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The Role Of Business Learning In Entrepreneurial Success Among Kitala Traders

Katusiime Zainabu[1], Kabanda Richard[2]
1, 2 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

This study examined the role of business learning in entrepreneurial success among traders at Kitala Market. The objectives were to determine the effect of formal business training on entrepreneurial success indicators, to assess the influence of experiential learning on business decision-making and growth, and to examine how peer and network-based learning shaped entrepreneurial outcomes. A descriptive correlational design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 130 traders using structured questionnaires. Key informant interviews were also conducted with 10 experienced traders and market leadership officials. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Results indicated that formal business training significantly predicted entrepreneurial success ($\beta = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$), experiential learning had a strong positive effect on business decision-making quality ($\beta = 0.428$, $p < 0.001$), and peer and network-based learning was significantly associated with improved business growth outcomes ($\beta = 0.344$, $p < 0.01$). The study concluded that business learning in all its forms formal, experiential, and social played a foundational role in the entrepreneurial success of Kitala traders. Recommendations included expanding vocational business training access, establishing peer mentoring circles, and creating structured market learning forums.

Keywords: business learning, entrepreneurial success, formal training, experiential learning, peer learning, Kitala traders, SMEs, Uganda

1.0 Introduction

Entrepreneurship had long been recognized as an engine of economic dynamism, job creation, and innovation, particularly in developing country contexts where formal employment opportunities were limited and the private sector was dominated by micro and small enterprises(Ahumuza et al., 2025). In Uganda, the entrepreneurial sector was vast and diverse, encompassing market traders, artisans, service providers, agricultural entrepreneurs, and technology-enabled businesses(Brian et al., 2024). Among the various factors that determined entrepreneurial success, learning the deliberate acquisition, processing, and application of knowledge relevant to business operations had emerged as a particularly powerful but underexplored predictor(Julius & Audrey, 2026).

Kitala Market, located in a peri-urban area of Uganda, represented a vibrant commercial ecosystem in which hundreds of traders operated in diverse product categories including fresh produce, clothing, electronics, hardware, and food services(Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). The market's traders ranged from first-generation entrepreneurs with minimal formal education to experienced businesspeople who had operated for decades, creating a rich cross-section of business learning experiences and outcomes(Kazaara, 2025). Despite the market's commercial vitality, many traders reported persistent challenges with business sustainability, financial management, market competition, and growth,

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suggesting that learning deficits were among the constraints limiting their entrepreneurial success(Nancy & Prudence, 2024).

The concept of business learning for entrepreneurs encompassed multiple dimensions: formal education and training (structured programmes delivered by educational institutions or training organisations), experiential learning (knowledge acquired through hands-on business practice, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes), and social or network-based learning (knowledge gained through interaction with peers, mentors, customers, and industry networks)(Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Each dimension had been examined in the entrepreneurship literature, but their combined and differentiated effects in the specific context of Ugandan market traders had not previously been studied(Sophie & Crispus, 2024).

This study therefore pursued the following objectives: (i) to determine the effect of formal business training on entrepreneurial success indicators among Kitala traders, (ii) to assess the influence of experiential learning on business decision-making and growth, and (iii) to examine how peer and network-based learning shaped entrepreneurial outcomes. By addressing these objectives, the study aimed to generate actionable insights for government training programmes, market associations, NGOs engaged in entrepreneurship support, and individual traders seeking to enhance their business performance.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) proposed by Kolb (1984) provided the primary theoretical foundation for this study. Kolb conceptualised learning as a continuous cycle comprising four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Applied to entrepreneurship, this model suggested that traders who actively reflected on their business experiences successes and failures alike and drew generalisable lessons from them would develop superior business competencies over time compared to those who simply accumulated experience without deliberate reflection.

The Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) offered a complementary framework, positing that investments in education and training analogous to investments in physical capital generated returns in the form of enhanced productivity, innovation, and earnings(Christopher, Moses, Enosh Muhindo, et al., 2022). For traders at Kitala Market, human capital investments through formal business training were theorised to improve decision-making quality, financial management skills, and market responsiveness, all of which translated into improved entrepreneurial outcomes(Kaazara & Nancy, 2025). Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) underpinned the third dimension of the study, predicting that individuals learned not only from direct experience but also through observation and modelling of the behaviour of others in their social network(Brian et al., 2024). In market environments characterised by dense trader communities and strong social ties, peer learning and mentorship were theorised to be particularly potent mechanisms of knowledge transfer and behavioural influence(Sophie & Crispus, 2024).

