



Descriptive Analysis on Challenges and Strategies Influencing Informal Small Businesses in Durban

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ABSTRACT

Informal small businesses remain one of the important means of economic development in economies of the world because of the value they create socially and economically, despite challenges facing them. They play a crucial role in South Africa's economy. The study focuses on immigrant-owned informal small businesses in Durban. This study examined the factors that hampers the growth and progress of small businesses as well as the strategies used by immigrant entrepreneurs. A quantitative research technique was employed for the study. Questionnaires were distributed to one hundred and ten immigrant small business owners in Durban, all returned timeously, and they were viable. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. The findings from the study revealed that lack of infrastructural facilities, lack of adequate security, high rentals, and difficulties in obtaining business permits are challenges faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. However, pricing was identified as the major strategies used by the immigrant small business owners to boost their business strategy, hence the study recommends the need for government intervention and improved policy development to enhance the growth of informal small businesses in Durban, South Africa.

Keywords: Small business, challenges, strategies, immigrant, Durban.

INTRODUCTION

Informal small businesses play significant roles to the economic prosperity of any country. Roles that informal small businesses play range from reducing poverty, hunger to unemployment which are parts of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG goal 1 aims to end poverty, 2 to end hunger and goal number 8 aims "to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". According to [1] small businesses within Asia and sub-Saharan Africa contributes sixty percent to employment and forty percent to gross domestic product (GDP). The small business enterprise is an inspired business activity operated by individuals of no income with less capital, for economic benefits. The entrepreneurship is embarked upon either as an opportunity or necessity hence, informal small business remains one of the easiest ways of setting-up a business for survival because it does not need much capital to set-up unlike other forms of businesses.

Further, [4] assert that the emergence of informal small businesses in South Africa is critical insolving the country's high employment rate and poor economic growth. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report of 2023, posit that entrepreneurship and small businesses reduces unemployment and contributes significantly to the South Africa's economy. But despite these contributions, small businesses are constantly faced with numerous challenges that negatively impacts their operations and sustainability. Immigrant business owners are not left out in these challenges, hence the need to investigate the challenges, to make informed decisions on the improvement and sustainability of small businesses.

Research problem

The immigrant owned informal small businesses face a lot of challenges which cannot be overemphasised in the sense that it is always in the news. The government of the day is equally known for their lack of attention on any issue concerning the entrepreneurs except when the tension in-between the business owners and locals grows high. Government authorities have failed in providing an environmentally friendly atmosphere where a

normal free flow entrepreneurship can be conducted. Lack of adequate security and other infrastructural amenities persist in so many areas. Lack of quick response to any eventuality has been recorded in the past and no adequate measures in place to check any imminent incidence. The businesses have suffered a lot of damages emanating from theft, xenophobia, arson, kidnapping, extortion, high handedness by the municipal officials and so on.

The objectives of this article lie in determining the challenges encountered by immigrant-owned informal small business in Durban. The study also seeks to determine the business strategies used by small business owners and provide recommendations towards improving their sustainability. A better understanding of these issues could assist government in developing policy initiatives for innovation and sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vukuzenzele in South African language means “get up and do it yourself, and this forms the spirit of fundamental entrepreneurship and sustainability” [18]. Setting up fresh business enterprise portends some risks; however, the challenges are surmountable to minimize the hazards like dealing with imminent business needs and utilizing any opportunity for diversification. Improvement space is always present and achievable in business only if one can give more than what is needed by the business via innovation that captures clientele’s need, taste or demand.

Small businesses

In defining small business, South African National Small Business (NSB) Amendment Act of 2003 and 2004 defined small business based on the number of employees, turnover and specific criteria. These criteria vary depending on the sector as illustrated on Table 1. Small business operators are prideful with their entrepreneurship as it can be regarded as enabler of economic growth [2].

