and hypotheses.

6.2.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the study's robustness, a thorough analysis of validity and reliability was conducted, which is essential for establishing the credibility of the research findings. Validity measures how well and instrument measures the targeted construct (Dash & Paul, 2021). Validity was measured using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which is a preferred method over exploratory factor analysis (EFA) when verifying pre-defined theoretical constructs (Chin, 2010; Dash & Paul, 2021).

Construct validity was confirmed through convergent and discriminant validity, two necessary indicators within confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Dash & Paul, 2021).Convergent validity was measured using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) which measures the shared variance among items measuring the same construct. In

this study, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above the acceptable threshold of 0.50 for all constructs were obtained (including mentorship, resilience, and entrepreneurial action) indicating that items within each construct were consistently aligned (Hair & Alamer, 2022). Discriminant validity, conversely ensures that each construct is distinct from other constructs in the model. This was further verified by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio. The Fornell-Larcker criterion require that a construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be higher than its shared variance (squared correlation) with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Morever the HTMT values stood below the critical threshold of 0.85, which further validated the constructs measured distinct factors (Henseler et al., 2015).

Reliability refers to the consistency of responses obtained from the instrument under repeated conditions (Dash & Paul, 2021). This was measured through the CR values-both rho_a and rho_c and Cronbach Alpha to confirm internal consistency (Chin, 2010). Composite Reliability (CR) in all constructs was above the accepted threshold of 0.70 indicating strong internal consistency and further confirming the instrument's reliability(Hair & Alamer, 2022). The Cronbach alpha values ranged from 0.834 to 0.954, suggesting strong reliability, which enhances accurate and consistent research findings.

Model fit, which gives statistical evidence about how well the model fits the observed data, was supported by the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which indicated a good fit according to conventional guidelines (Hu & Bentler, 1998).The Normed Fit Index (NFI) also reflected acceptable standards of model fit and further demonstrated the appropriateness of the model.

6.2.5 Descriptive Statistics

The sample population for this study, South African entrepreneurs with either generic or business-specific experiences in mentorship was highly relevant. The contribution of the participants in the light of mentorship shaping resilience and entrepreneurial action is relevant to the study. The gender balance was slightly biased towards females, with three out of five being females and two out of five males. This further ensured diversity for the representation of wider age groups, variation in industry

sectors, and added depth to the findings in capturing views across different stages of entrepreneurship journeys.

Some studies confirm that mentoring programs are an efficient tool for entrepreneurs' learning and development, thus bringing such positive outcomes such as increased business skills and resilience (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021). The impact of mentoring is not confined to the transfer of pure knowledge. A mentor can also provide psychological support, thus being a kind of confidant who offers encouragement to help mentees overcome their sense of isolation and thus increase their confidence (Owhoeke, 2021; E. St-Jean et al., 2018; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). This emotional support is crucial in fostering entrepreneurial resilience that will enable them to push forward even when setbacks happen and to sustain their commitment to the venture (E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012).

6.3. Hypothesis testing

6.3.1. Hypothesis 1: Relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial resilience

A wide range of studies conducted in various parts of the world and across different cultures generally show that mentorship significantly influences the entrepreneur's resilience and, successful entrepreneurial outcomes. Mentorship gives guidance as well as instils an adaptive mindset necessary in the world of entrepreneurship (Fisher R et al., 2016; Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Some studies also proved that mentorship helps develop the psychological and emotional strength of entrepreneurs to navigate challenges, particularly in turbulent business environments by enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy (E. St-Jean et al., 2018; É. St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). A tough job market and economic environment can act as a push factor towards entrepreneurship (Owhoeke, 2021), while a need for independence and autonomy may act as a pull factor attracting people to entrepreneurship (Shepherd et al., 2020; Williams & Shepherd, 2016). The combination of pull and push factors create a big pool of aspiring entrepreneurs for which mentorship is an important resource for building resilience and undertaking entrepreneurial action (Schmutzler et al., 2019). This study tested the first hypothesis (H1) to determine whether a positive relationship exists between mentorship received and entrepreneurial resilience developed by entrepreneurs. The hypothesis

is further dichotomized into two sub-hypotheses: differentiating the effects of generic mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience (H1a) and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience (H1b).

Mentorship is a multidimensional construct, findings of the present study indicated that there are two primary dimensions within the context of entrepreneurship: generic mentorship and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship. These constructs were found to be distinct yet complementary in measuring the role of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial resilience. The model fit result justified that both the dimensions of mentorship varied in their validities and reliabilities, pointing to the fact that they captured different aspects of the mentorship experience for building resilience among entrepreneurs. (Chin, 2010; Dash & Paul, 2021). Literature on mentorship highlights these differences, suggesting that while generic mentorship provides broad personal and professional support, entrepreneurial-specific mentorship offers targeted guidance on business skills, decision-making, and strategic thinking (Owhoeke, 2021; E. St-Jean et al., 2018; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012; E. St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022).

6.3.1.1. Generic mentorship and entrepreneurial resilience (H1a)

The findings indicate that generic mentorship does not have a statistically significant positive relationship with entrepreneurial resilience, with findings showing the path is not significant ($\beta = -0.122$, $t = 0.718$, $p > 0.05$). This is a differentiation that is crucial and should not be overlooked, while generic mentorship may enable overall personal development, it may be irrelevant in building resilience specifically needed in an entrepreneurial setting.

This contradicts several earlier studies that had argued that general mentorship serves to enhance one's adaptability towards life (Kram, 1985; St-Jean & Audet, 2012). However, studies focusing on entrepreneurial resilience (Kunaka & Moos, 2019) have pointed to the limitations of general mentorship, suggesting that general personal guidance may lack the specialized strategies necessary for building resilience in challenging, high-stakes business environments.

This study contributes new insights by underscoring the limitations of generic

mentorship in cultivating resilience among entrepreneurs, mostly due to its lack of focus on the relevant challenges encountered in the entrepreneurial setting. These findings suggest that mentorship programs targeting entrepreneurs should include entrepreneurial components to make them resilient. Such an approach could provide the relevant guidance and support that align with the entrepreneurship landscape, as suggested by social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the effectiveness of learning in context-specific environments (Bandura, 1991).

