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Coaching and mentoring to foster self-efficacy for early-stage survival-driven entrepreneurs

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Purpose: In developing economies, the intention to engage in entrepreneurship has steadily increased. However, the failure rate of small and medium enterprises remains high. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a useful lens to study entrepreneurial support. This study aims to investigate the respective mechanisms and contributions of coaching and mentoring in developing entrepreneurial self-efficacy of early-stage, survival-driven entrepreneurs.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was exploratory and qualitative, and followed an inductive approach. Purposive sampling (N = 21) was used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with 12 survival-driven entrepreneurs, four coaches, four mentors and one entrepreneurial support provider. Data were analysed using inductive thematic content analysis.

Findings/results: Although there are similarities and overlaps between the outcomes of coaching and mentoring, the results indicate that coaching is used as an exploratory intervention to generate options for entrepreneurs and predominantly contributes to the development of self-regulatory processes. Mentoring is used in a more consulting and directive manner to guide the entrepreneurs towards business-related solutions and contributes to the development of entrepreneurial business management competencies.

Practical implications: This study provides guidelines to coaches and mentors of survivalist entrepreneurs on when to use which approach.

Originality/value: Currently the lines between coaching and mentoring to support and develop entrepreneurs are blurred. This study created a conceptual framework (based on Social Cognitive Theory and Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy) that delineates the different mechanisms and contributions of coaching and mentoring to the development of the self-efficacy of survival-driven entrepreneurs.

Keywords: entrepreneurs; survival-driven entrepreneurs; coaching; mentoring; self-efficacy.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has often been credited globally and in emerging economies as a driver of economic growth through innovation and job creation (Shi & Weber, 2020). The expectation for entrepreneurship aligns with global goals for economic prosperity through job creation. This is demonstrated, for example, by the South African government's National Development Plan (NDP), launched in 2011, which envisions small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) providing employment to 90% of the workforce by 2030 (Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 119). This goal marks a notable rise from 50% to 60% of the workforce employed by SMEs in 2022, as reported by McKinsey (Albaz et al., 2020), emphasising the necessity for entrepreneurial development and support to reach this objective. However, entrepreneurship is an intricate process that is influenced by the external environment (Matos & Hall, 2020), the behaviour of the entrepreneur (Kuratko et al., 2021) and the institutional environment (Estrin et al., 2022). For entrepreneurs to actively contribute towards economic growth, they require the necessary motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and behavioural and business management competencies (Botha et al., 2019) to successfully transition from the early stages of entrepreneurship to established business ownership.

While entrepreneurship encompasses various aspects, it can be categorised into two groups depending on the motivation behind individuals choosing to become: (1) opportunity-driven

entrepreneurs and (2) necessity- or survival-driven entrepreneurs. Survival-driven entrepreneurs who have been 'pushed' into entrepreneurship without the required entrepreneurial competencies (Huang et al., 2023), may find themselves in situations where the demand for entrepreneurship exceeds their capabilities (Kuratko et al., 2021). Such situations during the early stages of entrepreneurship may ultimately lead to business failure (Bushe, 2019). It is therefore imperative to support and develop these survival-driven entrepreneurs, especially early on.

A useful theoretical lens through which to study entrepreneurial development is entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy, which is rooted in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, is a multi-dimensional construct which is a combination of the entrepreneur's self-confidence to execute certain tasks, as well as their ability to develop the required business and behavioural competencies to effectively function in the domain of entrepreneurship, particularly during the early stages of entrepreneurship (Baum & Locke, 2004; Drnovšek et al., 2010).

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a learned competence that can be developed and improved (Florin et al., 2007; Mueller & Goic, 2002; Zhao et al., 2005), and both coaching and mentoring have been identified as individual-level ESE antecedents (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Newman et al., 2019). Coaching, which is underpinned by adult learning theories (Cox et al., 2018), adopts a custom-tailored, flexible and reflection-oriented approach (Bozer & Jones, 2018; Hunt et al., 2019) towards development which can be applied during any stage of the entrepreneurial process (Kotte et al., 2021). In comparison to coaching, mentoring, which is informed by developmental theories, learning theories and social theories (Dominguez & Hager, 2013), is more directive as the mentors guide and share their experiences with a novice (St-Jean & Audet, 2012). Coach and mentor's one-on-one engagement with entrepreneurs is a unique and distinct feature in comparison to other individual-level antecedents of ESE. The individualised, person-centric nature of coaching and mentoring allows coaches and mentors to engage with entrepreneurs at a personal level (Gergen et al., 2001).