Table 1. Definition of Small Business

Enterprise	Micro	Very small	Small	Medium
Employees	0-4	5-9	10-49	50-200
Annual turnover				
Manufacturing	R0.2m	R5m	R12m	R51m
Wholesale trade, commercial agents and allied services	R0.2m	R6m	R32m	R64m
Finance and business Services		R3m	R13m	R26m
Community, social and personal services	R0.2m	R1m	R6m	R13m

However, other countries have different definition of small business. [16] defined small business “as enterprise where the investment in plant and machinery or equipment does not exceed ten crore rupees and turnover does not exceed fifty crore rupees”. Further, [15] defines small business as “a business that functions on a small-scale level which involves less capital investment, minimal number of people and fewer machines to operate. Those small businesses produce and sell goods and services (for example bakeries, toothpick, paper, etc) on a small scale and play important role in the economic development of the country”. The author further characterizes the small business as business that involves a single owner as a sole proprietor, managed by the owner, have a restricted operation area, have less dependency on technology, open and flexible to sudden changes, and utilize local and immediately available natural resources and limited wastage [15].

In Nigeria, according to [17], “small business is defined based on the cost of project criteria, funds involved, employee number, volume of sales, turnover and overall fund base. Businesses that are lower than N250,000 and annual turnover exceeds N5,000 per annum is a small business. Moreover, Nigeria National Directorate of Employment (NDE) describe small business as that which has a fixed maximum of N35,000. Third Nigeria National Development plan equally define small business as an entity employing less than 10 employees, machinery and equipment investment not exceeding N600,000”. Countries, authors, scholars, schools, organisations have distinct ideas on what small business should be defined as, and these ideas or descriptions vary. Nonetheless, research is undertaking in line with known or established definition of small business obtainable from a known authority of a country. It becomes an acceptable definition to work with and which must apply to the study.

Acknowledging immigrant entrepreneurship is crucial to authors, government, and operators because immigrant owned small businesses have significantly influenced socio-economic growth and development of communities in their host economies [7]. According to [2], employment creation is a function of an investment in small businesses. The pull factors identified by [7] for immigrant entrepreneurs are ability to identify an opportunity, knowledge of business ideas and trust relationship with the local indigenes. According to [8], the imbalances of an entrepreneur in the entrepreneurship pose a threat to growth and progress.

Challenges faced by informal small businesses.

Small businesses play significant roles in all economies but despite these roles, they face various challenges that obstruct their progress and development. Non availability of capital, legality, ecology, and managerial skills were mentioned by [1] as part of the challenges that deter the development of small businesses. For an immigrant entrepreneur, access to finance, language barrier and customs issues are the barriers that challenge them from starting their ventures [9]. Informal small businesses are not able to obtain loans from financial providers as a result of lack of collateral, inadequate financial knowledge, high transaction cost and lack of entrepreneurial skills [1].

Previous studies [3] conducted a systematic review on challenges of operating a business in Africa and result revealed that high cost of starting a venture, lack of electricity and finance as well as high tax rate and low cross-border trade poses a huge challenge to small businesses. In South Africa, [12] looked at the 'challenges facing small business retailers in selected South African townships', the study focused on both the locals and the immigrant small business owners, the outcome of the study shows that most of the businesses of the immigrant retailers are sustained while the locals are not. The authors also discovered the competitive edge of immigrant entrepreneurs over local counterparts, and this could be attributed to the low level of education of the local entrepreneurs.

As identified by [9], sociocultural environment of the host country is one of the challenges that are faced by immigrant informal small business owners. Somalian immigrant entrepreneurs face challenges such as stringent laws and policies, language barriers, and xenophobic attacks[5]. These challenges mentioned above usually lead to high business failure rates, which limits informal small businesses contribution to job creation and economic growth as predicted by [4].

