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Lisa K. Taylor
University of Nevada, Reno

M. Craig Edwards
Oklahoma State University

Marshall A. Baker
Collegiate EduNation

See next page for additional authors

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We conducted a multicase investigation to assess the impacts of a cross-cultural exchange program on Entrepreneur Fellows from Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda (8 women; 14 men) after they had returned home from the United States. Our assessment included the mentoring aspect of the program. Six questions and related probes guided semi-structured interviews with the 22 Fellows, the study's quintain. The lead researcher transcribed the study's interviews and verified accuracy and trustworthiness by sending her transcriptions to the Fellows for verification. Findings derived from the interviews or cases crystallized as themes representative of the quintain. The emergent themes, which included mentoring, inspired two theoretical lenses to guide our interpretation of the Fellows' experiences: human capital theory and theory of planned behavior. Recommendations for practice include additional training of entrepreneur mentors and suggestions to facilitate high-quality field experiences. Additional research examining participants' views about mentoring – protégés and their mentors – as an integral component of entrepreneurial training in cross-cultural settings, and how that can be improved, would likely enhance the learning outcomes of similar programs.

Keywords

entrepreneurship; international exchanges; mentoring; professional development

Authors

Lisa K. Taylor, M. Craig Edwards, Marshall A. Baker, Craig E. Watters, and James A. Rutledge

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Introduction, Conceptual and Theoretical Lenses

"The world now has the largest generation of young people in history. . . . They are part of the first generation that can end poverty and the last that can avoid the worst impacts of climate change" (United Nations [UN], n.d., para. 3). Young people are more likely to create a better future if they have real influence, negotiating muscle, political weight, and decent jobs (UN, n.d.). To achieve this aim, Collier (2007) asserted that "societies of the bottom billion can only be rescued from within. . . . [T]here are people working for change, but usually they are defeated by the powerful internal forces stacked against them. We should be *helping the heroes*" (p. 96). These *heroes* include entrepreneurs focused on the agricultural and food sectors of their respective nations.

"With few exceptions, international comparative studies of entrepreneurship are rare, hampered by barriers such as the difficulty in gaining access to entrepreneurs in other countries, the expense involved, and the lack of reliable, published data" (Thomas & Mueller, 2000, p. 289). The project examined here provided training that created access to agricultural and allied sector entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship facilitators (Thomas & Mueller, 2000), such as food producers and purveyors, business educators, Extension leaders, and researchers, among other mentors. During the training, participants received various types of mentoring related to their entrepreneurial interests. The fellowship experience provided three unique, field-based, learning opportunities involving mentoring relationships: 1) a sustained experience with one mentor ($\geq$1 week); 2) combination of more than one sustained experience and compatible job shadowing activities (1 or 2 days each); or 3) a series of related job shadowing experiences. Reporting on the mentoring experiences of the participants was the primary aim of this manuscript, as findings derived from a larger inquiry (Taylor, 2017; Jayaratne et al., 2017).

The study's conceptual lens was human capital theory (HCT) from the viewpoint that "individuals and society derive economic benefits from investment in people" (Sweetland, 1996, p. 341). The entrepreneurship education program (EEP) in which the study's subjects participated was a significant investment in their human capital (Sweetland, 1996) as entrepreneurs, especially regarding efforts of the mentors with whom they interacted (Taylor, 2017). The inquiry was also informed by the theory of planned behavior [TPB] (Ajzen, 1991). According to the TPB, behavioral change emanating from experience is related to intentions held by individuals *before* their involvement in such and what, in this case, occurred *during* the EEP or *fellowship.* We expected the Entrepreneur Fellows' (EFs') attitudes would be informed by the skills and knowledge they perceived learning during the EEP, i.e., their future perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991) as entrepreneurs, and the inspirations likely to impact forthcoming actions (Kuckertz & Wagner, 2010). According to Gird and Bagraim (2008), perceptions of implementing an action or behavior may grow from what significant people in a person's life express about a specific behavior such as entrepreneurial practices and activities. We examined whether mentors were referents for the EFs and affected their perceptions and actions, i.e., normative beliefs (Ajzen, 1991) and post-fellowship behaviors (Gird & Bagraim, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

