ENTREPRENEURIAL Skills as Mediator of the Relationship between Business Strategies and Business Growth of Women Entrepreneurs in Monkayo, Davao De ORO

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ABSTRACT

Business growth is a critical aspect in every business to sustain operations and expansion. This study investigated the mediating role of entrepreneurial skills in the relationship between business strategies and business growth among women entrepreneurs. A total of 80 women entrepreneurs in Monkayo, Davao de Oro, who operated small- and medium-sized enterprises in the food and non-food sectors and had been in business for at least a year, were selected as respondents through a mediation analysis. Experts validated the survey questionnaire. Mean, Standard Deviation, Spearman Rho, Mediation Analysis, and Path Plot were the statistical tools utilized to analyze the data. The study found that business growth, business strategies, and entrepreneurial skills were high. There was a significant and positive relationship between business strategies and entrepreneurial skills, and between business strategies and business growth. Entrepreneurial skills were the mediating factor of the study. Results revealed that entrepreneurial skills partially mediate the relationship between business strategies and business growth.

KEYWORDS: *Business management, entrepreneurial skills, women entrepreneurs, small and medium enterprises, Davao de Oro*

INTRODUCTION

Business growth, a critical factor in determining the success and expansion trajectory of organizations, is significant because it drives internal process development (Adomako & Mole, 2018). It is essential and significant for the business's long-term viability and success. This is the fundamental factor in achieving business success. Business growth is a crucial sign of a thriving economy, as it indicates significant improvements in key aspects of an enterprise's success (Owusu and Ismail, 2018).

Despite extensive research in related fields, there remains a notable gap in studies specifically addressing the overall impact of integrating entrepreneurial skills into business strategies on business growth, particularly in the sectoral or regional setting of Davao de Oro. While Prufer and Prufer (2020) highlighted the significance of entrepreneurial skills and Guillen and Lim (2023) focused on growth strategies for Philippine MSMEs, neither study explored the interplay of these variables in the context of Davao de Oro. Entrepreneurial skills are essential to the growth and sustainability of businesses and are significant in the decision-making process (Dahlstrom & Talgame, 2018). Nyamogosa and Obonyo (2022) demonstrated that adopting sustainable business strategies encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects significantly drives business growth. Women entrepreneurs operating in Monkayo encounter various challenges that affect business sustainability and growth. Those in the food sector often struggle with fluctuating raw-material prices, food-safety compliance requirements, limited storage facilities, and intense competition. Meanwhile, women operating non-food enterprises frequently encounter difficulties related to inventory acquisition, limited access to financing, transportation constraints, and changing consumer preferences. These contextual realities necessitate the adoption of effective business strategies and entrepreneurial competencies to sustain enterprise growth.

This study was anchored on two complementary theoretical perspectives. The Strategic Entrepreneurship Framework of Ireland, Hitt, and Sirmon (2003) emphasizes how organizations create wealth by integrating opportunity-seeking behaviors with strategic advantage-seeking actions. In contrast, the Entrepreneurial Orientation Framework of Lumpkin and Dess (1996) focuses on entrepreneurial tendencies reflected through innovativeness, proactiveness, autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, and risk-taking. While the former explains how strategies facilitate organizational growth, the latter highlights the behavioral competencies entrepreneurs need to successfully implement these strategies.