Research shows that coaching and mentoring can boost the ESE of survival-driven entrepreneurs (Baluku et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2019). Despite their different origins, these terms are often used interchangeably in literature and practice (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Clutterbuck, 2008; Stokes et al., 2021). The lack of clear definitions complicates distinguishing between them (Clutterbuck, 2008; Garvey et al., 2018; Stokes et al., 2021). Confusion also arises from professions or organisations historically favouring one over the other. Stokes et al. (2021) noted that coaches and mentors blend elements from both approaches to find effective practices. Despite overlapping definitions, each has unique attributes aimed at specific outcomes, particularly for survival-driven entrepreneurs. The exact contributions of coaching versus mentoring to ESE development in early-stage entrepreneurs remain unclear. The question this study therefore asks is: *What are the respective mechanisms and contributions of coaching and mentoring in developing the entrepreneurial self-efficacy of early-stage, survival-driven entrepreneurs?* An answer to this question could provide insights into how coaching and mentoring can be applied more purposefully and consciously to support vulnerable survival-driven entrepreneurs. This knowledge could also inform support programmes and guide coaches and mentors on when to apply each method.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs grow small businesses and, therefore, the effect of entrepreneurship on the stimulation, development and growth of SMMEs cannot be underestimated (Botha et al., 2019). The contribution of entrepreneurship towards economic prosperity is even more significant in developing nations where entrepreneurs and SMMEs are important vehicles to eradicate unemployment while contributing to income distribution and employment creation (Zwane & Nyide, 2017). The 2022 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report described the value of entrepreneurship as 'an essential driver of societal health, wealth creation, and a formidable engine of economic growth' (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022, p. 13). In South Africa, for example, there was an increase in entrepreneurial intentions from 11.9% in 2019 to 20% in 2021, which can be linked to the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). This increase resulted from negative factors (push effects), such as losing formal employment or positive factors (pull effects), such as emerging opportunities because of changes in consumer behaviour and innovation (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022; Loan et al., 2021).

Individuals have different sources of motivation to engage in entrepreneurship. Shapero's (1982) intention-based theory of entrepreneurship and Model of Entrepreneurial Event (MEE) posit that individuals engage in entrepreneurship as a result of either negative (push factor) or positive (pull factor) events which occurred during their normal way of life (Ndofirepi & Rambe, 2018; Shapero, 1982). Therefore, two types of entrepreneurs can be categorised, based on their motivation for embarking on the entrepreneurial journey, namely, those who are driven by opportunity and those who are driven by survival. Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs identify and exploit potential opportunities in the market. As entrepreneurs, they are motivated and driven to achieve success and create wealth (Shi & Weber, 2020). On the other hand, necessity- or survival-driven entrepreneurs pursue entrepreneurship out of a need to survive because of the lack of formal employment (Ddungu et al., 2023) or the absence of alternative sources of income (Weber et al., 2023). Survival-driven entrepreneurs are often extrinsically motivated as a result of being pushed into entrepreneurship (Huang et al., 2023). Survival-driven entrepreneurs often experience stress when the demand for entrepreneurship exceeds their entrepreneurial capabilities (Kuratko et al., 2021) which could result in lack of motivation and low confidence

(Loan et al., 2021), and ultimately business failure (Bushe, 2019). Therefore, developing the entrepreneurial competencies and entrepreneurial behaviour of the individual entrepreneur, specifically the survival-driven entrepreneur, could be positioned as one of the key factors in supporting entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is a multidimensional domain-specific behaviour concept that refers to people's belief in their entrepreneurial abilities and motivation to perform certain entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial self-efficacy has an influence on entrepreneurial intentions and actions (Chen et al., 1998; Newman et al., 2019). The behaviourist Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as people's beliefs in their capability to produce desired effects by their own actions. These beliefs influence how people feel, think, self-motivate, act and often operate collectively in the process of human functioning (Bandura, 1986; Baum & Locke, 2004). Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is very relevant during the early stages of entrepreneurship when individuals have to decide and commit towards engaging in entrepreneurship as a potential career option (Drnovšek et al., 2010; McGee & Peterson, 2019). Bandura identified four sources of self-efficacy such as mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion and managing emotional states. According to Bandura, there are certain processes through which self-efficacy beliefs produce results and outcomes. These include cognitive processes, motivational processes, affective processes and selection processes (Bandura, 1986; Bandura et al., 1999). In the context of entrepreneurship, the contribution of these self-efficacy processes can be grouped into two categories (Newman et al., 2019) namely: (1) *Individual-level outcomes* (entrepreneurial behaviour), which refers to the entrepreneurs' perceptions about their own capabilities and self-belief to handle given situations (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000) and (2) *firm-level outcomes* (entrepreneurial and/or venture performance such as revenue growth and financial performance), which are strongly affected by the characteristics of the top manager, especially in firms where 'the founder and the organisation may essentially be the same' (Hamburg & Mason, 1984 as cited by Newman et al., 2019, p. 412).