"Africa is at the crossroads. Persistent food shortages are now being compounded by new threats arising from climate change" (Juma, 2011, p. xiv). New opportunities that could facilitate transformation of African agriculture to be an economic force for growth are being guided by a new group of African leaders, according to Juma (2011). These leaders, who in many cases are

entrepreneurs, need assistance. "National, regional, and local economic development agencies use entrepreneurial mentoring as one ingredient in a wide assortment of assistance programs to help entrepreneurs and small business owners . . ." (Bisk, 2002, p. 262). Role identification, communication, relational climate, and relationships built among compatible pairs were discussed as critical to successful goal attainment by participants in coaching and mentoring experiences (Milner, Ostmeier, & Franke, 2013). Return on the investments made to structure and facilitate the EEP's mentoring relationships, i.e., programming time, resource expenditures, social capital costs, and so forth, was unknown. This knowledge gap supported conducting an inquiry to understand the EFs' views on their mentoring experiences.

Purpose and Research Question

This study sought to describe EFs' perceptions about the mentoring component of a professional development program, especially regarding its impact on their entrepreneurial attitudes and practices after they returned home. To achieve this aim, the project's guiding research question was "What were the EFs' perceptions of the entrepreneurial mentoring received during the fellowship program?"

Methods/Procedures

Study Participants, their Enterprises, and the Professional Development Program

The fellowship experience providing this study's data involved 23 participants from Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda, including 9 women and 14 men who visited the United States during one of two cycles (12 in cycle one; 11 in cycle two). In May of 2014, the first group trained in Oklahoma for four weeks and a second group participated during October of 2014; 22 EFs provided data. The boundaries of the study's cases included the EEP's timeframe and the participants themselves (Stake, 2006).

The EFs ranged in age from 26 to 47, with an average age of 34 years. They were primary owners/managers of 32 businesses and social ventures; 10 were involved with agricultural production activities and several worked as food purveyors. Six entrepreneurs described providing assistance to agriculture producers; 10 specified holding agricultural education, management, and leadership positions with Extension, government, or higher education institutions. Fifteen of the 22 EFs led more than one organization and/or venture. Seven indicated involvement in one primary venture, e.g., agricultural media consulting, a career development organization for adolescents, and an upmarket coffee shop. When the EEP transpired, one EF held an advanced degree in veterinary medicine. Two were working toward earning doctoral degrees, and three had earned master's degrees while eight were studying for such. The EFs were provided with numerous opportunities to learn from cross-cultural exchanges with U.S. citizens during the EEP. More than 60 field experience providers from agricultural enterprises, Cooperative Extension Service offices, educational entities, entrepreneurial ventures, other government agencies, and non-profit groups voluntarily served as mentors. Field experiences that involved mentoring were considered an essential part of the EFs' professional development activities (Taylor, 2017).

Ensuring a High-Quality Qualitative Study

Purposeful steps were taken to ensure the quality of this qualitative multicase study based on protocols supported by Stake (2006), Tracy (2010), and Saldaña (2013), including presentation of the participants' views on mentoring as representative of a group or *quintain* (Stake, 2006). Face-to-face interviews with 15 EFs were completed in May of 2015. The other seven interviews were conducted in summer of 2015 using Skype or Google Hangout. The lead researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim.