6.3.1.2. Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and entrepreneurial resilience (H1b)

The study's results indicate that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship has a significant positive relationship with entrepreneurial resilience, evidenced by the strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.866$, $t = 6.781$, $p < 0.001$). This significant relationship suggests that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship plays an important role in fostering resilience among entrepreneurs. The positive beta value indicates that mentorship focused on practical business challenges positively influences developing the required psychological and adaptive capacities for resilience in entrepreneurial settings, thereby giving necessary guidance and support from experienced mentors to the entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship provides more than just emotional support; it includes custom guidance in business skills, decision-making, and strategy which are essential for entrepreneurs to manage the demands of their businesses (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022). Fisher et al. (2016) and St-Jean et al. (2018) argue that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship supplies entrepreneurs with real-world practical advice that help them manage and recover from setbacks, fostering resilience. This customised support prepares entrepreneurs to navigate complex business environments.

This study adds onto the literature by showing that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship is not only beneficial but necessary for building resilience. It shows that such mentorship provides entrepreneurs with relevant strategies and problem-solving techniques that enhance their ability to persevere in the face of challenges. This implies that interventions aimed at boosting entrepreneurial capabilities should

be closely tied to the specific tasks and challenges entrepreneurs face in real-world settings (Bandura, 1991; Fisher R et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2023; Shafie & Mohd Isa, 2023). Putting together unique mentoring interventions that are related to and that address the challenges in entrepreneurship ensure that they are tangible and meaningful outcomes (Lin et al., 2023; E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). By incorporating the principles of social cognitive theory, interventions can be designed to provide entrepreneurs with the contextualized learning experiences that enhance their self-efficacy, and foster resilience in the face of entrepreneurial challenges.

Lastly, the study shows the significance of mentorship in developing entrepreneurial resilience, particularly emphasizing the superior and relevant impact of entrepreneurial-specific mentorship over generic mentorship. While generic mentorship contributes to overall personal development, it lacks the targeted support necessary for resilience in entrepreneurial contexts. These findings advocate for tailored mentorship programs that integrate entrepreneurial-specific guidance to effectively equip entrepreneurs with the resilience needed to succeed in complex, dynamic environments.

6.3.2. Hypothesis 2: Relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action

Hypothesis 2 (H2) proposed that mentorship positively influences entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation) by enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy, specifically skill development and opportunity recognition, which are critical for driving entrepreneurial behaviour. This hypothesis was divided into two sub-hypotheses to evaluate whether generic mentorship (H2a) and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship (H2b) contribute differently to entrepreneurial action. In assessing these hypotheses, this study sought to demonstrate the distinct roles that each mentorship type might play in shaping discovery and exploitative actions in entrepreneurial environment.

6.3.2.1. Generic mentorship and entrepreneurial action (H2a)

The results indicate that generic mentorship does not have a statistically significant positive relationship with entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation), with

findings showing a non-significant path for both discovery and exploitative actions (β = -0.258, t = 2.058, p = 0.040). This suggests that, although generic mentorship may provide broad developmental support, it may not directly translate into the specific behaviours necessary for entrepreneurial action.

These results contrast with broader literature that positions mentorship as a key enabler of professional development and opportunity exploration (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Kram, 1985). While previous research has argued that mentorship aids in skills acquisition and career navigation (Kunaka & Moos, 2019), the findings here indicate that generic mentorship lacks the necessary element to encourage the proactive and risk-oriented behaviours associated with entrepreneurial action. Studies by Schmutzler et al. (2019) agree with findings and suggest that for entrepreneurial settings, a more unique and relevant mentorship approach may be required to facilitate action-oriented skills and foster initiative, which generic mentorship may not address.

The insights gained from this study highlight the limited impact of generic mentorship on entrepreneurial action. This finding suggests that while general support can foster an entrepreneur's personal growth, it may not be sufficient to drive the specific actions needed in business environments. These results emphasise the importance of designing mentorship programs for entrepreneurs that go beyond generic support, by matching mentorship with the unique demands of entrepreneurship to effectively encourage entrepreneurial actions.

6.3.2.2. Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and entrepreneurial action (H2b)

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the results reveal a statistically significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and entrepreneurial action, with a strong path coefficient for discovery action (β = 0.496, t = 3.812, p < 0.001). This finding indicates that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship is an undeniable contributor of action-oriented behaviours among entrepreneurs. Specifically, this type of mentorship appears to boost the skills and confidence needed to recognize and act on business opportunities, an essential aspect of entrepreneurial success.

The significance of entrepreneurial-specific mentorship in driving action is well-supported by previous literature. Studies by Fisher et al. (2016) and St-Jean & Tremblay (2020) emphasize that mentorship tailored to entrepreneurial settings equips entrepreneurs with practical and relevant guidance in areas like opportunity evaluation, strategic decision-making, and adaptive thinking. By closely matching with real-world entrepreneurial environment and challenges, entrepreneurial-mentorship offers entrepreneurs the tools needed to pursue opportunities and manage risks effectively, which is important in translating intention into action (E. St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022). While numerous studies highlight the benefits of entrepreneurial-specific mentorship in positively enhancing entrepreneurial action, some recent research presents a different perspective. A study investigating online mentoring platforms found that merely providing access to mentors does not necessarily lead to increased entrepreneurial activity (Lall et al., 2023). The findings suggest that without active engagement and customised support, mentorship may have limited impact on entrepreneurial outcomes.

This study contributes new insights by confirming that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship not only enhances resilience but also plays a vital role in enhancing entrepreneurial action. The findings advocate for mentorship models that prioritize context-specific learning and experiential guidance, as supported by social cognitive theory, which stresses the value of tailored, environment-based learning (Bandura, 1991; Lin et al., 2023). Tailoring mentorship to address entrepreneurial challenges enhances self-efficacy and encourages entrepreneurs to undertake action-oriented behaviours that are necessary in the competitive business environments.

In conclusion, this study underscores the important value of entrepreneurial-specific mentorship in driving entrepreneurial action, highlighting its dominance over generic mentorship in this regard. While generic mentorship supports general development, entrepreneurial-specific mentorship provides the customised support necessary to boost both discovery and exploitative actions, thus equipping entrepreneurs to pursue business opportunities effectively. These findings emphasise the need for mentorship programs that integrate entrepreneurial-specific elements, thus enhancing entrepreneurs' capacity for action in dynamic entrepreneurial environments.

6.3.3. Hypothesis 3: Relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action

Hypothesis 3 (H3) proposed that entrepreneurial resilience has a positive influence on entrepreneurial action, particularly in the areas of discovery (H3a) and exploitation (H3b). This hypothesis was tested to understand whether resilience; defined as an entrepreneur's ability to withstand and adapt to challenges fosters the proactive and risk-oriented behaviours necessary for discovery and exploitation activities. The results indicated a statistically significant positive relationship for both discovery ($\beta = 0.532$, $t = 5.686$, $p < 0.001$) and exploitation ($\beta = 0.677$, $t = 6.381$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the pivotal role of resilience in encouraging entrepreneurial action.