Strategies used by informal small business

The life of a typical small informal business enterprise depends on the available good business strategies the entrepreneur has to offer for survival and sustainability. Invariably, an entrepreneur grows the business successfully by adhering strictly to these strategies [18]; (a) vision and passion to succeed, which always occupy his/her mind and propels the entrepreneur into having the right attitude towards the business and clientele. These lead to greater success, when an entrepreneur is enthusiastic, embrace new ideas and allows more research, inquisitive and ponder on submitted feedback from clientele, to understand and learn better. (b) Another strategy used is that the primary focus is always on the clientele. This entails studying the clientele and the market to maintain and improve on the demands, provision of the exact quality of products and services demanded, and monitoring of clientele traffic to know when more hands are needed. (c) Feedback. Getting feedback has always been viewed as an important tool, which entrepreneurs have used as a strategy over others to be ahead in terms of provision of better-quality goods and services. It enables an entrepreneur to use his/her innovative ideas to positively improve on the products in accordance with demands. Some have capitalized on feedback given to others to improve theirs and be ahead. Feedback serves as a barometer for business standing with the stakeholders, therefore, an entrepreneur possibly consults an expert for constant feedback on general issues concerning the business, to know what needs to be done or improved. (d) Networking is another strategy used by small business entrepreneurs to boost their businesses. In networking, so many things are involved ranging from the clientele base to wholesale dealers or manufacturers. The business will judge you by the type of networks you operate with, whether it improves the business or not. It is very important to cash-in on every opportunity presented to establish a valued network. Contacts are made through business meetings, workshops, seminars, and other business programs made available by private or public sector, or by the government agency/authority [18].

Furthermore, for businesses to succeed, entrepreneurial competencies and competitive strategies are essential. According to [2], there are primarily two strategies used by entrepreneurs to gain competitive advantage, these strategies are pricing strategy and differentiation strategy. Price strategy is viewed as an element that influence clientele choice and buyer decision. The pricing strategy works by reducing the cost associated with the development of the goods/services, marketing, and salaries [2]. On the other hand, the authors assert that "differentiation advantage denotes a competitive strategy introduced by entrepreneurs to manufacture products/services with certain specifications, in comparison to rivals, these specifications are typically connected to product/service quality, design, technological innovation, brand image, and customer satisfaction, which must be difficult to replicate for competitors" [2:6].

Previous studies assert that immigrant entrepreneurs use their social networking skills to dominate the market, hence prices of goods and services are relatively cheaper, they are better stocked, and as a result of that they are being patronized by local consumers [11]. Location is another strategy used by immigrant entrepreneurs. According to [5], they site their businesses in strategic township locations which are densely populated. In other words, market preference and business growth are synergetic and interrelated. It was emphasized that informal small businesses are close to the clientele and marketplaces, which enables the entrepreneurs make dynamic determinations and enforce strategies quicker thereby creating competitive advantage [6]. Strategically, an entrepreneur sees the business as a means through which one's unique talent and passion is discovered and expressed, needs more drive and in constant determination to succeed, achieve and remain sustainable.

Motivations for informal small businesses

Entrepreneurs in informal small businesses are motivated in so many ways into pursuing their day-to-day business obligations. According to [19], small business operators are motivated to satisfy the clientele by fulfilling unmet demands of theirs effectively, efficiently, and innovatively by any means possible. This motivation influences entrepreneur's alertness and ability in discovering profitable opportunity that leads to entrepreneurial success. Scholars [20] assert that an entrepreneur is motivated into doing business by the hunger to achieve and equally contribute towards the standard of living improvement for himself, family, and the community. It propels him to dare any obstacle or risk(s) that may be involved or facing the business. The standard of living for any individual is dependent on what you take home at the end of the day, therefore striving to meet up with the daily personal, family and business expenses positively portends better or improve living standard.