The novelty of this study lies in examining entrepreneurial skills as a mediating mechanism rather than merely as a direct predictor of business growth. By investigating how entrepreneurial skills transmit the effects of business strategies on business growth among women entrepreneurs in a rural Philippine setting, this research contributes context-specific evidence that remains limited in entrepreneurship literature. This study specifically aimed to answer these questions. First, it seeks to measure the level of business growth of women entrepreneurs across economic, social, and environmental aspects. Second, it examines the status of business strategy among women entrepreneurs in terms of product positioning, product promotion, market intelligence systems, integrated marketing strategies, and pricing. Third, this study examined the status of entrepreneurial skills among women entrepreneurs, focusing on self-competence, control focus, and risk-taking tendency. Also, it seeks to evaluate the significant positive association between business strategies and entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurial skills and business growth, and business strategies and business growth. Furthermore, this research aimed to identify whether the entrepreneurial skills of women entrepreneurs significantly mediate the relationship between business strategies and business growth.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative, descriptive, correlational design to examine the relationship between business strategies and the business growth of women entrepreneurs who integrate entrepreneurial skills. According to Smith (2023), a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design is a methodical study that uses statistical, mathematical, or computational tools to systematically analyze social phenomena. It implies that the quantitative researcher develops a targeted, précised question through a survey questionnaire. A descriptive design aims to precisely and methodically describe a population, circumstance, or occurrence and is used to describe the level of business growth and status of business strategies and entrepreneurial skills of women entrepreneurs in Monkayo, Davao de Oro.

This research was conducted in Monkayo, Davao de Oro, targeting women entrepreneurs in the municipality. Monkayo is a vibrant municipality in the Davao Region known for its dynamic blend of cultural and economic activities. A study by Aparecio and Torrejas (2024) asserted that Monkayo was a community that establishes resilience, particularly in the business sector. Its unique geographical and socio-economic landscape, characterized by a mix of traditional markets and emerging businesses, offers a rich setting for examining the factors influencing the growth of local women entrepreneurs. A total of 80 women entrepreneurs were selected as participants through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation across business types and varying levels of business experience. The businesses included in this study met the Department of Trade and Industry's eligibility criteria for micro, small, and medium enterprises. Participants operated legally established businesses in either the food or non-food sectors and had maintained operations for at least 1 year prior to data collection. The survey questionnaire, which consisted of three parts, was validated by experts. The first part contained the dependent variable, business growth, adapted from Khan and Naeem (2018), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. This had three indicators, namely: economic, social, and environmental, with eleven (11) items. The second part contained statements on business strategies, adapted from the study by Sheetal et al. (2012), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80. This had five indicators, namely: product positioning, promotion of the product, market intelligence system, marketing strategies, and pricing, with sixteen (16) items. The third part was adapted from Serdar Geri (2013), which has a Cronbach alpha of 0.88. This had three indicators: self- competency, control focus, and tendency to take risk, with sixteen (16) items.

Data collection for this study commenced after the researcher obtained the UIC REC certificate of compliance. Additionally, the researcher wrote to the dean of the graduate school to request permission to carry out the study. The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC REC) after receiving the Dean’s approval. The required documents, including the study protocol and informed consent forms, were submitted to ensure compliance with ethical standards. As soon as approval was granted, the researcher requested a copy of the list of women entrepreneurs in Monkayo, Davao de Oro. The respondents received the survey questionnaires from the researcher in person. The researcher followed all applicable ethical guidelines, including obtaining participants’ informed consent and protecting the privacy of their responses, to ensure the study was conducted ethically and responsibly. Furthermore, the researcher was mindful of potential cultural differences that may have affected the research and ensured they were taken into account when designing the questionnaire and conducting the research. Participants had sufficient time to independently evaluate the ICF and the survey form. The researcher ensured participants' voluntary participation and informed them that they could withdraw without consequences. The data compiled from participants' responses were tabulated and subjected to appropriate statistical analysis and interpretation.

Spearman rho correlation was selected because the data were derived from Likert-scale responses and did not fully satisfy the assumptions of normality required for Pearson correlation. Spearman Rho provides a robust non-parametric measure appropriate for ordinal data.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Notably, in Table 1, the overall mean level of business growth is 4.61, which is described as very high and very evident. This result indicates that women entrepreneurs are experiencing significant business growth across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This suggests that women-owned businesses have strong, well-rounded performance, proving they are not only surviving but also growing. The data show that the standard deviation (SD) ranges from 0.39 to 0.85, and all indicators are homogeneous, indicating consistent responses. The findings are consistent with the study by Santos et al. (2016), which stated that economic, social, and environmental aspects are pillars for achieving sustainable business growth within the organization.