6.3.3.1. Entrepreneurial resilience and discovery

The results showed a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and discovery, with a strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.532$, $p < 0.001$). This finding points to resilience enabling entrepreneurs to pursue discovery-oriented activities, such as identifying and evaluating business opportunities, despite potential challenges or uncertainties.

Literature supports this finding, with prior research highlighting resilience as a critical element in the entrepreneurial process, enabling entrepreneurs to explore new markets and pursue innovative ideas (St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020; Fisher et al., 2016). Resilience provides a psychological advantage that fosters confidence in facing uncertainty, a characteristic essential to discovery activities. For instance, Williams and Shepherd (2016) found that resilient entrepreneurs are more likely to perceive challenges as opportunities for growth, aligning with the proactive approach required for opportunity recognition and exploration in entrepreneurship.

While resilience is widely recognized as beneficial to entrepreneurial discovery, some studies suggest that an overemphasis on resilience can inadvertently lead to overconfidence and excessive risk-taking, which may counter opportunity discovery. Cope and Watts (2022) argue that resilience can sometimes foster a form of "perseverance bias," where entrepreneurs persist in exploring unviable ideas rather

than pivoting or abandoning them. Their study found that, in some cases, high resilience led entrepreneurs to persist with initial ideas, even in the face of clear signals of market misalignment. The opposing view is also supported by Williams et al. (2017), this aligns with the concept of "positive illusions", where overly positive self-conceptions, often associated with resilience, might hinder the ability to acknowledge failure and learn from mistakes.

This study adds new viewd to the existing literature by affirming that resilience does not merely support an entrepreneur's survival but actively contributes to their ability to seek out and engage with new opportunities. These findings indicate that resilience training could play a crucial role in entrepreneurship education and mentorship programs, focusing on preparing entrepreneurs to withstand challenges and use them as learning experiences, ultimately encouraging consistent discovery behaviours in the entrepreneurial setting.

6.3.3.2. Entrepreneurial resilience and exploitation

The study also found a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and exploitation, evidenced by a robust path coefficient ($\beta = 0.677$, $p < 0.001$). This relationship supports the importance of resilience in encouraging entrepreneurs to capitalize on established opportunities, maximize resources, and effectively manage business operations, all of which are key aspects of exploitation activities.

Literature further substantiates this finding, indicating that resilience helps entrepreneurs persist in the face of operational challenges, allowing them to maintain focus on optimizing and scaling their business ventures (Shepherd et al., 2020; Montoro-Fernández et al., 2022). Kunaka and Moos (2019) suggest that resilient entrepreneurs can better manage stressors, leading to improved decision-making and resource allocation, both essential for exploitation-oriented tasks. Entrepreneurs with resilience perceive setbacks as opportunities for learning and adaptation rather than as failures, which aligns with Dewi's (2024) findings on the positive relationship between resilience and adaptability in entrepreneurship. An opposing view is that an overemphasis on resilience, particularly when it's likened to the ability to withstand shocks, could make entrepreneurs less likely to challenge the status quo and explore

novel ideas (Korber & McNaughton, 2018). This aligns with our previous discussions on the potential for resilience to lead to an unwillingness to pivot or adapt. If entrepreneurs are overly focused on exploiting existing opportunities and overcoming challenges within their current business model, they might miss out on emerging trends and potentially disruptive innovations.

This study contributes to the literature by emphasizing that resilience is not only beneficial for the initial stages of opportunity recognition but is equally important in the resource-intensive phases of exploitation. The findings highlight the value of resilience-building mechanisms within mentorship and training programs, enabling entrepreneurs to persist when confronted with operational difficulties. These insights show the importance of resilience in ensuring long-term sustainability and success in entrepreneurial actions, reinforcing that both discovery and exploitation activities benefit significantly from resilience in the entrepreneurial journey.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the dual impact of entrepreneurial resilience in driving both discovery and exploitation activities. By facilitating opportunity recognition and enabling effective resource utilization, resilience proves essential for entrepreneurial success. These findings advocate for the integration of resilience-building initiatives in entrepreneurship programs to foster sustained and proactive engagement in both discovery and exploitation, thereby enhancing entrepreneurial outcomes in dynamic business environments.

6.3.4. Hypothesis 4: Entrepreneurial resilience developed through mentorship mediates the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that entrepreneurial resilience, developed through mentorship, mediates the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action, suggesting that mentorship influences entrepreneurial outcomes indirectly through its effect on resilience (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021). The hypothesis was tested across two paths: one involving generic mentorship and another involving entrepreneurial-specific mentorship.

6.3.4.1. Generic mentorship -> Entrepreneurial resilience ->

Entrepreneurial action

The analysis of this path evidenced that generic mentorship did not have a statistically significant effect on entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation) through entrepreneurial resilience. The results indicated a non-significant relationship, suggesting that generic mentorship does not substantially contribute to building the resilience necessary for influencing entrepreneurial outcomes. This finding contrasts with the general assumption that broad-based mentorship can facilitate resilience in various contexts.

Research on generic mentorship often suggests its benefits in promoting broad personal and professional development, which indirectly supports resilience by providing a general foundation for growth (St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021). However, studies such as those by Kunaka and Moos (2019) indicate that generic mentorship, while beneficial for general skill enhancement, may lack the specificity required to build resilience in the entrepreneurial environment. This view is consistent with Duchek (2020), who posits that resilience in entrepreneurship is more effectively developed through custom interventions addressing specific challenges.

The findings contribute a nuanced understanding by demonstrating that while generic mentorship is valuable for overall development, it may not directly foster entrepreneurial resilience or action. This distinction suggests a need for mentorship programs that incorporate entrepreneurial-specific guidance to bridge this gap. The results emphasise that resilience development in entrepreneurship is more effective when mentorship is custom-tailored, aligning with social cognitive theory's emphasis on environment-specific learning (Bandura, 1991).

6.3.4.2. Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship -> Entrepreneurial resilience -> Entrepreneurial action

In contrast, the path from entrepreneurial-specific mentorship to entrepreneurial resilience and subsequent entrepreneurial action (discovery and exploitation) was found to be statistically significant. The results demonstrate that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship fosters resilience, which in turn, positively influences

entrepreneurial action. This significant finding indicates that mentorship tailored specifically at entrepreneurial challenges effectively equips entrepreneurs with the resilience needed to act on business opportunities.