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy can be developed and improved (Florin et al., 2007; Mueller & Srecko, 2002; Zhao et al., 2005). Several ESE development options such as work experience, education and training (Zhao et al., 2005), role models (BarNir et al., 2011), mentors (St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015) and coaching (Hunt et al., 2019) exist. However, in developing economies like South Africa, where unemployment is above 35%, prior work experience is limited because of high levels of unemployment (Altman, 2022). Similarly, opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills through education and training are also limited (Mutanda et al., 2021) and entrepreneurial education remains a challenge (Bowmaker-Falconer & Meyer, 2022). In many countries, coaching and mentoring are available forms of entrepreneurial support provided by public and private entrepreneurial development institutions. The delineation of coaching and mentoring, their mechanisms and respective outcomes in terms of developing self-efficacy in the context of the survival-driven entrepreneur during the early stages of entrepreneurship are however not well understood.

Coaching

Coaching can be linked to Socratic dialogue, in which a student is asked questions that force them to think about their preconceptions and assumptions before replying. Coaching offers a safe space where the coachee is encouraged to speak freely without fear of judgement (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Crompton et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2018). The asking and answering of questions stimulate critical thinking and provide the coachee with the opportunity for reflection about limiting behaviours and the effect of such behaviours on themselves (Cox et al., 2014; Crompton et al., 2012), while developing a self-correcting ability to remove self-doubt (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Flaherty, 2006). Coaching can be positioned as a form of adult learning (Cox et al., 2018).

Entrepreneurial coaching is a relatively novel concept (Kotte et al., 2021). There is an increasing demand for coaching in the entrepreneurial context as a reflective action-based method of entrepreneurial learning and development (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018). Coaching is a custom-tailored, active and reflection-oriented approach. It can therefore contribute to the personal growth and development of the entrepreneur, particularly during the early stages of establishing the venture (Crompton et al., 2012; Kutzhanova et al., 2009). The role of the coach is to facilitate learning and development by helping the entrepreneur develop the ability to step back from a situation and to think about the learning process, which is a requirement for critical reflection (Audet & Couteret, 2012; Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018). However, a potential limitation of coaching in the entrepreneurial context is the coach's lack of entrepreneurial experience and lack of business and industry-specific expert knowledge (Kotte et al., 2021), which limit the ability and confidence of the coach to be directive and provide guidance in the entrepreneurial context. In summary, entrepreneurial coaching could lead to improved levels of ESE (Brinkley & Le Roux, 2018; Kotte et al., 2021; Kutzhanova et al., 2009). However, it is not clear what processes the coach should follow and how coaching contributes to ESE differently from mentoring.

Mentoring

The literature links mentoring with cognitive development, emotional development, leadership and social integration, all of which are rooted in an experiential learning philosophy. Mentoring's one-to-one nature is an effective way of passing on knowledge in a trusting environment where the language is directly appropriate to the mentee and can lead to the most effective transmission of and creation of knowledge and experience (Lee, 2007; Memon et al., 2015). Despite the number of widely accepted definitions of mentoring, there is

no such consensus with regard to the specifics of the term, 'entrepreneurial' mentoring. Since the context and circumstances of entrepreneurs are different from formally employed individuals, the definition of mentoring in the entrepreneurial context is influenced by the context and specific needs of the individual entrepreneur (Brodie et al., 2017). The phases of entrepreneurship, the experience of the entrepreneur and the personality traits of the entrepreneur will also influence and determine what type of mentorship is required. Consequently, the mentoring needs of nascent and novice entrepreneurs will be different from those of experienced entrepreneurs (Memon et al., 2015; St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015). Therefore, in entrepreneurial mentoring both mentor and mentee bring specialised knowledge to the relationship and in many cases the mentee sets the goals (Brodie et al., 2017).

In the context of entrepreneurship, the mentor can become a positive role model for the entrepreneur which allows the entrepreneur the opportunity to find inspiration through their mentor's example (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015). The mentee observes the expertise of the mentor (Baluku et al., 2020), while the mentor acts as an adviser who shares experience, expertise, advice and wisdom with the mentee (Stout-Rostron, 2014). A possible limitation of mentorship is the importance attached to the skills, knowledge and experience of the mentor in the outcomes of the relationship (McKevitt & Marshall, 2015). Therefore, the expectation from the mentee for the mentor to provide an appropriate response could be challenging because of the many potential issues the survival-driven entrepreneur may face (Clutterbuck, 2005). In summary, mentoring is a form of social learning where an entrepreneur, through their engagement and observation of the mentor's behaviour, can enhance their own entrepreneurial behaviour and performance (Kunaka & Moos, 2019; Laukhuf & Malone, 2015). However, it is not clear what processes are required for the entrepreneurial mentor to contribute to the development of the ESE of the survival-driven entrepreneur during the early stages of entrepreneurship and how this differs from coaching.

Methodology

The study was exploratory and qualitative, and followed an inductive approach. The methodology adopted for this study had to answer the research question: *What are the respective mechanisms and contributions of coaching and mentoring in developing the entrepreneurial self-efficacy of early-stage, survival-driven entrepreneurs?* The qualitative nature allowed the researcher the opportunity to explore the subjective experiences of the participants in order to answer the research question.