As indicated in the table, the first indicator, economic, yields a very high category mean of 4.43, described as very evident. This indicates that women entrepreneurs experienced high revenue and profitability growth, improved sales and market share, and increased customer numbers, all of which directly contributed to their business growth. Also, the second indicator, social, yielded a category mean of 4.57, which is considered very high. Also, the 4 statements in this indicator yielded a very high mean of 4.26 to 4.78, indicating that improvements in training and skills, contributions to community development, a stronger product image, and high revenue growth are evident. This affirms that women entrepreneurs have enhanced their training and development activities. Environmental is the third indicator, which obtained a category mean of 4.55, described as very high and interpreted as very evident. This result connotes that women entrepreneurs complied with environmental laws and policies and focused on reducing energy consumption. The very high environmental aspect score further suggests that women entrepreneurs recognize the long-term value of sustainable business practices. Compliance with environmental regulations and efforts to minimize resource consumption may strengthen the business's reputation, improve operational efficiency, and enhance resilience, thereby contributing to the business's long-term viability.

Table 1

Level of Business Growth, Status of Business Strategies, and Entrepreneurial Skills

Variables and its Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Business Growth	**4.61**	**0.61**	**Very High**
Economic	4.43	0.80	Very High
Social	4.57	0.61	Very High
Environmental	4.55	0.82	Very High
Business Strategies	**4.60**	**0.54**	**Very High**
Product Positioning	4.65	0.49	Very High
Promotion of the Product	4.64	0.58	Very High
Market Intelligence System	4.82	0.43	Very High
Integrated Marketing Strategies	4.64	0.55	Very High
Pricing	4.25	0.58	Very High
Entrepreneurial Skills	4.42	0.66	Very High
Self-Competency	4.60	0.63	Very High
Control Focus	4.60	0.50	Very High
Tendency to take risks	3.97	0.84	High

The status of business strategies, as evaluated by women entrepreneurs, had an overall mean of 4.60 and was described as very high. This implies that women entrepreneurs' business growth is very evident. Furthermore, the data show that the standard deviation (SD) ranges from 0.43 to 0.58, and all five indicators are homogeneous. The results show that women entrepreneurs are satisfied and enthusiastic about the strategies they use for their businesses. The high status of business strategies aligns with the investigation by Rawat and Garg (2022), which found that business strategies are critical to driving business growth. Their work highlights the importance of strategic planning, underscoring the need for supply security and regulatory simplification to drive growth. From a similar lens, Farida and Setiawan (2022) find that business strategies have a positive impact on the business performance of small and medium enterprises.

Product positioning also yielded a very high mean score of 4.65, indicating very high and very evident. It denotes that women entrepreneurs are satisfied with the product development process and approach, distribution channel, and the way the product was produced. Product positioning is an essential factor in business strategy aimed at growth. This result substantiates the findings of Abdulla and Bett (2023), which emphasize the influence of product development in enhancing organizational performance. The product promotion reaped a category mean of 4.64, which is described as very high, indicating that product promotion, in terms of satisfaction with the current supplier, communication channels reaching the target market, and overall satisfaction, is very substantial. This corroborates Salamah's (2023) discussion, which points out that effective promotional strategies are vital for business sustainability and growth, thereby boosting company performance. The market intelligence system yielded a very high category mean of 4.82, interpreted as very evident. This indicates that women entrepreneurs agree that a market intelligence system is important for achieving business growth. A study conducted by Franco et al (2023) highlights the importance of market intelligence system strategies in improving business presence. Integrated marketing strategies obtained a category mean of 4.64, indicating very high performance. This implies that women entrepreneurs agree that integration of marketing strategies improves business outcomes. Marketing strategies, as explained by Aristide and Irechkwu (2023), were used by businessmen to drive market growth, emphasizing the roles of product and pricing strategy and the importance of integrating these strategies for business growth. Pricing also obtained a category mean of 4.25 and a description of very high. This shows that a pricing strategy is essential to the development of women-owned businesses. Pricing strategies, as examined by Ekong et al (2023), significantly influence business performance and enhance business growth.