This result aligns with the body of literature advocating for specialized mentorship in the entrepreneurial setting. Studies such as those by Fisher et al. (2016) and St-Jean & Tremblay (2020) emphasise that mentorship focused on the unique demands of entrepreneurship (such as opportunity recognition, risk management, and strategic thinking) enables entrepreneurs to build resilience that directly supports entrepreneurial action. Research further illustrates that this specialized support not only enhances resilience but also equips mentees to pursue actions that sustain business growth, particularly in high-stress environments (Williams & Shepherd, 2016).

The study extends the understanding of entrepreneurial-specific mentorship by illustrating that its impact on entrepreneurial action is effectively mediated by resilience. This suggests that resilience acts as a critical bridge between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and action, confirming that tailored mentorship is essential for fostering a sustainable entrepreneurial journey. This aligns with social cognitive theory's emphasis on skill acquisition in context-specific environments, as it demonstrates that resilience cultivated through entrepreneurial-specific mentorship enhances both the psychological and practical abilities necessary for entrepreneurial success (Bandura, 1991; Lin et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings emphasize that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship is instrumental in boosting resilience, which then acts as a mediator in driving entrepreneurial action. The lack of impact observed with generic mentorship further underscores the need for focused, entrepreneurial-targeted mentorship programs that can address the unique challenges faced by entrepreneurs.

6.4. The Final Model of the Study

The study confirms that Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides a relevant framework for understanding the role of mentorship in developing entrepreneurial resilience and promoting entrepreneurial action. It supports several core Social

Cognitive Theory (SCT) principles such as the impact of environmental influences, the importance of self-efficacy, and the value of context-specific learning in shaping entrepreneurial behaviour and resilience (Bandura, 1986). The study also confirms SCT's emphasis on self-efficacy as an invaluable component through which mentorship encourages entrepreneurial action. According to Bandura (1991), self-efficacy is fundamental for participating in proactive and goal-directed behaviour. Mentorship, especially when designed to entrepreneurship, is shown in this study to enhance self-efficacy among entrepreneurs, thus increasing resilience in facing entrepreneurial challenges. This is consistent with SCT's claim that self-efficacy develops through observing role models and receiving customized feedback, both of which mentorship provides (Bandura, 1991; McGee & Peterson, 2019).

Additionally, the study highlights SCT's principle of context-specific learning, as entrepreneurial-specific mentorship has a more significant impact on resilience and action compared to generic mentorship. This finding supports Bandura's (1991) perspective that learning is most impactful when it is contextually aligned with the individual's environment and goals. SCT suggests that learning through mentorship in relevant entrepreneurial settings prepares individuals with practical skills, which this study validates by showing that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship better prepares entrepreneurs for practical entrepreneurial challenges (McGee & Peterson, 2019).

Figure 6 presents the final model of the study, illustrating the relationship between mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action. The model comprises three primary constructs: mentorship (with two dimensions—generic and entrepreneurial-specific), entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action (with subcategories of discovery and exploitation). The model fit results confirmed the multidimensionality of the constructs as valid and reliable measures within the mentorship and entrepreneurial resilience framework.

The study found that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship strengthens entrepreneurial resilience and positively impacts both discovery and exploitation actions, suggesting that customised mentorship effectively equips entrepreneurs for challenges (St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020; Fisher et al., 2016). In contrast, generic mentorship showed no significant relationship with resilience and even a negative

influence on discovery actions, highlighting its limitations in fostering the proactive exploration required in entrepreneurship (Kram, 1985; Kunaka & Moos, 2019).

The positive link between resilience and entrepreneurial action supports findings that resilience aids entrepreneurs in persisting through challenges, facilitating both opportunity-seeking and consistent action (Williams & Shepherd, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2020). Additionally, resilience acted as a mediator between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and entrepreneurial action, demonstrating that resilience helps translate mentorship into actionable behaviours (Lin et al., 2023). This mediation effect was not seen with generic mentorship, further reinforcing the unique value of industry-specific guidance in entrepreneurial setting (Duchek, 2020). Overall, these findings suggest that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship better supports entrepreneurial resilience and action.

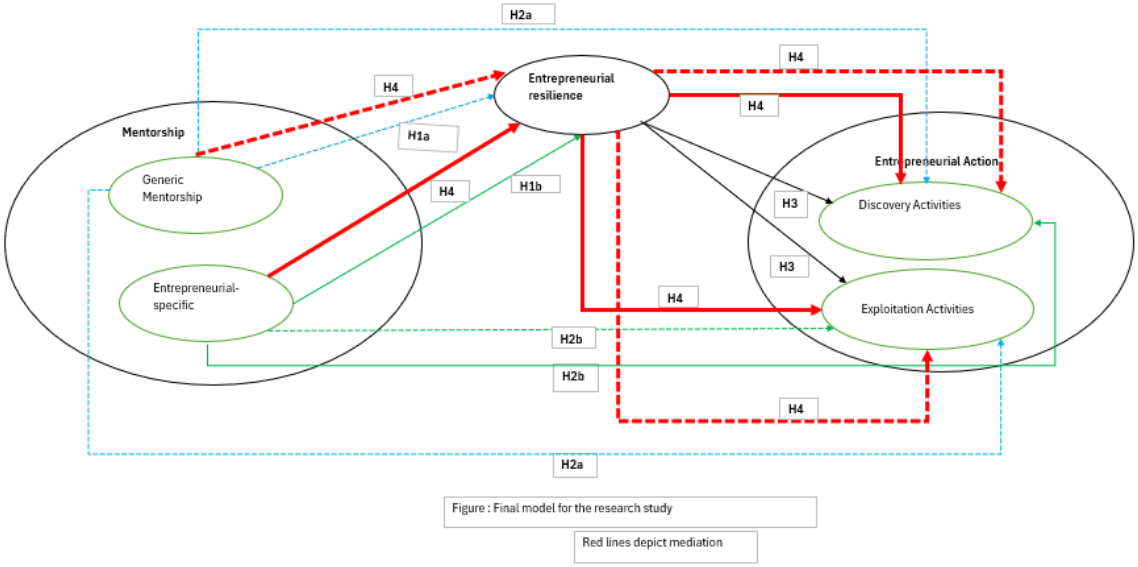

Figure 6: Final model for the research study

In this model, mentorship serves as the foundational element shaping both resilience and action. Generic mentorship provides broad-based support, encouraging adaptability and foundational skill development. It contributes to overall personal growth but lacks targeting in driving entrepreneurial resilience and action (E. St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship offers custom-guidance addressing the entrepreneurial setting such as risk management, opportunity recognition, and strategic decision-making(R. Fisher et al., 2016; Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021). This type of mentorship is depicted as having a more direct and significant impact on entrepreneurial resilience.