2.2 Formal Business Training and Entrepreneurial Success

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Formal business training delivered through vocational institutes, business schools, NGO capacity-building programmes, or government enterprise development initiatives had been associated with improved entrepreneurial performance across numerous studies in developing country contexts(Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, et al., 2022). Mead and Liedholm (1998) found that formal business training significantly predicted SME survival rates in sub-Saharan Africa, while Karlan and Valdivia (2011) demonstrated in a randomised control trial in Peru that structured business training improved firm profitability and revenue sustainability among micro entrepreneurs(Kazaara & Audrey, 2024).

In Uganda, government and NGO-sponsored business training programmes had been delivered through entities such as the Private Sector Foundation Uganda, Enterprise Uganda, and various donor-funded SME development projects(Julius & Matovu, 2025). Studies by Munene et al. (2014) found that participation in structured entrepreneurship training was positively associated with business formalization, record-keeping adoption, and access to formal credit among Ugandan SME operators(Alex et al., 2024). However, the duration, content quality, and practical relevance of training varied widely, with critics noting that generic training modules often failed to address the specific operational challenges of market traders(Julius & Kazaara, 2026).

2.3 Experiential Learning and Business Decision-Making

Experiential learning the knowledge and capabilities developed through the lived experience of managing a business had been extensively theorised as a complement to, and sometimes substitute for, formal education in entrepreneurial contexts(Julius, 2025). Ucbasaran et al. (2008) found that habitual entrepreneurs those with multiple prior venture experience made higher-quality opportunity recognition decisions and demonstrated greater resilience in the face of adversity than novice entrepreneurs, attributing these advantages to accumulated experiential wisdom(Julius & Nancy, 2026).

In market trader contexts, experiential learning occurred through daily price negotiations, supplier relationship management, stock-out experiences, credit management decisions, and customer service interactions(Nelson, Christopher, Teddy, et al., 2022). Traders who actively reflected on these experiences and adjusted their strategies accordingly as Kolb's ELT predicted developed implicit business knowledge that shaped their intuitive decision-making. However, the challenge was that in the absence of financial recordkeeping and systematic reflection mechanisms, experiential learning often remained tacit and context-specific rather than becoming transferable and generalizable expertise(Kazaara, 2025).

2.4 Peer and Network-Based Learning

Peer and network-based learning including informal mentorship from experienced traders, interaction within trader associations, participation in market governance structures, and exposure to supplier and customer networks constituted a critical but often overlooked dimension of entrepreneurial knowledge acquisition(Audrey & Nancy, 2026). The literature on social capital (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988) demonstrated that traders embedded in dense,

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trusting networks had access to information flows, market intelligence, and collaborative problem-solving resources that isolated traders lacked.

Studies of market trader communities in East Africa by Lyons and Snoxell (2005) found that membership in trader associations was associated with significant knowledge spillovers regarding market trends, regulatory requirements, and successful business practices(Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). These associations functioned as informal learning communities in which successful practices were shared, demonstrated, and collectively refined. For Kitala Market traders, the strength and quality of these network ties were hypothesised to be significant predictors of entrepreneurial success.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive correlational research design was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The mixed-methods approach enabled statistical testing of hypothesized relationships while capturing the rich contextual dimensions of market trader learning and success that quantitative measures alone could not fully represent(Nafiu et al., 2012).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised all registered traders at Kitala Market, estimated at 520 based on market management records. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample of 217 was theoretically indicated; however, given resource constraints and respondent availability, the accessible sample was refined to 130 traders selected through stratified random sampling across product categories(A. Nafiu et al., 2012). Additionally, 10 key informant interviews were conducted with experienced traders (more than 10 years of operation) and market association leaders. The effective response rate from questionnaires was 91.5 percent (119 usable questionnaires).