Population and sampling

This study employed a combination of purposive and theoretical sampling. Initial sampling was purposive (selecting the most likely and knowledgeable participants), while theoretical sampling (a deliberate process of finding new, relevant participants) later on allowed for the recruitment of additional participants who could contribute new insights to help ensure rich insights (Birks & Mills, 2012).

Participants were selected based on their suitability to answer the research question, founded on their experience with the phenomenon (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Cope, 2011). In this case, they were survival-driven entrepreneurs who had received coaching or mentoring, and coaches and mentors who had coached and mentored survival-driven entrepreneurs in South Africa during the early stages of entrepreneurship. The sample size was not determined *a priori* and was completed once *data saturation* had occurred. In total, 21 participants were recruited: 12 survival-driven entrepreneurs, four coaches, four mentors and one coaching and mentoring service provider. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the participants who were entrepreneurs. Table 2 provides details of the coaches, mentors and service providers included in this study.

Data collection

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews by the first author. The use of interviews as

TABLE 1: Profile of entrepreneurs included in the study.

Participant code	Gender	Age (years)	Years in business	Industry	Motivation for starting the business
E1	F	44	3	Catering	To increase earning potential compared to formal employment
E2	F	28	3	Tutoring	Could not find employment with my degree
E3	F	36	4	Clothing	No growth prospect at work, needed to earn more money
E4	M	34	4	Cleaning services	Have always need selling things informally to make a living, all that 'I' know
E5	F	37	4	Swimming teacher	Could not find employment with a Sports degree
E6	M	38	4	Leather goods manufacturing	Could not find employment due to physical disability after an accident
E7	M	32	4	IT/Digital marketing agency	Helped a friend and realised I can do it for myself
E8	F	36	3	Entrepreneurial support coach/ services	Left formal employment due to health reasons
E9	M	28	4	Marketing	Come from a family of entrepreneurs, it is all I know to make a living
E10	F	38	3	Baking	Did not want to return after maternity leave, had to look after the baby while making a living
E11	M	29	4	IT support	Come from a family of entrepreneurs, it is all I know
E12	M	31	4	IT support and marketing	Could not find employment after returning from a secondment contract

F, female; M, male; IT, information technology; E, entrepreneur.

TABLE 2: Profile of coaches, mentors and service providers included in the study.

Participant code	Gender	Qualifications and experience	Entrepreneurial coaching and mentoring experience (years)
M1	F	Post-graduate and small business consultant	4
C1	M	Coaching Certificate and full-time entrepreneurial development coach	6
M2	F	Coaching Certificate and business owner	3
C2	F	Coaching Certificate and business owner	4
C3	F	Post-graduate, professional coach and entrepreneurial mentor	3
M3	M	Post-graduate and business consultant	4
C4	F	Post-graduate and business consultant	4
M4	M	Graduate and business owner	3
SP	F	Graduate and business owner	4

F, female; M, male E, entrepreneur; M (Participant code), mentor; C, coach; SP, service provider.

data collection methodology is relevant in studies that have individual people as units of analysis, which in this study applied to the survival-driven entrepreneurs as well as the coaches and mentors. The qualitative and open-ended nature of the interview guide encouraged the participants to describe their experiences in their own words and allowed the participants to contribute much detailed information. Examples of interview questions included: What motivated you to start the business? What challenges did you experience? What role did the coach or mentor play? What did the coach or mentor do to address your challenges and development needs? How did you feel after the session? The average duration of the interviews was 45 min for entrepreneurs and 60 min for coaches and mentors. Interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom. The availability and advancement of virtual communication options like Zoom provided a viable option for data collection for qualitative researchers (Irani, 2019). Each interview was transcribed by a professional transcriber by using the Zoom recording as source of data. The transcribed interviews per participant were captured on ATLAS.ti for the purposes of data analysis.

Data analysis

The data analysis followed a qualitative thematic analysis approach. Qualitative data analysis such as thematic analysis can be defined as an interpretative analysis of the textual data to describe and interpret the participants' views of the phenomenon (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The principles of constant comparative analysis, which is an inductive and iterative process of coding and analysis, were applied to the data analysis process (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Figure 1 is a visual illustration of the data analysis process.

The 21 interviews generated 125 quotes which were converted into 24 codes through open coding. Open coding, which is also referred to as initial coding, was the first level of coding (Birks & Mills, 2012; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). At the start of the analysis process, coding and comparison were

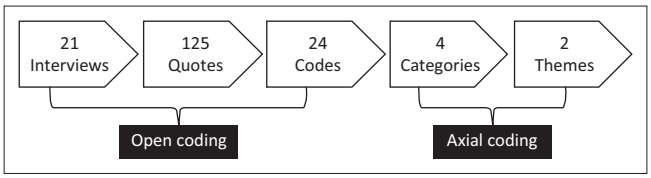


FIGURE 1: Data analysis process.