Three main criteria guided the compilation and analysis of the study's data: how each case was relevant to the quintain; the diversity of the cases across the quintain; and how each case provided an opportunity to learn about the contexts and complexities of the quintain (Stake, 2006). In concordance with Stake (2006), "the transcriptions and codes were triangulated and then a cross-case analysis was conducted by the researcher" (p. 39). Knowledge was mobilized from each case during cross-case analysis. This mobilization occurred first as case knowledge was acquired; second, when cases were compared; and, finally, as new knowledge emerged (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008) from our interpretations of meaning based on analysis of the cases. Coding was performed at open, axial, and selective levels (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Responses provided during the interviews were subjected to initial word-for-word content analysis. This In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2013), meaning *in that which is alive* (Strauss, 1987), was done by examining each word or small phrase in audio recordings of the EFs' interviews. Coding categories were derived directly from this textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The segmentation of data into alike groupings and comparing such for similarities was completed next, which reflected Creswell's (2007) open coding process. Constantly comparing the data during coding increased the likelihood of eliminating ambiguity and identifying meaning across codes (Creswell, 2007). More codes emerged as comparison of the data ensued.

Axial coding was expedited by NVivo software to compare existing codes using search methods for both terms and key phrases, which revealed the essence of the perceptions expressed by the study's quintain. Selective coding practices were used in the exploration of relationships between codes and the primary categories identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although codes were applied to the data, themes ultimately arose from the selective coding conducted during cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006), which fomented emergence of the study's conceptual and theoretical lenses of HCT (Sweetland, 1996) and TPB (Ajzen, 1991). A distillation of the EFs' views on their mentoring experiences was a predominant theme (Creswell, 2007), as derived from our analysis.

To increase trustworthiness of the data, notes written during the interviews by the lead researcher were combined with related details documented immediately after each interaction with an EF. According to Britten (1995), this procedure coupled with verbatim transcriptions of the audio recorded interviews are indicative of high-quality, qualitative research practices. Transcriptions were provided to the EFs through electronic mail for member checking to ensure credibility and accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2007). Changes and clarifications were made as requested by the EFs. This practice was also employed to ensure that errors in interpretation due to language differences related to meaning, control, and relevance between the English spoken by the participants and that of the lead researcher were revealed and eliminated.

Rich rigor existed because the 22 cases contained an abundance of insights as the participants described experiences in the United States with relevance to their entrepreneurial enterprises and the mentoring relationships developed during the fellowship. Credibility of the

findings was strengthened by the inclusion of multiple and varied voices, i.e., different ages, entrepreneurial enterprises, genders, and socio-economic statuses. This aspect reflected the multivocality of the quintain (Tracy, 2010).

Researchers' Reflexivity and Backgrounds

As a constructivist (Crotty, 1998), the lead researcher believes that individuals construct meaning in different and specific ways, even regarding a mutually experienced phenomenon. The meaning of the EFs' perspectives was co-constructed by her and the 22 study participants through their interactions and the investigator's reflections on and interpretations of such discourses. Engagement with the EFs allowed her to explore unique ways to examine the phenomenon in light of the myriad voices and perspectives shared during the 22 interviews.

A reflexive journal was kept to record impressions and preferences that may have influenced interpretation of the data. We acknowledge the potential for bias due to our involvement with the development and delivery of many aspects of the EEP that made the study possible. Daily participation interacting with project team members, invited experts, the EFs and their internship/ job shadowing mentors also provided opportunities to acquire and manifest bias. In addition, such involvement included a two-week exchange during which three of the researchers and other Oklahoma State University collaborators traveled to the EFs' home nations for follow up work.

The lead researcher was educated as a vocational home economics teacher. During her teacher preparation, she studied, developed, and taught a six-week instructional unit with a Nigerian vocational home economics teacher. That was her first experience working with an individual from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The other researchers included two agricultural educators, an Extension educator, and an entrepreneurship expert. Two had worked extensively with other professionals from SSA and three had traveled to the EFs' home countries. All were faculty members at Oklahoma State University during the study.

Findings Regarding the Fellowship's Mentoring Experiences and Related Interpretations

Analysis of more than 235 pages of interview transcriptions and related data, such as the lead researcher's notations made during the interviews, resulted in 15 significant categories, including five themes (Taylor, 2017), of which one theme explicated the EFs' *mentoring relationships.* The mentoring experiences were unique to each EF. The outcomes were generally described in three ways: impactful connections with a variety of U.S. contacts, ongoing relationships with one or more mentors, and interactions inspired among the EFs themselves (see Table 1).