3.3 Measurement of Variables

Entrepreneurial success was operationalised as a multidimensional composite measure incorporating profitability growth (revenue and net profit change over three years), business survival and longevity, number of employees hired, and level of business formalisation (registration, tax compliance, recordkeeping). Formal business training was measured by training participation frequency, total training hours, and perceived training utility scores. Experiential learning was measured by business age, self-reported reflection practices, and a business competency assessment adapted from Mitchelmore and Rowley (2010). Peer learning was measured by membership in trader associations, mentorship relationship quality, and network density scores.

4.0 Results and Findings

4.1 Trader Profile and Business Characteristics

Table 1: Trader Profile

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)

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Gender	Male	71	59.7
	Female	48	40.3
Education Level	No formal education	12	10.1
	Primary	31	26.1
	Secondary	47	39.5
	Tertiary	29	24.4
Business Age	< 2 years	18	15.1
	2–5 years	38	31.9
	5–10 years	41	34.5
	> 10 years	22	18.5

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provided important background information regarding gender, education level, and business age. These characteristics helped to describe the composition of the study participants and offered insights into the diversity of the sample involved in the research. The findings on gender distribution showed that the majority of respondents were male. Out of the total respondents, 71 individuals, representing 59.7%, were male, while 48 respondents, accounting for 40.3%, were female. This indicated that males constituted a larger proportion of the study population compared to females. The results suggested that men were more represented in the businesses or activities examined in the study, although female participation was also substantial.

In terms of education level, the results revealed varying levels of educational attainment among respondents. The largest group consisted of respondents who had attained secondary education, with 47 individuals representing 39.5% of the sample. This was followed by respondents with primary education, who accounted for 31 respondents or 26.1%. Those with tertiary education comprised 29 respondents, representing 24.4%, while respondents with no formal education were the smallest group, consisting of 12 individuals or 10.1% of the sample. These findings suggested that most respondents had attained at least some level of formal education, particularly secondary education, which may have influenced their understanding of taxation and compliance matters.

The results on business age showed that most businesses had been in operation for between 5 and 10 years. This category included 41 respondents, representing 34.5% of the sample. Businesses operating for 2–5 years followed closely, with 38 respondents accounting for 31.9%. Respondents whose businesses had existed for more than 10 years constituted 22 individuals or 18.5%, while the smallest proportion consisted of businesses younger than 2 years, represented by 18 respondents or 15.1%. These findings indicated that the majority of respondents operated relatively

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established businesses with several years of experience in the market. The presence of both newer and older businesses also suggested diversity in business maturity among the study participants.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Business Learning and Entrepreneurial Success Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Formal Business Training Score	2.94	0.88	Moderate
Experiential Learning Index	3.67	0.72	High
Peer/Network Learning Score	3.41	0.81	Moderate-High
Entrepreneurial Success Composite	3.28	0.79	Moderate-High
Profitability Growth (%)	16.4	11.2	Moderate
Business Formalisation Score	3.12	0.94	Moderate

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive statistics presented in the table provided insights into the levels of formal business training, experiential learning, peer or network learning, entrepreneurial success, profitability growth, and business formalisation among the respondents. The findings generally indicated moderate to high levels across most of the variables, suggesting that respondents possessed varying degrees of entrepreneurial knowledge, experience, and business development outcomes.

The results showed that the Formal Business Training Score had a mean of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.88, which was interpreted as moderate. This suggested that respondents had acquired a fair level of formal entrepreneurial or business-related training, although the level was not particularly high(Nelson, Christopher, & Milton, 2022). The relatively moderate variation in scores indicated that while some respondents had benefited from substantial formal training, others had received limited or no structured business education. The findings further revealed that the Experiential Learning Index recorded a mean score of 3.67 and a standard deviation of 0.72, which was interpreted as high. This indicated that respondents relied heavily on practical experience and learning through direct involvement in business activities(Nelson et al., 2023). The relatively low standard deviation suggested that experiential learning was consistently important across most respondents. The findings implied that hands-on experience played a significant role in shaping entrepreneurial skills and decision-making among business operators.

Similarly, the Peer or Network Learning Score had a mean of 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.81, interpreted as moderate-high. This suggested that respondents benefited considerably from interactions with peers, mentors, business networks, and social connections. The findings indicated that learning through observation, collaboration, and sharing experiences with others contributed meaningfully to entrepreneurial development and business management practices.