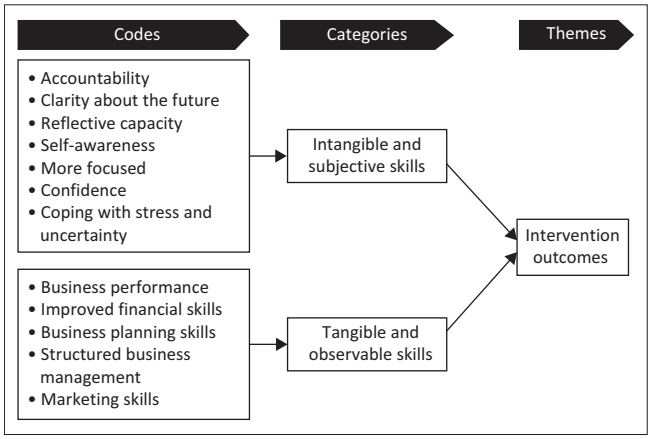


FIGURE 2: Example of theme development.

conducted within the first interview by fracturing the data to compare incidents with each other as well as to identify similarities and differences (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The next step was to label each quote with a brief description that provided meaning to each quote (Chun Tie et al., 2019). In this study, the units of meaning, or quotes, were sentences, phrases and short paragraphs to capture the full extent and meaning of the participants as advocated by Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019).

Axial coding, or intermediate coding, was the second level of coding, which builds on the open coding phase (Williams & Moser, 2019) and the codes were grouped into four categories. During axial coding, codes with similar themes were organised into clear and logically constructed categories as a precursor to the final step in the coding process (Williams & Moser, 2019) which was to further reduce the categories into two themes. Themes can be described as the final step or final products in the content analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The writing of reflective notes and memos during the data analysis process also helped to make meaning from the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Figure 2 is an example of how the codes informed the categories and how the categories informed the themes.

The following themes emerged from this data analysis process: (1) development approach and (2) intervention outcomes.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Stellenbosch University Social, Behavioural and Education Research Ethics Committee (Project nr. 19507).

Results

The data analysis revealed that the differences between coaching and mentoring pertain to the approach adopted by the coach or mentor and the subsequent outcomes of the coaching and mentoring. Each of the findings will be discussed in the following section. Table 3 is a consolidated view of the themes and supporting categories and findings.

Theme 1: Development approaches adopted by the coaches and the mentors

The coaches adopted a self-directed learning approach whereas the mentors relied on their own knowledge and experience to guide the survival-driven entrepreneurs.

Coaching: Self-directed learning

The entrepreneurs had difficulty thinking beyond their current reality and had limiting beliefs about themselves and their businesses (E2, C2). Coaches created an introspective space where entrepreneurs had 'to address the things you need to overcome' (C1). The coaches asked questions to help entrepreneurs think about where they are going, to get clarity and to help them control their strategy (C2). According to E2, the exploratory and probing approach from the coach helped her 'to open up my thoughts and I was learning about myself and about business'. With the help of the coach, the survival-driven entrepreneurs developed the ability to reflect on their own behaviour and performance which gave them better insight into their progress as entrepreneurs, 'which helped me to see my growth' (E8). The benefits of the exploratory process through coaching are captured through the comment below from C3:

> 'They have an idea, but cannot always articulate it clearly, so you have to explore and help them to clearly describe the problem to find out what the actual or underlying problem is.' (C3)

TABLE 3: Themes and supporting categories.

Category	Key finding	Verbatim quote
Theme 1: Development approaches adopted by the coaches and the mentors		
Self-directed learning **(coaching)**	Coaches use non-directive, probing questions prompting contemplation and reflection	'During the first meeting he asked me questions like where I was going with the business – it made me think. I had to think why I was doing this business – he made me think through his questions. During the year he continually told me things that made me think and believe that I could do this.' (E1)
Guidance and direction **(mentoring)**	Mentors use guidance, knowledge exchange, and challenges perspectives	'You can ask the mentor for specific guidance in the field that you need help in, for example, how to advertise and the operational side of the business.' (E10)
Theme 2: Intervention outcomes		
Intangible and subjective skills development **(coaching)**	Coaching enhances self-confidence and motivation	'I have a lot more focus. I have a clear vision, he helped me to distil it in a clear way and it feels like I am on my way to the vision.' (E9)
Tangible and observable skills development **(mentoring)**	Mentoring enhances business skills and performance	'The outcome was a better structured business, a clear plan on the priorities, they can think for themselves, and they have grown in confidence in terms of decision making.' (M4)

According to E2, the exploratory and probing approach from the coach helped her 'to open up my thoughts and I was learning about myself and about business'. For E9, after coaching:

> 'I have a clear vision, he helped me to distil it in a clear way and it feels like I am on my way to the vision.' (E9)

Furthermore, the introduction of reflection by the coach played a significant role in raising their self-awareness by 'thinking and reflecting on what they have achieved' (C1) and how much they have grown their 'confidence in their own abilities' (C2):