Further, the authors [20] posit that a conceived, nurtured business idea motivates an entrepreneur into setting-up a business tailored to address that pioneer innovative idea. This pioneering innovation may improve the quality of products demanded and improve the living standard quality of the community and interested parties. An important attribute of such innovation as regards goods and services is being environmentally friendly to suit demand. Furthermore, the entrepreneur is knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally, or unintentionally motivated to embark on business to provide employment especially when the environment is enabling. It suffices to say, according to [20] that entrepreneurship provides employment because of the enabling environment naturally, in the sense that the underlying entrepreneurship is a function of manpower that is consummated via creating employment. Additionally, creating employment can be directly or indirectly linked with other factors to improve growth and economic development.

According to [21], motivations for informal small businesses may come from two different contexts; it can be opportunity or necessity driven. In the context of opportunity-driven motivation, entrepreneurship prevails more particularly among highly skilled entrepreneurs, who are driven by innovation and can be found mostly in developed economies where there are varieties of work opportunities. In necessity-driven motivation context, entrepreneurship integrates business ideas that are initiated by entrepreneurs with no work experience or other means of livelihood. Generally, necessity-driven motivation can be found mostly in underdeveloped economies.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research method was employed for this study and a cluster-sampling strategy was used to select 110 participants from the target population which is the immigrant-owned informal small businesses in Durban. The survey strategy is a strategy employed mostly in business and management research and was chosen for this study to enable the collection of quantitative data and gives the researcher more control over the research process. Hence, a well-designed closed ended questionnaire was used for the appropriateness of the study as data gathering instrument that measured the relevance and validity of the research findings. One hundred and ten immigrant-owned informal small businesses from Durban area were sampled and questionnaires were administered to sampled participants. The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics via Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. To give a good understanding of how the participants reacted to the items in the questionnaire descriptive statistics, t-test and correlation was employed.

RESULTS

Respondents' demographics

To understand the demographic profile of the participants, Section A of the questionnaire required responses from the respondents regarding their gender, their age and experience in their business operations. The result is revealed on Table 2. Figure 1 revealed that out of the one hundred and ten questionnaires that were sampled and administered, 87 of the participants were males which represents 79.1% of the sample and 23 were females representing 20.9% of the participants. Conclusively, there were more males than females owned foreign informal small businesses in Durban.

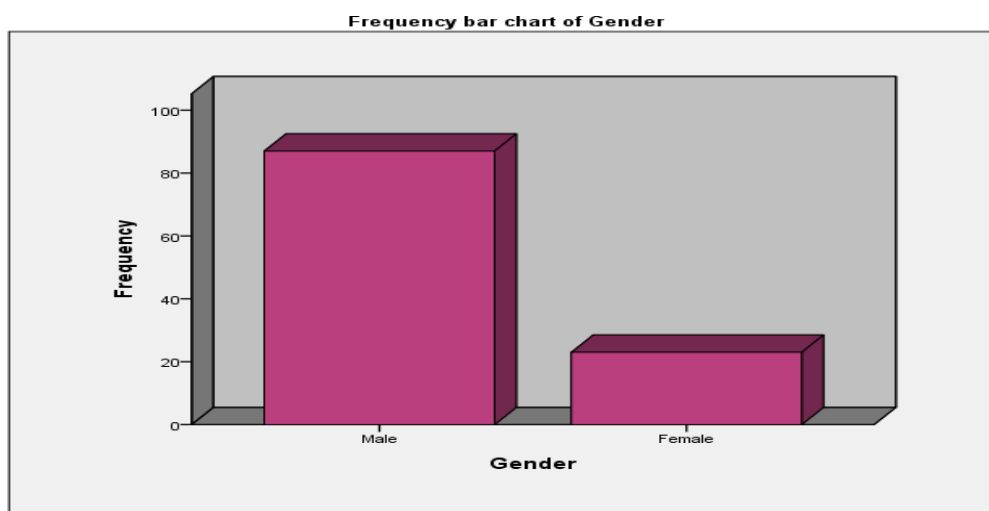


Figure 1. Gender of the participants

Table 2: Biographical profile of the study participants

Variables		Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Gender	Male	87	79.1	79.1
	Female	23	20.9	100.0
Age	21-30 years	23	20.9	20.9
	31-40 years	71	64.5	85.5
	41-50 years	16	14.5	100.0
	51-60 years	0	0.0	100.0
Years inbusiness	0-3 years	29	26.4	26.4
	4-6 years	38	34.5	60.9
	7-9 years	5	4.5	65.5
	10-12 years	10	9.1	74.5
	13 years +	28	25.5	100.0