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The Entrepreneurial Success Composite recorded a mean score of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.79, which was interpreted as moderate-high. This finding suggested that respondents generally experienced relatively positive entrepreneurial outcomes in terms of business performance, growth, and sustainability. The moderate spread of responses indicated some differences in success levels among entrepreneurs, although the overall trend pointed toward satisfactory business achievement.

In terms of financial performance, the results showed that Profitability Growth had a mean of 16.4% with a standard deviation of 11.2, interpreted as moderate. This indicated that businesses experienced moderate increases in profitability over the period under consideration. However, the relatively high standard deviation suggested considerable variation in profitability growth among respondents, meaning that while some businesses achieved substantial financial gains, others recorded lower or minimal growth. Lastly, the Business Formalisation Score had a mean of 3.12 with a standard deviation of 0.94, interpreted as moderate. This suggested that respondents demonstrated a moderate level of compliance with formal business practices such as registration, licensing, record keeping, and regulatory adherence. The variability in responses implied that some businesses were highly formalised, whereas others still operated with limited formal structures or informal arrangements.

4.3 Correlation and Regression Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between all business learning dimensions and entrepreneurial success. Experiential learning had the strongest bivariate correlation with success ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), followed by peer/network learning ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$) and formal training ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$).

Multiple regression analysis confirmed the independent contributions of each learning dimension to entrepreneurial success after controlling for trader age, gender, and business age. Table 14 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 3: Multiple Regression: Predictors of Entrepreneurial Success (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.638$)

Predictor	**β**	**Std. Error**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Constant	0.612	0.248	2.47	0.015
Formal Business Training	0.391	0.074	5.28	0.000
Experiential Learning	0.428	0.081	5.28	0.000
Peer/Network Learning	0.344	0.083	4.14	0.000
Business Age (control)	0.183	0.062	2.95	0.004
Gender (control)	0.089	0.071	1.25	0.213

Source: Primary Data, 2026

The multiple regression analysis examined the influence of formal business training, experiential learning, peer or network learning, business age, and gender on entrepreneurial success. The findings showed that most of the predictor variables had statistically significant positive effects on entrepreneurial success, as indicated by their p-values being

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less than 0.05. This suggested that entrepreneurial learning and experience played an important role in improving business performance and success outcomes among respondents(Nelson et al., 2023).

The constant term recorded a coefficient of 0.612 with a standard error of 0.248, a t-value of 2.47, and a p-value of 0.015. The statistically significant constant indicated that even when all predictor variables were held constant, there remained a baseline level of entrepreneurial success among respondents. This suggested that factors outside the regression model may also have contributed to entrepreneurial outcomes(Kazaara & Audrey, 2024).

The results further revealed that Formal Business Training had a positive regression coefficient (β) of 0.391 with a standard error of 0.074. The variable recorded a t-value of 5.28 and was statistically significant at $p = 0.000$. This finding indicated that formal business training positively influenced entrepreneurial success(Kazaara & Audrey, 2024). Specifically, an increase in formal training was associated with improved business outcomes and performance. The strong significance of the variable suggested that structured entrepreneurial education and training programs enhanced respondents' managerial skills, decision-making ability, and overall business effectiveness(Alex & Kazaara, 2023).

Similarly, Experiential Learning demonstrated a positive coefficient of 0.428 with a standard error of 0.081 and a t-value of 5.28. The variable was statistically significant at $p = 0.000$. This implied that learning through practical business experience had a strong positive influence on entrepreneurial success. The relatively high coefficient suggested that respondents who gained knowledge and skills through direct involvement in business activities were more likely to achieve better entrepreneurial outcomes. The findings emphasized the importance of hands-on experience in developing business competence and adaptability.

The analysis also showed that Peer or Network Learning had a positive coefficient of 0.344, with a standard error of 0.083 and a t-value of 4.14. The relationship was statistically significant at $p = 0.000$. This finding indicated that interactions with peers, mentors, and professional networks contributed positively to entrepreneurial success. Respondents who actively engaged in learning from others were more likely to improve their business practices and achieve favorable business performance. The result highlighted the value of collaboration, information sharing, and social networks in entrepreneurial development.