> 'As a coach I help them to understand how they think and we focus a lot on their mindset, including limiting beliefs.' (C2)

Mentoring: Guidance and direction

Mentors focused on facilitating the competence development of survival-driven entrepreneurs. The competence development was primarily done through knowledge transfer from the mentor, which included recommendations, suggestions, sharing of knowledge and challenging their thinking. The mentors made the entrepreneurs think about the business and identify the small things that they can do to get success quickly as described by E3:

> 'She always focused on solutions and suggestions to make things better – focusing on moving forward and the future.' (E3)

For E1, the mentor helped to delve into the details:

> '[*My mentor asked me*] what my turnover and profit was, which made me think about my business and profitability. My mentor made me look at my quotes and increased my mark-up and since then the profit increased.' (E1)

E6 appreciated that their mentor would 'ask about my problems and then send a few suggestions to look into' (E6). Furthermore, the mentors used their experience and knowledge to make recommendations:

> 'She [*mentor*] always focused on solutions and suggestions to make things better.' (E3)

Mentors provided direction and guidance by 'sharing examples from other businesses' (E6) and this led to (E4) trying 'something new as she would guide me because she is more experienced as a businessperson'. The mentor's experience and business successes enhanced their credibility amongst the survival-driven entrepreneurs as underpinned by M1, who stated, 'I see myself as a guide drawing from my own experiences to help them'. The willingness to share their knowledge and experience further enhanced the competency development for the entrepreneurs:

> 'The mentor was experienced in the field that I am in, so I realised that I could learn from her. She was open, and I could speak freely.' (E2)

E1 liked the fact that their mentor 'will tell you that you are good at what you are doing, but she will show the areas that you need to work on' (E1). For E11, their mentor brought a new perspective:

> 'The mentors put things in perspective and give you honest and direct feedback and give reasons as to why, so they are a great sound board with somebody with the same experience as you.' (E11)

Theme 2: Intervention outcomes

The second theme captures the different outcomes of the coaching and mentoring interventions.

Coaching: Intangible and subjective skills development

The outcome of the coaching resulted in improved 'planning capacity' (E4) of the survival-driven entrepreneurs. This led to improved focus: 'I now have my vision and clarity on where I am going' (E8). The coaching sessions helped E2 to plan, and for E8 to become more effective and focused and more structured, which improved their effectiveness. E7 was 'more organised and worked smarter', while E11 had 'a clear mind and more focused and better priorities'. Improved planning and a more structured approach made them feel that they were 'in control of their plan and their strategy' (C1) which 'increased their confidence' (E4, C3, SP) about the future of their business. The coaching also contributed to the development of skills like communication and public speaking (E12), how to ask for help (E10), communicating with clients and employees (SP), and dealing with stress and uncertainty (E12). The coaching helped E11 to 'cope as a person in business'. Coping was especially useful for E12:

> '[*My coach*] helped a lot during COVID-19 when the coach helped me with coping techniques which allowed me time to focus and work on my business.' (E12)

By building their self-confidence C2 'started believing and backing themselves and increased confidence often translates to business success' (C2). Similar to self-confidence, the coaching improved their levels of motivation. The coaching 'motivated me to remain steadfast' (E4) and 'I was motivated and wanted to work harder after each session with the coach' (E2). The contribution of the coaching also extended beyond that of the venture as described by E7:

> '… [*T*]he coaching helped to balance things in order to get more time for myself and not to neglect your personal life at the expense of the business. He helped me to become more effective, less hours but better results.' (E7)

Mentoring: Tangible and observable skills development

The most significant outcome of the mentorship interventions was the tangible contribution the mentor made to the survival-driven entrepreneur's business. The overall 'business performance improved' (E1) as a result of 'the improved profitability of my business' (E3). Practically for E6 this meant:

> 'I reduced my manufacturing time and improved my pricing; the mentor helped me to calculate the cost per unit.' (E6)

Improved financial skills and knowledge assisted some participants:

> '… [*B*]y making less use of my bookkeeper, I can now do more myself.' (E1)
>
> 'I had a fear to look at my finances. Although I still struggle with that, it is much better.' (E3)

Overall, the mentorship resulted in improved business strategies and planning in terms of marketing and the operational management of the business. Improved business processes further enhanced the overall business performance, for example:

> '… [*A*]dmin procedures which helped me to deal with my staff better, we now have fixed processes in place.' (E1)
>
> '… [*W*]e are using other tools (online) and better planning the daily routine, more organised.' (E12)

The marketing skills of the survival-driven entrepreneurs also benefited from their engagement with mentors:

> 'She gave me a list of people to contact as new clients.' (E4)
>
> '[*My mentor*] helped me to advertise.' (E10)
>
> '[*My mentor*] refined my unique offer.' (E2)
>
> 'It felt like a new business. I now have 400 kids and we are better after COVID.' (E5)

The mentors encouraged and motivated the entrepreneurs to persist by challenging them and making them think about themselves and the future of their ventures. The mentors built a sense of confidence by validating ideas (M3), which boosted morale (E6). The aim of the mentorship was captured by (M4) and M3:

> 'I want them to think about the business and think about small things that they can do to get success quickly.' (M4)
>
> '[*My purpose is to*] help them to understand the commercial aspects to build confidence.' (M3)

Discussion

The overall aim of this study was to *investigate the respective mechanisms and contributions of coaching and mentoring in developing entrepreneurial self-efficacy of early-stage, survival-driven entrepreneurs*. The findings in relation to coaching and mentoring are now discussed in more detail.