Table 1
Selected Perspectives held by Entrepreneur Fellows related to their Mentoring Experiences

"In the U.S., people share information with each other. And currently I have a group of U.S. people who we get together and we are able to share information. . . . I can now get information from the Internet which I learned in my program and it is applicable in my work and I am able to share it with my workers to better the jobs they are doing." (P19 Interview)
"[D]ifferent types of mentors show[ed] me how to plant crops, how to grow, and how to harvest. . . . I took them [practices] back to my country and taught the women I am working with. . . . The mentors were even teaching me types of irrigation skills. . . . [W]e used to use the bucket system where we were sprinkling and it takes so long. It discourages women from

continuing planting and food gardening. . . . I learned drip irrigation system to put in under the ground. . . . I implemented these things and they are working." (P03 Interview)
"[Name] helped me design an easier way of breaking down the curriculum to help people who did not go to school. . . . I apply my knowledge in my business and she[, my mentor,] continues to guide me." (P15 Interview)
"[My mentors] put it plainly to me [that] they would like to visit Africa in two years and visit my farm. I set myself a goal to have a farm where I could host them in two years. But the bigger picture of that is that there is an opportunity in creating an activity or an experience where American business people or entrepreneurs or researchers can come and live on a farm in Africa. . . . In that way, here we will be benefiting from some kind of knowledge transfer. . . . [H]aving those folks around for a month and so forth would be of tremendous benefit . . . ." (P13 Interview)
"[Another Fellow] moved from [City A] to [City B] and I moved from [City B] to [City A], so we have been linking. . . . I have told him when I set up my new agribusiness farm, I will let him market his fertilizer from that location. In this way, we can have an enterprise together. . . . That's a way of connecting markets, you can both make a profit. Also, I would like to learn how he does [composting] so we will keep sharing new ideas and other information." (P16 Interview)
"I did talk with [another Fellow] because it has been very funny that where our company is located near where he grew up and his mother lives. And where [another Fellow] works is where I come from. Where my father lives. It's been quite an exchange." (P17 Interview)
"I never quite got a specific mentor like [Name] did. . . . But, I consider [name of team member] a really strong mentor and yourself [the lead researcher] and the rest of the team." (P18 Interview)

Two broad purposes Kram (1988) identified for mentoring were (a) facilitating a career-defining purpose for protégés and (b) achieving the psychosocial purposes of role modeling, acceptance, counseling, and friendship. Members of the fellowship's delivery team recruited more than 100 individuals to assist the EFs at professional, technical, and/or personal levels as mentors for field experiences. Recruitment occurred on a person-by-person basis to select the most appropriate mentors possible for the EFs. Analysis of the EFs' interview responses related to the interactions they had with these mentors identified eight who described ongoing relationships as impactful on their entrepreneurial activities. In addition, 12 other EFs indicated communicating with two project team members who assisted in facets of their ventures. Implications of Milner et al. (2013) study emerged regarding the cross-cultural relationships inherent to many of the EFs' field experiences, including length of relationships, settings of mentoring experiences, ways of communication, and mutual understanding of their roles.

Overall, the EFs' views also confirmed Clutterbuck's and Megginson's (1999) assertion that mentoring enables one person to assist another in transitioning their knowledge, thinking, and work practices with long-ranging, important ramifications on a variety of levels, i.e., from individuals to communities to whole societies. The interviews also reflected the EFs' gratitude for the efforts and resources expended, i.e., investment, to provide the various mentor-protégé interactions. They spoke about how the relationships with mentors had changed their entrepreneurial perspectives and practices. Such was represented in one EF's comment: "The

American people should not take for granted the fact that their money provided through the fellowship is making an impact in our countries. It may not be an immediate difference but it long-term will make an impact" (P01 Interview).