Regarding the control variables, Business Age recorded a positive coefficient of 0.183 with a standard error of 0.062, a t-value of 2.95, and a statistically significant p-value of 0.004. This suggested that older or more established businesses tended to experience greater entrepreneurial success compared to younger businesses. The finding implied

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that increased years of operation may have provided entrepreneurs with more experience, customer trust, and market stability, which contributed positively to business performance.

In contrast, Gender had a coefficient of 0.089 with a standard error of 0.071 and a t-value of 1.25. However, the variable was not statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of 0.213, which exceeded the 0.05 significance threshold. This suggested that gender did not have a significant influence on entrepreneurial success within the study sample. The finding implied that entrepreneurial outcomes were more strongly influenced by training, experience, and networking factors rather than gender differences.

4.4 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of key informant interviews generated three primary themes. The first theme, 'Learning from Failure', emerged strongly among experienced traders who described how early business failures stockouts, bad debts, pricing errors had been transformative learning experiences that sharpened their subsequent decision-making. One 12-year veteran trader noted that his initial three years of trading had been characterized by frequent losses, but that systematic reflection on each setback had eventually yielded a reliable mental model for stock management and customer credit.

The second theme, 'The Value of Trader Associations', highlighted the role of Kitala Market's trader association in facilitating peer knowledge exchange. Members described how association meetings served as informal business school sessions in which market trends, supplier intelligence, regulatory updates, and pricing strategies were openly discussed. The association's role in organizing joint supplier negotiations had also reduced input costs for members, representing a tangible network learning dividend.

The third theme, 'Barriers to Formal Training', revealed that cost, time constraints, and skepticism about training relevance were the primary barriers preventing Kitala traders from accessing structured business education. Several traders expressed preference for practical, market-based training delivered by experienced traders over classroom-based courses disconnected from their operational realities.

5.0 Discussion

The finding that experiential learning was the strongest predictor of entrepreneurial success among Kitala traders was consistent with Kolb's ELT and with the broader literature on market-based entrepreneurship in Africa, where formal educational credentials were less predictive of business success than accumulated practical wisdom. The prevalence and effectiveness of experiential learning in this context underscored the importance of designing support interventions that amplified traders' capacity for deliberate reflection, rather than simply adding formal instruction on top of experiential learning processes.

The significant positive effect of formal business training, despite its moderate mean score among the sample, suggested that the returns to training were high for traders who had accessed it. The finding validated the Human Capital Theory's prediction that education investments generated measurable productivity and performance

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improvements(Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, et al., 2022). The barriers to training access identified qualitatively cost, time, and perceived irrelevance pointed to clear design principles for future training interventions: they should be affordable or subsidized, delivered in short modular formats compatible with market trading hours, and grounded in practical, context-specific case studies.

Peer and network-based learning's significant independent contribution to entrepreneurial success affirmed the Social Learning Theory's applicability in the market trader context. The qualitative evidence about trader associations as informal learning communities reinforced the theoretical proposition that social capital in the form of trusting, information-rich trader networks represented a valuable resource that entrepreneurship support programmes could leverage rather than replace. Strengthening trader associations through facilitation, governance support, and linkage to external expertise networks represented a high-leverage, low-cost intervention strategy.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that business learning in all its forms formal training, experiential learning, and peer and network-based learning played a significant and statistically robust role in the entrepreneurial success of Kitala Market traders. The three learning dimensions explained 63.8 percent of variance in entrepreneurial success outcomes, confirming that learning-oriented interventions represented among the most impactful investments for improving trader performance. Experiential learning was the most prevalent and influential mechanism, while formal training, despite lower access rates, offered the highest marginal returns when accessed.

The study recommended that government agencies and NGOs expand access to short, modular, and market-tailored business training programmes at Kitala Market and similar trading environments, delivered in local languages and aligned with traders' operational realities. A peer mentorship programme should be established, pairing experienced successful traders with newer entrants in formal but flexible mentorship relationships supported by small stipends or market fee concessions for mentors. The Kitala Market trader association should be strengthened through capacity building grants that enable it to formalise its learning forum role, develop a market intelligence bulletin, and facilitate joint supplier negotiations. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to establish the causal effects of specific learning interventions on entrepreneurial success outcomes over time.

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