Entrepreneurial resilience acts as an intermediary construct within the model, mediating the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. Resilience, characterized by the ability to withstand challenges and adapt to changing environments, is strengthened particularly through entrepreneurial-specific mentorship (É. St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). This resilience, enables entrepreneurs to engage in entrepreneurial action, divided into two subcategories: discovery (the proactive pursuit of new opportunities) and exploitation (the operationalization and scaling of existing opportunities) (Shepherd et al., 2020).

This final model, grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, reflects the dynamic connections among mentorship, resilience, and action. It emphasizes the important role of customized mentorship in building resilience and enhancing entrepreneurs' capacities to both discover and exploit opportunities in entrepreneurial environments (Bandura, 1991; Lin et al., 2023).

6.5. Conclusion

This study underpins the significance of mentorship, particularly entrepreneurial-specific mentorship, as an important factor in fostering resilience and enhancing entrepreneurial action among South African entrepreneurs. Built on the foundation of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), the research underlines mentorship's role as an environmental influence that fosters self-efficacy, supports adaptive capabilities, and promotes proactive behaviours essential for entrepreneurial success (Bandura, 1991; McGee & Peterson, 2019). By comparing generic and entrepreneurial-specific mentorship, the study provides insights into the differential impacts these mentorship types have on resilience and action, with entrepreneurial-specific mentorship showing a more dominant positive influence.

The study's final model reveals that entrepreneurial-specific mentorship strengthens resilience, which, in turn, drives both opportunity discovery and exploitation. This relationship supports SCT's focus on context-specific learning and adaptive capability, confirming that mentorship tailored to the unique demands of entrepreneurship arms individuals with the necessary skills to tackle challenges effectively (Fisher et al., 2016; St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020). In contrast, generic

mentorship, while beneficial for general personal development, did not significantly impact resilience or entrepreneurial action, indicating that broad guidance alone may be insufficient for entrepreneurs facing high-stakes environments.

The results demonstrate the critical role of resilience as a mediator between mentorship and entrepreneurial action, especially in entrepreneurial settings. Resilience built through entrepreneurial-specific mentorship, enables entrepreneurs to both seek and capitalize on opportunities, thus highlighting the value of customized mentorship programs that enhance real-world skills and adaptability (Lin et al., 2023; Shepherd et al., 2020).

In conclusion, this study contributes to SCT by validating mentorship as an environmental factor that builds resilience and facilitates proactive action in entrepreneurial settings. The findings advocate for mentorship programs that emphasize entrepreneurial-specific guidance, reinforcing the importance of tailored support in nurturing entrepreneurial resilience. This final model presents a structured approach to understanding mentorship's impact on entrepreneurial success, and a practical framework for developing mentorship.

This chapter summarizes the findings derived from the collected, processed, and analysed data. It delves into the results obtained from hypotheses testing. Chapter 7 concludes the study by presenting the final conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

Chapter seven presents the principal conclusions and discusses the implications of the study for various stakeholders involved in business and economic development. It emphasizes the importance of mentorship in fostering entrepreneurial resilience and action, highlighting the roles of entrepreneurs, mentors, and policymakers. The chapter also addresses the implications for academia, acknowledging the limitations of the research. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations for future research, advocating for mixed-methods studies that can provide a more comprehensive.

7.2. Principal Conclusions

This study explored the effect of mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience and action within the South African business environment. Typically, a high rate of unemployment and economic disparity is indicative of systemic hurdles toward equal opportunity and access. Within such contexts, mentorship will be significant for its role in affording personalized guidance, support, and networks that can enable individuals to beat such obstacles (Owhoeke, 2021; Ukil & Almashayekhi, 2024). The research specifically investigated how both generic and entrepreneurial mentorship influence resilience and the capacity of entrepreneurs to identify and act upon business opportunities. The findings underscore the potential of resilient entrepreneurship to contribute to economic recovery and job creation in South Africa, as highlighted by Bowmaker-Falconer et al. (2023).

By focusing on how mentorship enhances entrepreneurial resilience, this study contributes to broader knowledge regarding the critical role that mentorship plays in sustaining the entrepreneurial ecosystem, especially within emerging markets such as South Africa. Resilience in entrepreneurship helps not only the individual entrepreneur but also fosters a culture of innovation and adaptation that may catalyze economic growth(Branicki et al., 2018b; R. Fisher et al., 2016; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). Furthermore, the insights from this research can inform policymakers and educators about the importance of structured mentorship programs as a strategic tool for promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing economic development (Unger et al.,

2011). The study highlights the transformative potential of mentorship in empowering entrepreneurs and catalyzing positive change within the South African economy, paving the way for future research in this vital area.

- South Africa's socio-economic landscape, characterized by high inequality and a poor job market in South Africa's socio-economic setting, which has made entrepreneurship even more significant for economic development (National Planning Commission, 2012). The country's National Development Plan 2030 and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor both emphasize entrepreneurship's potential to foster sustainable economic growth. However, entrepreneurs in South Africa face resource limitations, political instability, and systemic economic challenges, which often impede business success (Sarkodie & Adams, 2020). For this reason, mentorship during these times becomes a necessary form of support that builds resilience among entrepreneurs to address such stresses (Branicki et al., 2018).

- Past literature on entrepreneurial mentoring has tended to be supportive, but there is a lack in the literature relating to its specific role in developing entrepreneurial resilience and action (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Entrepreneurial resilience or "the ability to deal with failure and to overcome adversity" is one of the most important drivers of the success of an entrepreneur (R. Fisher et al., 2016; Korber & McNaughton, 2018). Although previous studies have documented how mentorship builds this resilience in ways that equip entrepreneurs with the necessary knowledge, skills, and support to better face uncertainty and challenges; (Branicki et al., 2018b; Kao et al., 2014; Korber & McNaughton, 2018; Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021) few have studied how resilience mediates the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. The paper provides rich insights into those aspects of mentorship that build resilience to eventually lead to entrepreneurial action by examining differential impacts from generic and entrepreneurial mentorship.

- This study sought to address four key questions:
    i. What is the impact of generic and entrepreneurial mentorship on

entrepreneurial resilience, which ultimately results in entrepreneurial action?

ii. What is the impact of generic and entrepreneurial mentorship on entrepreneurial resilience?

iii. What is the impact of entrepreneurial resilience on entrepreneurial action?

iv. What is the mediating role of entrepreneurial resilience on the relationship between mentorship and entrepreneurial action?