Conceptual Lens

HCT recognizes that education, specifically apprenticeships, is a real expense with an expected economic impact (Sweetland, 1996). Albeit this study was qualitative, concrete examples of economic benefits were found to be derived from investments the EFs reported making in their enterprises (Sweetland, 1996). For example, descriptions of the efforts mentors made to guide and train employees were reported as resulting in positive financial outcomes by the EFs due to their adoption of similar practices (see Table 1). Although not quantitatively confirmed, the cases provide evidence to funders and policy makers that the EEP was an effective way to build human capital (Dunn & Holtz-Eakin, 1996; Sweetland, 1996; Unger, Rauch, Frese, & Rosenbusch, 2011) with the potential to make positive economic impacts.

Theoretical Lens

Most of the EFs intended to develop collaborative networks and relationships during the EEP, as described by their goals for such. This reflected attitudes toward executing given behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Moreover, subjective norms, i.e., "perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform [a] behavior" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188), were described as important determinants of the EFs' behaviors.

During interviews, the EFs explained the impact of networks and colleagues influencing their entrepreneurial activities after returning to their home countries. Examples included an EF's business partner as integral to her developing a pork processing, packaging, and delivery business; employees' input resulting from their trying a variety of marketing strategies to increase an EF's frozen yogurt sales; and a board of female community leaders advising an EF about the scope and direction of empowerment activities for rural girls. Expressions of increased *perceived behavioral control* (Ajzen, 1991) were revealed in the EFs' statements about building relationships with employees, work colleagues, and community members. For instance, one EF explained:

> [W]hen I came back from the U.S., people had a lot of expectations of me. So, I have been sharing information with them. I shared encouraging messages to the young men and women of this nation to work hard and at least to pursue their cause according to what I saw in the U.S. (P19 Interview)

This example reflects quintain members' willingness to model what they viewed as successful relationships of U.S. business owners with co-workers and employees and conveyed confidence and enablement to use their acquired knowledge and skills to follow through on intentions to exploit practices likely to benefit themselves and others (Drucker, 1985). It also embodies Ajzen's (1991) three kinds of salient beliefs – behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs – which he indicated were "prevailing determinants of a person's intentions and actions" (p. 189) [see Figure 1].

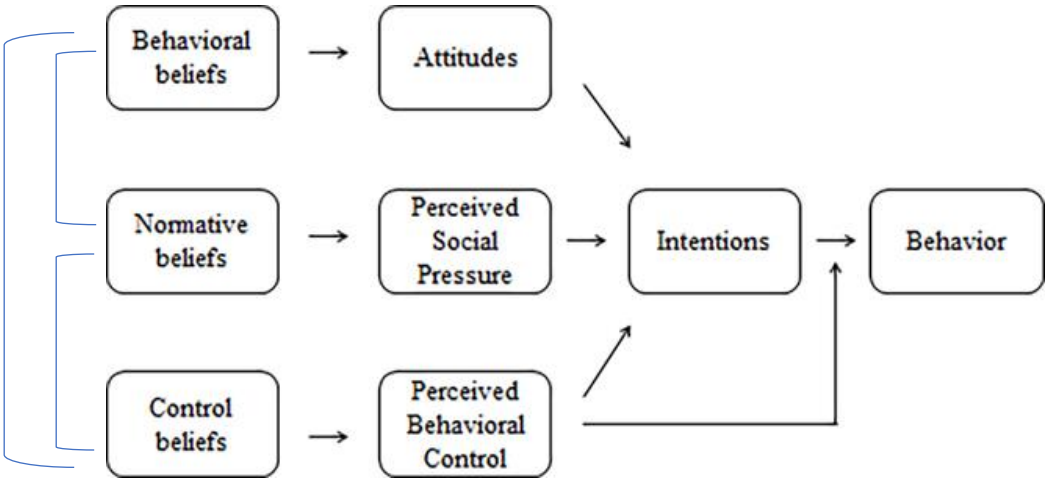

Figure 1. Ajzen's three kinds of salient beliefs (Ajzen, 1991, p. 189). Adapted from the theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 5*(2), 179-211.