Coaching approach and outcomes

In terms of coaching approaches, the development of the survival-driven entrepreneur was facilitated through exploratory questions by the coach, reflective practice by the survival-driven entrepreneur and experiential learning. The exploratory questions are consistent with coaching's exploratory nature (Mansoori et al., 2019). Moreover, the exploratory nature of the coaching helped the survival-driven entrepreneur to generate options they were not previously aware of which is congruent with Flaherty's (2006) notion of self-generation through coaching. This ability to self-generate could lead to learning which enables the entrepreneur to repeat the behaviour in future in the absence of the coach (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). Similarly, the reflective dialogue between the coach and the survival-driven entrepreneur is consistent with the evolutionary coaching approach advocated by Mansoori et al. (2019). Reflective practice helps the survival-driven entrepreneur to take ownership of their development and contribute to their development by creating knowledge through the transformations of the experience as defined by Kolb's Experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984).

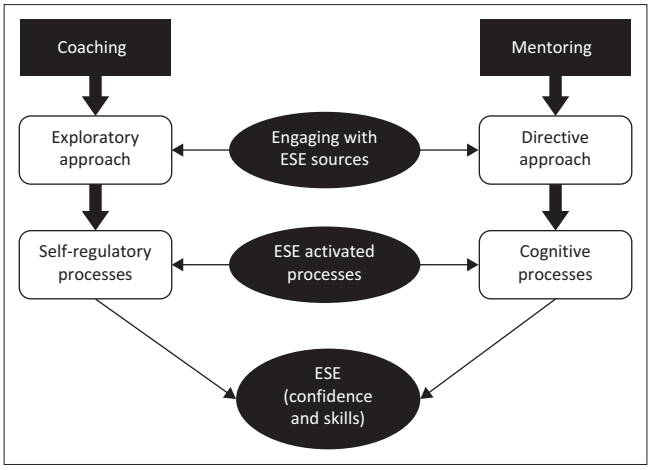
The exploratory and reflective approaches adopted by the coaches can be linked to ESE through the four sources of self-efficacy as defined by Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986): mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion and managing emotional states as follows. In terms of *mastery experiences,* the coaches encouraged and challenged the survival-driven entrepreneur to experiment and apply new behaviours and skills like long-term planning and adopting a more structured approach to the business without any external support (Cramer et al., 2009). *Vicarious learning* was facilitated by learning from the coach's personal failures and successes and observing the coach's behaviour as a source of self-efficacy (BarNir et al., 2011). *Social persuasion* was done by the coach acknowledging good performance of the survival-driven entrepreneur (Bandura & Wood, 1989) and encouraging and motivating them to persist, particularly when they have applied new skills and competencies (Lent et al., 2017). Finally, *managing emotional states* was promoted by the coach being available during times of uncertainty, particularly during COVID-19 and when the business performance was causing stress and anxiety. From a theoretical perspective, the outcomes of the coaching can be linked to the activation of predominantly self-regulation processes in survival-driven entrepreneurs, such as motivation, taking ownership and dealing with uncertainty. These processes can be connected to human agency as part of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). We therefore conclude that by creating a reflective, non-directive exploratory environment, coaches are able to help develop ESE in survival-driven entrepreneurs.

Mentoring approach and outcomes

Mentors helped survival-driven entrepreneurs with competence development through experience and knowledge sharing, and by providing suggestions and guidance. These actions of the mentors are aligned with the findings of Stout-Rostron (2014), that the mentor acts as an adviser who shares experience, expertise, advice and wisdom with the mentee. Similarly, Laukhuf and Malone (2015) found that the mentee observes the expertise of the mentor and that the mentor can be a role model and source of inspiration or comparison for the mentee (St-Jean & Mathieu, 2015).