The first age category of twenty-one to thirty years made up the young people in business representing 20.9% of the respondents, thirty-one to forty years made up the middle age in business representing 64.5% of the participants, while the older participants between the ages of forty-one to fifty made up the remaining 14.5% of the participants. There was no respondent on ages between fifty-one to sixty years and sixty-one years and above. This show that most of the business owners in Durban are in the middle age category.

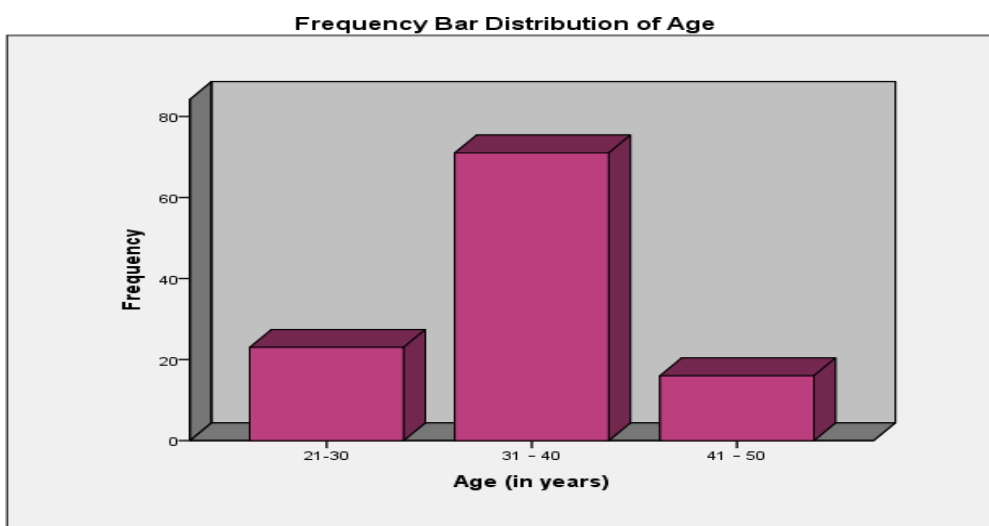


Figure 2. Age distribution

With regards to number of years in business, majority of those foreign nationals in business have been in business for periods between 0 and 6 years, although 25.5% have been in business for more than 13 years.