A quantitative research approach was used, surveying South African entrepreneurs who were either part of a generic or entrepreneurial-specific mentoring initiative. Data was collected via an online questionnaire and then analysed by SPSS and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to ensure the findings were both statically robust and reliable (Field, 2013). The results indicated some key findings relating to the links between types of mentorships and entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial action.

- First, entrepreneurial-specific mentorship significantly positively related to entrepreneurial resilience and hence supported the hypothesis that tailored mentorship strengthens resilience, especially in respect to industry-specific challenges (St-Jean & Tremblay, 2020; Fisher et al., 2016). This finding underlines the importance of targeted guidance, since such entrepreneurial-specific mentorship equips entrepreneurs with practical skills, like recognizing opportunities and handling risks, which are directly relevant to the demands in the entrepreneuaril environment (Kubberød & Ladegård, 2021).

- In contrast, the relationship between generic mentorship and entrepreneurial resilience was not statistically significant. This means that though generic mentorship may support general personal development, it lacks the specific focus which is essential for the proper building of resilience that best equips entrepreneurs for challenges (Kunaka & Moos, 2019). Literature confirms this because generic mentorship largely imparts broader life skills that are not necessarily translated into the resilience level needed in the entrepreneurial context. (Kram, 1985; St-Jean & Audet, 2012).

- The relationship between entrepreneurial resilience and entrepreneurial

action was strongly supported, proving that resilience positively affects both discovery and exploitation actions. Resilience helps entrepreneurs persist despite challenges and increases their confidence in exploring new opportunities (Williams & Shepherd, 2016; Emueje et al., 2020). This aligns with findings by Shepherd et al. (2020), who observed that resilient entrepreneurs can better manage operational setbacks, facilitating both opportunity-seeking and sustained action in their ventures.

- However, the study found a statistically significant negative influence of generic mentorship on the discovery aspect of entrepreneurial action. This unexpected result suggests that non-targeted mentorship may discourage proactive exploration behaviours, potentially due to a lack of entrepreneurial-specific guidance needed for entrepreneurial discovery (Schmutzler et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial-specific mentorship, on the other hand, was positively related to discovery, aligning with the view that industry-aligned mentorship fosters opportunity recognition and strategic decision-making (St-Jean & Jacquemin, 2022).

- Lastly, the mediating role of resilience was significant for the path between entrepreneurial-specific mentorship and entrepreneurial action, confirming that resilience plays a bridging role in transforming mentorship into actionable entrepreneurial behaviours (Fisher et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2023). This relationship was not significant in the case of generic mentorship, further proving the limited impact of generic guidance on resilience and action in entrepreneurship (Duchek, 2020).

- These findings collectively advocate for a mentorship approach that prioritizes entrepreneurial-specific support, as it more effectively builds the resilience and action-oriented mindset necessary for entrepreneurial success.

7.3. Theoretical contributions

This research offers significant theoretical contributions by investigating mentorship, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action within the framework of social cognitive theory.

While existing literature widely accepts the role of mentorship in developing entrepreneurship, this study investigates in detail how mentorship specifically enhances entrepreneurial resilience and elicits entrepreneurial action. The research explores both generic and entrepreneurship-specific mentorship, considering their respective contributions to the building of resilience and fostering entrepreneurial action. This nuanced understanding addresses gaps identified by scholars like St-Jean and Audet (2012) and Kunaka and Moos (2019), who call for more detailed exploration of mentorship's impact on entrepreneurial outcomes.

The study applies social cognitive theory to illustrate the paths through which mentorship impacts entrepreneurial resilience and action. Mentors enhance entrepreneurs' self-efficacy as highlighted by McGee and Peterson (2019). Additionally, mentors also afford opportunities for observation-based learning and provide insights into the setting that surrounds entrepreneurship, impacting entrepreneurial actions positively. It integrates an overview of how mentorship builds resilient entrepreneurs who are able to pursue continuous entrepreneurial action.

The study positions resilience as a mediator between mentorship and entrepreneurial action. Mentorship fosters resilience by providing support and resources, which in turn drive entrepreneurial action. This perspective aligns with findings by Kao et al. (2014) and Branicki et al. (2018), who suggest that mentorship indirectly promotes entrepreneurial action by enhancing resilience. This advances theoretical discourse by highlighting resilience's fundamental role in translating mentorship into entrepreneurial outcomes.

By integrating concepts from mentorship, social cognitive theory, entrepreneurial resilience, and entrepreneurial action, this study offers a framework for understanding mentorship's multifaceted role in entrepreneurship. This theoretical advancement is important for developing mentorship programs and policies that support entrepreneurial success across various economic contexts, as emphasized by Bowmaker-Falconer et al. (2022) and Cope and Watts (2000).

In summary, this study enriches theoretical understanding by detailing how mentorship influences entrepreneurial resilience and action, bridging mentorship with social cognitive theory, positioning resilience as a mediator, and providing insights

for effective mentorship practices in entrepreneurship.

7.4. Practical and Business Relevance

7.4.1. Business Growth and Economic Development

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been considered one of the main factors in the development of an economy by bringing greater job creation, innovation, and enhancement of productivity (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024). By supporting the growth and development of Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), economies can unlock their full potential for economic development, creating jobs, fostering innovation, and enhancing productivity. Research suggests that entrepreneurship and innovation are essential for economic growth. Entrepreneurs introduce new products and services, increase competition, and stimulate technological progress, all of which contribute to a thriving economy (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023; R. Fisher et al., 2016; Nautiyal & Pathak, 2024).

Moreover, effective mentorship allows entrepreneurs to flourish, and in turn, this reflects positively on the creation of jobs. This aligns with South Africa's National Development Plan, which identifies entrepreneurship as a key solution to pressing socio-economic challenges (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). The findings point out that role-players, such as policymakers and educational institutions, need to invest resources in mentorship initiatives that would nurture entrepreneurial talent and create an environment that is conducive to innovation.

7.4.2. Impact on Learning and Research

Entrepreneurship studies, such as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) study, is often driven by the need to understand the challenges and needs of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to inform policy decisions and create support programs that contribute to economic development (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). The insights provided by this research will support entrepreneurs in establishing factors that enhance entrepreneurial activity and its effect on economic

growth, along with resultant policy implications for the support of entrepreneurship within clearly specified economic contexts(Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). This may assist in entrepreneurship education becoming increasingly common in tertiary institutions, so as to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed in entrepreneurship.

This study provides significant inputs into the arena of growing entrepreneurship education and research by pointing out important gaps in understanding the role that resilience plays in entrepreneurial success. Indeed, the results from the study showed that those entrepreneurial mentorship programs that have resilience as their core enhance an entrepreneur's ability to recognize and seize new opportunities. This befits a call within the literature-for example, that provided by St-Jean and Audet's (2012) work, which advocates for a deeper exploration of the mechanisms through which mentorship fosters specific entrepreneurial behaviours, including opportunity identification and resource acquisition.