Implications and Recommendations

Several unanticipated factors influenced the field placements chosen to instigate the EFs' mentoring relationships. These included biosecurity concerns eliminating internships for international visitors during the EEP, i.e., disease outbreaks causing livestock producers to restrict access to their operations to reduce the potential of transmission risks; and competitive global marketing of food products restricting access to proprietary elements of manufacturing facilities. The EFs expressed mixed reactions to such restrictions that resulted in short-term job shadowing experiences being arranged rather than internships with one primary mentor. For example, an EF who had multiple mentors indicated: "The many experiences I had, the contacts I have made, the work I am now doing, the courses I am taking, they are having impacts in [Country]" (P01 Interview). In contrast, another EF – a marketer of pork – commented: "I really did not have any one person[, i.e., mentor,] and that was a really big disappointment for me" (P18 Interview). And a third EF, who had experienced apartheid in his nation, reflected on his short-term, job shadowing placements:

> [I]t was a very nice experience to be treated as a person. And where your color played no role. To be accepted amongst people as a person . . . and being treated as a person [and] not
> a second-class citizen . . . was what I noticed and what I appreciated. (P07 Interview)

The EFs' unique perspectives on field experiences conveyed the breadth of impacts described during the study's interviews. However, a longitudinal study of the enduring influences of U.S. internships/job shadowing experiences on international entrepreneurs would provide valuable insights about long-term outcomes resulting from EEPs. Mentoring relationships, internships and/or job shadowing experiences, understanding of participants' roles, and the type and substance of related communication were four critical aspects of the EFs' field experiences, as well as indicative of and congruent with important indicators of compatibility in cross-cultural pairings (Milner et al., 2013). Research studies that examine the perceptions of

international entrepreneurs and their mentors about shared learning experiences vis-à-vis these indicators would be beneficial to leaders of cross-cultural exchanges and instructive if selecting participants for similar programs in the future. Table 2 reflects recommendations for practice by program leaders soliciting and preparing volunteer mentors to participate in cross-cultural, EEPs.

Table 2
Recommendations to Recruit and Support Volunteer Mentors for International Entrepreneurs

1. Recruiting and selecting volunteer mentors who value global relationships can aid in creating compatible mentoring experiences.
2. Focus mentor preparation on identifying long-term opportunities that can give the richest experiences and meet goals of both protégés and mentors.
3. After mentor and fellowship participant selection has occurred, provide training for both groups to build mutual understanding, to increase future rapport, and to decrease apprehension.
4. Develop, maintain, and promote *new media* sites and related mobile telephone apps as tools for scheduling events, and for posting training agendas and materials, internship/job shadowing arrangements, emergency contact information, travel specifics, and institutional opportunities.
5. Develop and discuss field experience plans with mentors prior to an EEP to provide clear expectations, to answer questions, and to clarify arrangements and responsibilities.
6. After underway, make site visits early during the field experiences to follow up on planned activities and the status of relationship building as well as to adjust plans and placements, if such is needed.
7. Conduct a celebration and/or a recognition ceremony to acknowledge all participants for their contributions to the field-based, learning experiences of an EEP.
8. Strategize alternative experiences in case unforeseen events occur hindering ideal field placement plans, such as threats to biosecurity or constraints due to proprietary issues.

The EFs indicated overall positive impressions of follow up provided by Oklahoma State University team members during reciprocal visits to their countries and through electronic mail and telephone communication. However, some voiced interests in additional long-term facilitation, including ongoing mentoring at a distance. Leaders of EEPs are encouraged to seek funding to support such.

Other investigations intended to gain perspectives about the experiences of both mentors and protégés depending on the type of relational encounter could provide additional recommendations regarding training curricula and field experiences most appropriate for similar fellowship programs in the future. Moreover, longitudinal research about the implications of mentoring experiences may reveal strategies to consider in recruitment, selection, preparation, training, and support of participants in cross-cultural, fellowship programs featuring entrepreneurship education. Implementing such strategies may result in stronger and more productive collaborative relationships among a fellowship's participants over time.

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