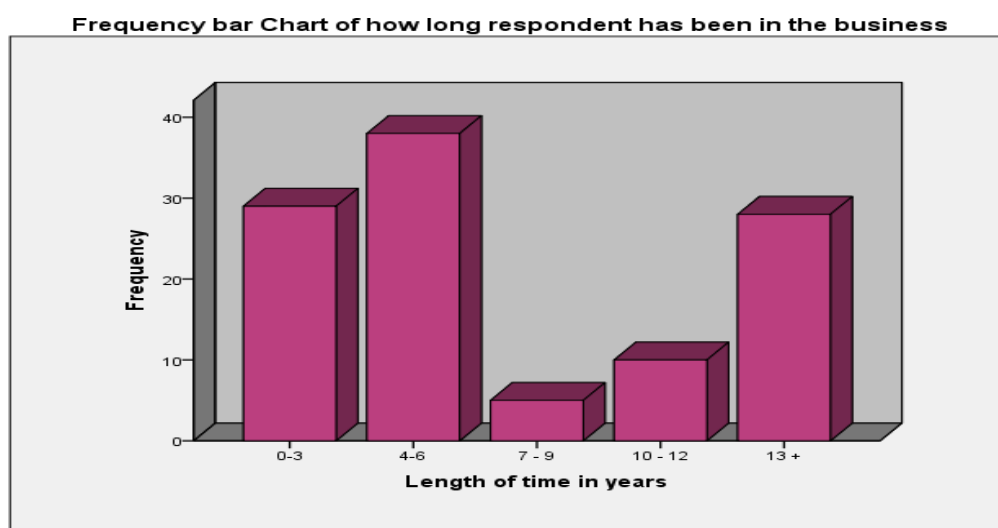


Figure 3. Duration in business

Table 3. Challenges faced by informal small business.

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I encounter problems with the indigenes during business activities	11.8	8.2	14.5	54.5	10.9
2. I encounter problems with government authorities and their agents.	9.1	14.5	10.9	60.0	5.5
3. My business face socio-cultural problems in its daily transactions.	0.9	62.7	5.5	27.3	3.6
4. I pay high amount of money on rent	12.7	56.4	8.2	17.3	5.5
5. There is lack of infrastructural facilities within my business area	14.5	49.1	5.5	25.5	5.5
6. There is lack of adequate security in the business premises.	4.5	30.0	19.1	44.5	1.8
7. I encounter difficulties in obtaining business permits or renewal.	17.3	42.7	4.5	33.6	1.8

The challenges listed on Table 3 above summarised the responses to the questions in questionnaire section B which was examined as the main challenges facing immigrant-owned informal small businesses in Durban. The questions were answered using Likert scale where SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree and SD=Strongly Disagree.

Table 4: Business strategies used by small business owners

Items	SA	SA	N	D	SD
1. I sell products at affordable prices.	60.0	34.5	5.5	0.0	0.0
2. I make available products mostly needed by the customers	60.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
3. I satisfy the needs of my customers and the public alike.	63.6	33.6	0.9	0.0	0.0
4. I give discounts and credit to my customers.	40.9	51.8	6.4	0.9	0.0
5. I do offer training and development to interested entrepreneurs.	40.0	35.5	19.1	5.5	0.0
6. I do offer employment to indigenes.	39.1	28.2	18.2	10.9	3.6
7. My business contribute to the growth of the economy.	64.5	34.5	0.9	0.0	0.0

Table 4 above summarised the responses to the questions in questionnaire section C. The total number of hundred and ten participants answered all the questions in this section and 89.5% of the total respondents in section C statements agreed that they are participants to the business strategies highlighted above.

Inferential Statistics

Internal consistency is essential towards measurement of the research instrument because it indicates the degree of association among the items, therefore, the result of the internal consistency must be consistent for it to be deemed valid as stated by [14]. Hence, to determine the reliability of the research instrument on each variable Cronbach's alpha was used and the outcome on table 5 shows that all the variables had alpha values between 0.70 and 0.82. According to the rule of thumb, Cronbach's alpha should attain 0.70 for a research instrument to be considered acceptable and reliable. To test for normality of the data, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test was carried out to determine if the data was normally distributed, the result of the test on table 6 shows that One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for sampling adequacy exceed 0.550, therefore, the sample is adequate, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant.

Table 5. Reliability Statistics

Constructs	No of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Challenges	7	0.70
Strategies	7	0.82

Table 6: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.610
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1202.309
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

DISCUSSION

Challenges faced by immigrant-owned informal small business in Durban.

It can be deduced from literature that host country is instrumental towards the successful entrepreneurial activities in the host country [9]. The challenges experience by foreign-owned business owners are usually attributed to sociocultural context. The findings from this study shows that the business owners disagree that they encounter problems with the indigenes and the government authorities during business activities. It suggests that as far as relationship with the government authorities is concerned, majority of the immigrant-owned informal small businesses owners generally do not contend with the government officials (66 per cent). To some extent, this might imply that majority of such businesses are registered properly as well as in compliance with the municipal laws. Only 24 per cent indicate having issues with government authorities which might be an indicator that only few do not comply with all the municipal laws.