Moreover, in entrepreneurial skills, the overall mean score of 4.42 is considered very high and interpreted as very evident, suggesting that, generally, women entrepreneurs possess competency, manifest control, and engage in risk-taking behavior. This result affirms the findings of Chatterjee and Das (2016), who found that strong entrepreneurial skills are a significant contributor to achieving business growth and success. Their findings indicate that entrepreneurs with strong entrepreneurial skills contribute to the growth and change of businesses. A study conducted by Asieba and Nmadu (2018) highlights that entrepreneurial skills have a significant impact on business performance. Their research indicates that the more effectively entrepreneurial skills are applied to a business, the more profitable it becomes and the higher the probability of its survival, leading to enterprise growth. Additionally, the data show that the standard deviation (SD) ranges from 0.35 to 0.87, indicating consistent responses from participants.

Self-competency had a category mean of 4.60, indicating that women entrepreneurs generally feel competent in self-related aspects essential to entrepreneurship. The result supports the conclusions of Bolzani and Luppi et al. (2021), which show that competence is essential for fostering entrepreneurial attitudes and skills, thereby promoting sustainability and business growth. Control focus also obtained a category mean of 4.60, described as very high, indicating that women entrepreneurs have a strong sense of focus in decision-making and acknowledge opportunities. This is supported by the investigation of Musyoki and Korir (2017), which reveals the influence of focus on a business venture and highlights the role of focus in entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to the success and growth of the business. The indicator, tendency to take risk, had the lowest category mean of 3.97, which is described as high. The high mean is supported by Wambagu et al. (2015), who found that risk-taking has a positive impact on firm performance. The study emphasizes the impact of risk-taking and its positive effect on business growth and sustainability.

Correlation between Variables. The relationship between business strategies (independent variable), business growth (dependent variable), and entrepreneurial skills (mediating variable) is displayed in Table 2. The data shows a strong positive relationship between business strategies and entrepreneurial skills, with an R-value of 0.690. This suggests that entrepreneurs with advanced skills are more likely to possess effective business strategies. This result is consistent with the study by Mutuku et al. (2022), which found that entrepreneurial skills are the capabilities an entrepreneur possesses to implement business strategies. There is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial skills and business growth, with an R-value of 0.682, suggesting that stronger entrepreneurial skills are associated with greater business growth. A study by Poi (2020) examined the necessity of entrepreneurial skills for business economic growth, confirming that entrepreneurial skills positively impact sustainability and business growth. Moreover, a strong positive correlation between Business Strategies and Business Growth is observed, with an R-value of 0.762, indicating that when business strategies are enhanced, business growth tends to improve. The aforementioned result confirms the studies of Caravella and Crespi (2022), demonstrating that innovative companies tend to grow faster by pursuing an innovation strategy, significantly influence growth outcomes.

Table 2
Correlation between Variables

Variable	r	p-value	Remarks
Business Strategies and Entrepreneurial Skills	.690	.001	Significant
Entrepreneurial Skills and Business Growth	.682	.001	Significant
Business Strategies and Business Growth	.762	.001	Significant

Mediation Analysis. Notably, data in Table 3 indicate that business strategies have a significant effect on business growth, both directly and indirectly, as mediated by entrepreneurial skills. The *direct effect* of business strategies on business growth was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.744$), indicating that effective strategies drive growth. Moreover, business strategies have an *indirect effect* on business growth as mediated by entrepreneurial skills ($\beta = 0.209$). This finding suggests that business strategies also enhance business growth when entrepreneurial skills are strengthened. The *total effect* of business strategies on business growth is also strongly significant ($\beta = 0.954$), highlighting the comprehensive role of business strategies as direct drivers of business growth and, when mediated by entrepreneurial skills, as indirect drivers that amplify business growth.