By focusing on the role of resilience in entrepreneurship, this research adds to the discussion of entrepreneurship education and calls for a mentorship curriculum designed to build resilience. In this way, entrepreneurs would have the necessary tools to handle challenges in the entrepreneurial environment. The study thus provides a basis on which other research and practice should emphasize the impact of resilience in raising successful entrepreneurs.

7.4.3. Policy and Decision-Making

Policymakers rely on empirical research to design interventions that promote sustainable growth. For example, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) has been providing valuable insights to support decision-making and policy since 1999 (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). Governments and other stakeholders require robust and credible data to make critical decisions that promote sustainable entrepreneurship and healthy entrepreneurial ecosystems (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023).

Policymakers stand to ensure that resources are not wasted in initiatives that might not be aligned with the country's development goals by only encouraging evidence-

based mentorship activities (Sarkodie & Adams, 2020). In this regard, having mentorship programs focusing on economic disadvantages will lead to further decreased entrepreneurial failure rates, hence helping attain continued economic growth and stability within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The findings have significant implications for the design and implementation of impactful mentoring programs that are focused on the twin variables of resilience and entrepreneurial action (through discovery and exploitation actions) amongst entrepreneurs. Organizations and policymakers are encouraged to incorporate structured entrepreneurial mentorship programs that emphasize resilience-building and strategic skills (Bowmaker-Falconer et al., 2023). The research supports initiatives in the National Development Plan 2030 that advocate entrepreneurship as a catalyst for economic growth and job creation (National Planning Commission (NPC), 2012).

7.5. Limitations of the Investigation

The study's focus on South Africa may limit the applicability of the results to other contexts. Conducting the study in a specific context or with a particular population may face challenges in generalizing findings to other settings or groups. Findings from this study on entrepreneurs in mentorship relationships in South Africa may not hold true for entrepreneurs in different settings.

Self-reported data, which was used in the survey can be susceptible to biases, such as social desirability bias and recall bias. Respondents may tend to over-report positive attributes or under-report negative experiences, leading to inaccurate results. Further, a single data collection method was used (survey), this might cause a limitation by common method variance, where the correlation between variables is inflated due to the shared method of measurement.

This study is constrained by its cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish definitive causal relationships between mentorship and the outcomes of resilience and entrepreneurial action. Cross-sectional studies offer a snapshot in time, which can obscure the dynamic nature of mentorship relationships.
While the quantitative method employed in this research ensured statistical rigor and

allowed for the analysis of relationships between variables, it may have overlooked the rich, qualitative dimensions of mentorship experiences. Quantitative data often simplifies complex human experiences into numerical values, potentially missing the subtleties that qualitative methods can illuminate.

7.6. Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provides critical insights, it also highlights areas for future research. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial to explore mentorship's sustained impact on entrepreneurial resilience and action over time. Additionally, future research could broaden the geographic scope beyond South Africa to include other emerging markets, allowing for comparative analysis of mentorship's impact across different socio-economic contexts (Ukil & Jenkins, 2023). Expanding the research into other entrepreneurial settings would deepen the understanding of how mentorship models adapt to varying cultural and economic landscapes. To counter biases of self-reported data, using multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and objective measures is suggested to triangulate findings and mitigate these biases. Finally, qualitative studies, such as case studies, could enrich these quantitative findings by offering detailed narratives of the mentor-mentee relationship and its influence on resilience and entrepreneurial action (Cope & Watts, 2000).

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APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire Items

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Dear Participant,

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on the role of mentorship in building entrepreneurial resilience and its influence on entrepreneurial action. To that end, you are requested to complete a survey relating to this topic. The survey aims to better understand how mentorship experiences contribute to the development of resilience among entrepreneurs and how this resilience impacts their entrepreneurial activities.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any point without any consequences. Your **responses will remain anonymous**, and only aggregated data (the combined summary of all responses) will be reported. All data will be stored securely without any identifying information and will be used exclusively for the purposes of this study

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time and contribution to this important study. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor. Our details are provided below.

Researcher Name: Caroline Irambu-Setshedi

Email: 22029118@mygibs.co.za

Researcher Supervisor: Prof Anastacia Mamabolo

Email: Mamaboloa@gibs.co.za

1. Demographic questions:

1. Are you currently an entrepreneur?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Have you received any form of mentorship (Generic – life and personal and/or Entrepreneurial – business specific)?
    - Yes
    - No
3. What type of mentorship have you received?
    - Generic Mentorship (broad personal and professional growth)
    - Entrepreneurial Mentorship (business-specific support)
4. How long have you been operating your current business?
    - Less than 1 year
    - 1 - 3 years
    - 4 - 6 years
    - 7 - 10 years
    - More than 10 yeras
5. Does your business fall under the classification of Small, Medium, or Micro Enterprises (SMMEs)?
    - Yes
    - No
6. Age: What is your age?
    - Under 20
    - 20-29
    - 30-39
    - 40-49
    - 50-59
    - 60 and above
7. Gender: What is your gender?
- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say
8. Education: What is your highest level of education completed?
- High School
- Some College
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate

- Other (please specify)

9. Industry: In which industry does your business operate?
   - Agriculture
   - Manufacturing
   - Services
   - Technology
   - Other (please specify)
10. Business Stage: What is the current stage of development of your business according to the GEM classifications?
    - Nascent (0-3 months)
    - New (3-42 months)
    - Established (more than 42 months)
11. Previous Business Ownership: "Have you owned or managed any other businesses before this one?"
    - Yes
    - No

2. Mentorship Experience: Adapted from Mentoring Functions Questionnaire - MFQ-9 (Castro and Scandura, 2004) - Likert-type

Instructions: Please rate your agreement with the following statements about your experience with your mentor. Use a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Likert Scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Career Support

2.1. My mentor actively supports the development of my entrepreneurial venture/s.

2.2. My mentor helps me set realistic business goals.

2.3. My mentor assists me in identifying new business opportunities.

Psychosocial Support

2.4. My mentor offers emotional support as I navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship.
2.5. My mentor shares their entrepreneurial experiences and lessons learned with me.
2.6. My mentor serves as a sounding board for my business ideas and challenges

Role Modelling

2.7. My mentor serves as a role model for entrepreneurial behaviour.
2.8. My mentor inspires me to overcome obstacles and persevere in my business endeavours.
2.9. My mentor exemplifies the qualities I aspire to have as an entrepreneur.