The study also revealed that there is lack of infrastructural facilities and lack of adequate security in the business premises which is consistent with the studies of previous authors [4]. The authors [4] assert that access to utilities and the prevalence of crime are part of the challenges that impede the growth of migrant entrepreneurs. Many foreign owned business owners establish that they pay high rentals and encounter series of difficulties in obtaining business permits or renewal which makes it difficult to formalize their businesses. It was confirmed by [9] that obtaining licenses and permits are the formal challenges experienced by immigrant informal small business owners especially in their early stages of venture development. Although they face socio-cultural and psychological problems which impacts on their day-to-day business activities, they try their best to harness their entrepreneurial zeal towards overcoming these challenges.

Business strategies used by small business owners.

Entrepreneurs use various strategies to sustain their businesses. Pricing is one of the business strategies used by immigrant business owners. The findings from this study indicate that immigrant business owners sell at affordable price, this finding is in alignment with the findings of [13]. Because the immigrant owned businesses are better stocked, they make use of discounted price that benefit consumers and capture the market from existing stores. Buying in bulk with their networks play a huge role in discount sales and satisfying customer's needs. The study also established that immigrant business owners do offer employment, as well as training and development to indigenes. According to the study by [1], an entrepreneur with training on managerial and marketing experience has a greater chance of business success. It was argued that training and reskilling programmes will improve the performances of informal small businesses [10]. Finally, it was revealed that informal small business significantly contributes to the growth of the economy, this is so because in the words of [10], "knowledge is crucial to improve the economic benefits derivable from the informal sector".

CONCLUSION

It has been revealed that informal small businesses contribute greatly to the growth of the economy and the society at large. The statistical data analyzed and presented showed a resounding significance in participants' responses pertaining to the different kinds of challenges facing the immigrant-owned informal small business in Durban which ranges from social, government relationship, socio-cultural, financial, infrastructural, security, consultation, and red tape. The study revealed that these challenges impact on business survival and also hampered the roles the business carries out, both to the government and the society. Despite these challenges, they have come up with several strategies to reduce the influence of those challenges on their business sustainability. Hence the need for improved policy development to enhance the growth of informal small businesses in South Africa.

The findings of this study have implications for small business managers and public policy makers. It should be emphasized that this research was exploratory and undertaken purely within the context of discovery. However, given the theoretical and empirical findings of the study, it appears that the goals of discovery were accomplished in that many interesting findings, although tentative and deserving further investigation, lend preliminary support to the understanding of small business as part of informal sector economy with particular focus on challenges faced by immigrant-owned informal small businesses and the strategies they use. This research was focused mainly on immigrant entrepreneurs in Durban, hence future researchers may explore different provinces as well as use a qualitative research approach.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study revealed that amidst the challenges faced by immigrant-owned informal small businesses, they were to survive. Therefore, more innovative strategies should be employed by the entrepreneurs in the day-to-day business operations and better managerial skills must be acquired to handle the business better. The entrepreneurs should strive to make sure that all that is required to operate the business in the municipal area is obtained. For instance, registration of the business and other permits required by the government and municipal authorities. The entrepreneurs must adhere to the legality of their business endeavours and sanity must always be maintained to ensure peaceful co-existence.

The government on the other hand must maintain the decorum by making sure that adequate security of life and property is well provided and maintained. Bottlenecks must be removed in obtaining business and other necessary permits to ensure that all businesses are registered and counted for, to ensure accountability while growing the economy of Durban. Moreover, adequate infrastructural facilities should be provided and maintained right and around the Durban central business district (CBD) to ease the suffering and difficulties face by the stakeholders on a daily basis. The community should realise that they are part of the great mix, the businesses are for everyone, you are either part of the buying or selling public, therefore, the space is there for everyone to protect. The entire economy improves for everyone to reap the benefits in one way or another.

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