Similar to coaching, the approaches adopted by the mentors can be linked to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and ESE. The mentor as a role model can be linked to *vicarious learning* as a source of self-efficacy. Role modelling develops self-efficacy when the observer, in this context, the survival-driven entrepreneur, reproduces the behaviour of the model, in this context, the mentor. The experience and knowledge of the mentor develop the competence of the survival-driven entrepreneur by sharing targeted and relevant business advice (Mason et al., 2022). *Mastery experience* is enacted by the mentor helping the survival-driven entrepreneur to implement plans and suggestions which improves self-efficacy. In the context of entrepreneurship, mastery experiences build confidence by using past performances to influence future performances in a similar domain (Lent & Brown, 2019). *Social persuasion* as a source of self-efficacy was enacted when the mentor provided positive feedback on progress and business results. Social persuasion in the context of entrepreneurship can be seen as a source of push motivation to encourage the entrepreneur to start the process, or pull motivation to encourage the entrepreneur to continue what they are doing (Liñán & Chen, 2009). Similar to the coaches, the mentors also provided support and guidance to the survival-driven entrepreneur during times of uncertainty, particularly during COVID-19, which can be linked to *managing emotional* states as a source of self-efficacy. Helping entrepreneurs cope during difficult times can be linked to entrepreneurial resilience as an outcome of entrepreneurial mentorship (Kunaka & Moos, 2019). Therefore, mentoring's directive approach towards skills transfers and sharing of experience contributes predominantly to the development of tangible (transactional) skills (Cope, 2005; Harvey & Evans, 1995), which can be linked to the activation of predominantly cognitive processes as defined by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory.

In summary, the study's findings suggest that both coaching and mentoring can enhance the confidence and self-belief of survival-driven entrepreneurs, helping them navigate challenges in the early stages of entrepreneurship. Coaching, with its exploratory approach, supports the transformational development of entrepreneurs by altering their self-perceptions, aligning with an evolutionary coaching relationship. In contrast, mentoring relies on the mentor's skills and experiences, using a directive communication style where the mentor's knowledge serves as the primary learning resource. The results show that coaching mainly aids the development of self-regulatory processes, such as affective and motivational aspects, while mentoring primarily fosters cognitive processes. Figure 3 is a conceptual framework that delineates the respective approaches and contributions of



ESE, entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

FIGURE 3: Conceptual framework of coaching and mentoring approaches to entrepreneurial self-efficacy development.

coaching and mentoring towards the ESE development of survival-driven entrepreneurs.

Contributions

On a theoretical level, this study contributes to entrepreneurial theory by highlighting the distinct, possible contributions of coaching and mentoring towards the development of ESE amongst survivalist entrepreneurs. Using Social Cognitive Theory as the foundation for understanding ESE, the findings demonstrate that coaching and mentoring could potentially activate ESE through its four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, social persuasion and the regulation of emotional states – each through different approaches and resulting in different outcomes. Coaching fosters intangible and subjective skills through self-directed learning while mentoring emphasises guidance and direction to develop tangible business skills. These findings extend both the concept of ESE development and its application within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory.

Practically this study provides clarity to coaches and mentors about the approaches they should follow, how to engage with the sources of ESE and the outcomes they should aim for. Entrepreneurial coaches should predominantly follow an exploratory and reflective approach to achieve ESE development in entrepreneurs by facilitating a process of self-management and self-directed learning. Entrepreneurial mentors should rely on their experience and knowledge to contribute to the ESE development of the survival-driven entrepreneur, by providing information, support, guidance and role modelling.

Limitations and future research

The findings are specific to the context and entrepreneurial phase. The aim of the study was to focus on a specific type of (survival-driven type) entrepreneur during a specific (early-stage) phase of the venture life cycle to develop an understanding of how coaching and mentoring contribute to a specific behavioural construct (ESE). Therefore, the findings exclude the perspectives of other types of entrepreneurs, such as opportunity-driven entrepreneurs or those who have transitioned from early stages to business maturity. Consequently, the transferability of the findings from the present study is a possible limitation.

The findings of this study contribute to highlighting the differences between coaching and mentoring, specifically, the approaches adopted by coaches and mentors and their subsequent outcomes. However, the findings do not suggest or prescribe a specific coaching or mentoring model or theory that could contribute to the ESE development of the survival-driven entrepreneur. To further enhance entrepreneurial development through coaching and mentoring, additional research should be conducted to explore specific coaching or mentoring models and theories in a more prescriptive framework, which could increase the contribution of coaching and mentoring to the entrepreneurial development of the survival-driven entrepreneur.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship is viewed as a significant contributor to economic growth and social development. Within the emerging economies and South African context, the successful transitioning from the early stages of entrepreneurship to an established business remains a challenge as is evident in the high failure rate of businesses. Entrepreneurial success and progress are even more challenging for the survival-driven entrepreneur, who often lacks the entrepreneurial skills and confidence to successfully transition from the early stages of entrepreneurship to established business owners. The conceptual framework that clarifies the respective approaches and outcomes of coaching and mentoring for the ESE development of survival-driven entrepreneurs offers guidance for coaches and mentors to enhance their contribution to entrepreneurial development.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

J.P.C. contributed to the conception, writing original draft and editing as part of this PhD study. N.T. and M.T-.W. supervised the research and contributed to the reviewing and editing of the paper.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are not openly available due to reasons of confidentiality and are available from the corresponding author, N.T., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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