3. **Resilience: Adapted from The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC 10) (Connor and Davidson, 2007) - Likert type**

Instructions: Below are some statements about how people cope with different situations. Please indicate how much you agree with each statement as it has applied to you over the past year. Use the following scale:

- 0 = Not true at all
- 1 = Rarely true
- 2 = Sometimes true
- 3 = Often true
- 4 = True nearly all the time

3.1. I am able to adapt my business strategy when market conditions change.
3.2. I can handle unexpected challenges and setbacks in my business.
3.3. I try to find opportunities in business problems.
3.4. Overcoming business challenges makes me a stronger entrepreneur.
3.5. I can recover quickly from business setbacks or hardships.
3.6. I believe I can achieve my business goals, even if there are obstacles.
3.7. Under business pressure such as deadlines or financial targets, I maintain focus.
3.8. I am not easily discouraged by business rejections or negative feedback.
3.9. I consider myself a strong and determined entrepreneur.
3.10. I can handle emotional stress and uncertainty that come with running a business such as financial losses, market downturns, and tough competition.

4. <u>Entrepreneurial Action: Adapted from Botha and Pietersen (2022) - Likert type</u>

Instructions: Please indicate how much you have engaged in each of the below activities in the past three years. Use the following scale:

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Sometimes
- 4 = Regularly
- 5 = Very Regularly

Discovery Activities:

4.1. I have spent a lot of time thinking about starting a business before I actually started my business.

4.2. I have identified market opportunities.

4.3. I have prepared a business plan.

4.4. I have developed models or procedures for a product/service.

4.5. I have selected a business name.

4.6. I am devoted full time to the business.

Exploitation Activities:

4.7. I have organized a start-up team.

4.8. I have created a legal entity.

4.9. I have registered with the tax authorities.

4.10. I have invested some of my own money in a business.

4.11. I have requested for and received financial assistance to start my business.

4.12. I have facilities and equipment in place that assisted me in starting a business.

4.13. I have purchased or leased major items, like equipment, facilities, or property.

4.14. I have purchased raw materials, inventory, or other supply.

4.15. I have started marketing or promotional activities.

4.16. I have applied for licenses or patents.

4.17. I have appointed employees.

Appendix 2: Ethical approval clearance letter

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

13 August 2024

Caroline Irambu-Setshedi

Dear Caroline

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS MBA Research Ethical Clearance Committee

Appendix 3: Certificate of Data Analysis Support form

CERTIFICATION OF DATA ANALYSIS SUPPORT

(Additional support retained or not - to be **completed by all students)**

Please note that failure to comply and report on this honestly will result in disciplinary action

I hereby certify that (please indicate which statement applies):

- *I DID NOT RECEIVE any additional/outside assistance (i.e. statistical, transcriptional, and/or editorial services) on my research report:*
  N/A

- *I RECEIVED additional/outside assistance (i.e. statistical, transcriptional, and/or editorial services) on my research report:*
  Yes – Statistician

If any additional services were retained– ***please indicate below which:***

☐ ***Statistician***

☐ ***Transcriber***

☐ ***Editor***

☐ ***Other (please specify……..)***

Please provide the name(s) and contact details of all retained:

NAME: Dr. Matolwandile Mtotywa

EMAIL ADDRESS: Andile@bsri.co.za

CONTACT NUMBER: (012) 023 1130

TYPE OF SERVICE: Statistical

NAME: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

CONTACT NUMBER: .....

TYPE OF SERVICE: .....

NAME: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

CONTACT NUMBER: .....

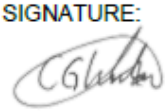
TYPE OF SERVICE: .....

I hereby declare that all *statistical write-ups and thematic interpretations of the results for* **my study were completed by myself without outside assistance**

NAME OF STUDENT:

Caroline Irambu-Setshedi

SIGNATURE:



STUDENT NUMBER: 22029118

STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS: 22029118@mygibs.co.za

Appendix 4: Copyright form

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

COPYRIGHT FORM

Copyright Declaration:

Why must I complete this form?

You need to acknowledge that you are aware of the following conditions:

All rights regarding intellectual property produced by a university student vest in the University, i.e. the University holds the copyright of all research done at the university.

No copyright laws have been broken by using copyrighted material without prior permission or acknowledgement.

The University is not responsible or liable for any breach of intellectual property rights or copyright infringements.

Based on the ethical clearance process, you need to indicate if your report must be embargoed due to confidential information

This must be done in accordance with your supervisor and the ethical clearance process.

Research will only be embargoed for a period not exceeding two years.

If permanent embargo is required, you and your supervisor must apply through the office of the Vice-Principal: Research and Postgraduate Studies.

You need to give us permission to make your research report publicly available via the University's repository, UPetd

Note: GIBS shall do everything in its power to protect the personal information supplied herein, in accordance to its company privacy policies as well the Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013. Access to all the above provided personal information is restricted, only employees who need the information to perform a specific job are granted access to this information.

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

COPYRIGHT DECLARATION FORM

Student details			
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Qualification details			
Degree:	MBA	Year completed:	2024
Title of research:	The role of mentorship in building entrepreneurial resilience and its influence on entrepreneurial action		
Supervisor:	Prof Anastacia Mamabolo		
Supervisor email:	mamaboloa@gibs.co.za		

Access

A.	My research is not confidential and may be made available in the GIBS Information Centre and on UPSpace.

I give permission to display my email address on the UPSpace website

Yes	X	No	

B.

	My research is confidential and may NOT be made available in the GIBS Information Centre nor on UPSpace.

Please indicate embargo period requested

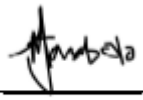
Two years		Please attach a letter of motivation to substantiate your request. Without a letter embargo will not be granted.
Permanent		Permission from the Vice-Principal: Research and Postgraduate Studies at UP is required for permanent embargo. Please attach a copy permission letter. Without a letter permanent embargo will not be granted.

Copyright declaration

I hereby declare that I have not used unethical research practices nor gained material dishonesty in this electronic version of my research submitted. Where appropriate, written permission statement(s) were obtained from the owner(s) of third-party copyrighted matter included in my research, allowing distribution as specified below.

I hereby assign, transfer and make over to the University of Pretoria my rights of copyright in the submitted work to the extent that it has not already been affected in terms of the contract I entered into at registration. I understand that all rights with regard to the intellectual property of my research, vest in the University who has the right to reproduce, distribute and/or publish the work in any manner it may deem fit.

.

Signature: 	Date: 01.11.2024
Supervisor signature: 	Date: 01.11.2024