The model reveals an r^2 value of 0.658 for business growth, indicating that business strategies and entrepreneurial skills jointly account for 65.8% of the variation in business growth. Similarly, the r^2 value of 0.545 for entrepreneurial skills suggests that 54.5% of the variance in entrepreneurial skills is explained by business strategies. These findings substantiate that the model provides an explanation of the factors that influence business growth. The high R^2 values confirm the model's good fit with the empirical data and indicate that it reliably explains the observed effects. Furthermore, the Path Plot model shows that business strategies significantly influence business growth, both directly and indirectly, through entrepreneurial skills. The results revealed that business strategies have a *direct positive effect* on business growth ($\beta = 0.74$), indicating that, in isolation, they will lead to business growth. Likewise, examining the *indirect effect*, business strategies significantly influence entrepreneurial skills (β = 0.79), which, in turn, influence business growth (β = 0.26). Indirectly, business strategies improve business growth by enhancing entrepreneurial skills.

Table 3
Mediation Analysis of Entrepreneurial Skills on the Relationship Between Business Strategies and Business Growth

Independent Variable (IV) = Business Strategies
Dependent Variable (DV). = Business Growth
Mediating Variable (MV). = Entrepreneurial Skills

	Estimates	Standard Error	p-value
Direct Effects (IV → DV)			
Business Strategies → Business Growth	0.744	0.119	<.001
Indirect Effects (IV→ MV → DV)			
Business Strategies → Entrepreneurial Skills → Business Growth	0.209	0.092	<.001
Total Effects (IV → DV)			
Business Strategies → Business Growth	0.954	0.081	<.001
Path Coefficients			
Entrepreneurial Skills → Business Growth	0.265	0.045	<.001
Business Strategies → Business Growth	0.744	0.046	<.001
Business Strategies → Entrepreneurial Skills	0.791	0.043	<.001
R-Squared			
Business Growth	0.658		
Entrepreneurial Skills	0.545		

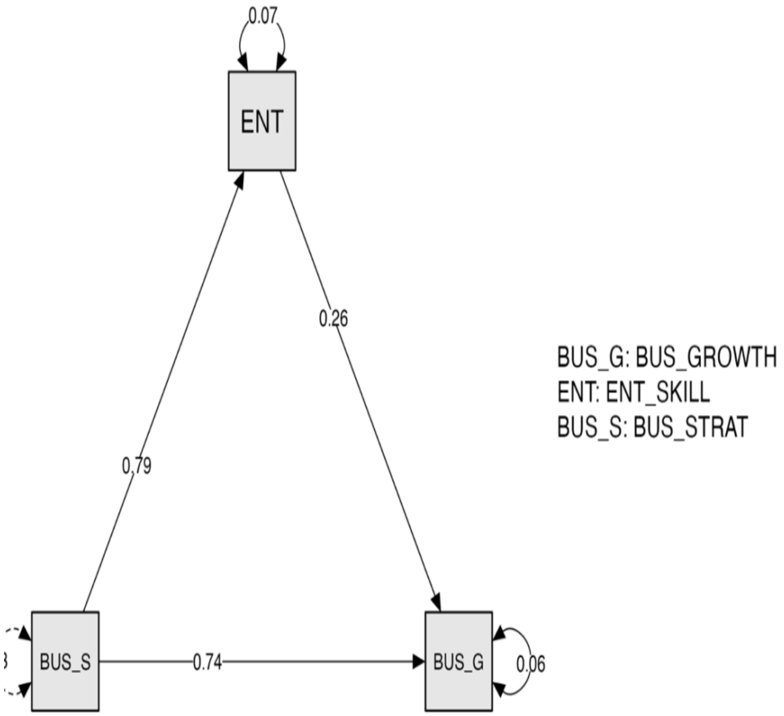
Further, the values within the curved arrows indicate that each variable has unexplained variance. For Entrepreneurial Skills, 7% is unexplained, which means that 93% of the variation is explained by business strategies. Similarly, 6% of Business Growth is also unexplained. This suggests that 94% of the variation in business growth is accounted for by the combined influence of business strategies and entrepreneurial skills. The unexplained variance suggests that other contextual variables not included in this study may also contribute to business growth. These factors may include local government support programs, inflationary pressures, access to credit, market competition, household responsibilities, technological adoption, and changing consumer behaviors.

The *Mediation Analysis* and the *Path Plot Model* were used to determine the strength and structure of the relationships among variables. Both the mediation analysis and the path model strongly support the conclusion that entrepreneurial skills significantly mediate the relationship between business strategies and business growth. Moreover, the mediation analysis reveals that business strategies have a significant direct effect on business growth ($\beta = 0.744$). This finding is confirmed by the path analysis, which shows a coefficient of 0.74. This connotes that business strategies independently influence business growth. The findings of the present study are consistent with those of Wheelen et al. (2018), who described business strategy as the set of managerial decisions and actions that determine an organization's long-term performance by enabling it to achieve its objectives and establish a competitive position in the market.

It is the backbone of the business, driving desired goals and amplifying business growth. The results further reveal a partial mediating role for entrepreneurial skills. The mediation analysis indicates a significant indirect effect of business strategies on business growth, with entrepreneurial skills intervening, with a standardized estimate of 0.209. The *path plot* corroborates the mediation analysis result, bearing a strong relationship between business strategies and entrepreneurial skills ($\beta = 0.79$) and a significant relationship between entrepreneurial skills and business growth ($\beta = 0.26$). The finding of partial mediation indicates that business strategies continue to exert a substantial direct influence on business growth, even in the absence of entrepreneurial skills. However, entrepreneurial skills also transmit a portion of this influence, enhancing the effectiveness of strategic initiatives. Thus, business growth among women entrepreneurs results from both the independent contribution of business strategies and the indirect contribution facilitated through entrepreneurial competencies. This finding negates the proposition of Rahman et al (2023) that individuals with a strong entrepreneurial mindset, well-developed skills, and strategic capabilities execute effective business strategies, driving their ventures toward greater growth and success.

Figure 1

The Path Plot on the Significance of the Relationship between Variables



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study's findings provided valuable insights into business growth, the status of business strategies, and the entrepreneurial skills of women entrepreneurs. The results show that the level of business growth among women entrepreneurs is very high, indicating strong growth. This finding suggests that significant growth is occurring across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This can be sustained by establishing a business development center in the municipality that provides training and mentoring, as well as product development assistance.

Regarding the level of business strategy among women entrepreneurs, participants rated all factors as very high, indicating that business strategies across product positioning, product promotion, market intelligence, integrated marketing, and pricing are evident. The Department of Trade and Industry, or any private and Non-Government Organizations, may organize innovation-based development programs through the Go Negosyo program. Also, the implementation of pricing strategies may be handled with careful consideration, taking into account the technicalities of pricing decisions.

The status of entrepreneurial skills among women entrepreneurs was very high, indicating that entrepreneurial skills are evident. This indicates a generally strong presence of characteristics among women entrepreneurs. This can be sustained by TESDA and DTI through the organization and management of skills enhancement training initiatives that strengthen women entrepreneurs' skills and capabilities. Also, an enhancement of a clear and concise communication workshop and mentorship may be beneficial. Local government units, TESDA, DTI, and development agencies may implement targeted interventions such as entrepreneurial mentoring programs, strategic planning workshops, financial literacy training, and innovation boot camps specifically designed for women entrepreneurs in rural communities

It is inferred that a significant, positive relationship exists among business growth, business strategies, and entrepreneurial skills. Women entrepreneurs can leverage this positive result by participating in training and development programs to enhance their entrepreneurial competencies. This could include workshops on market analysis and adaptive management relevant to the business. These training programs could improve entrepreneurial skills, effectively helping implement strategies to ensure alignment with market opportunities. Enhancing entrepreneurial skills leads to the implementation of effective strategies that can foster business growth.

The findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial skills complement rather than replace the contribution of business strategies. Women entrepreneurs with stronger competencies in self-management, focus, and calculated risk-taking are better able to translate strategic initiatives into tangible business growth outcomes. Future studies may adopt longitudinal or multi-year designs to determine whether the business strategies currently employed by women entrepreneurs contribute to sustained business expansion or merely yield short-term growth. Since other variables were not mentioned in this study, other factors that could strongly amplify business growth can be explored.

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