

2016

Exploring Skills That Liberian Small-Business Entrepreneurs Use to Succeed in Business

Mars Mellish
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Mars Mellish

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Exploring Skills That Liberian Small-Business Entrepreneurs Use to Succeed in Business

by

Mars Mellish

MBA, New Jersey Institute of Technology, 2003

BA, Manhattan College, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2016

Abstract

Over 35 years of gross economic mismanagement and business failures led Liberia's gross domestic product to collapse by 90% in less than two decades. As a result of a general lack of business skills, up to 80% of Liberian small-business entrepreneurs fail in business beyond the first year. Based on the theory of constraints, the purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Data came from semistructured face-to-face interviews with 5 central regional Liberian small-business entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. Participant observation, the use of company documents, and the use of member checking allowed for methodological triangulation and verification of the themes. Analysis of data involved using pattern-matching technique and data coding to evaluate, organize, code, and analyze the raw data. There were 3 prominent themes that emerged among entrepreneurs during data analysis: business knowledge, bookkeeping, and pricing skills. The data from the results indicated, within this particular context, Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used business skills for knowledge, finance, and marketing. Focusing on these practices may lead to increased profit and business success beyond the first year for other Liberian small-business entrepreneurs. The findings from the study could provide mechanisms for social change by giving Liberian small-business entrepreneurs additional ideas for using their business skills in their businesses. Furthermore, the findings may aid the Liberian communities to create training programs and curriculums for numerous Liberian colleges and institutions for future Liberian small-business owners.

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Dedication

The dedication of my doctoral study goes to my grandmother, Tete Sinoe, for providing me with a prime example of how a mother should lead her family and guide her children. Her spiritual support continuously encouraged me to complete this program. I will never forget the day I turned 7, when I stood in our house in Liberia, and she told me that I would be someone one day. I thank her for being so hard on me.

To my whole family who always pressed me to be better. I would not be in this position without all of you supporting me to finish my doctoral degree and advocating for me in all of my entrepreneurial efforts. This dedication also goes to all small-business leaders and entrepreneurs who continuously work to improve their lives and create jobs for others and to all the people in Liberia who need the help that this study can provide.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Scholars suggested that entrepreneurship is a driver of economic growth and development (Bakar, Islam, & Lee, 2014; Matejovsky, Mohapatra, & Steiner, 2014; Ribeiro-Soriano & Mas-Verdu, 2015). Naude (2013) found that entrepreneurship includes advantages for economic growth and development. Small businesses have been fundamental drivers of several economies worldwide (Harris, Aziz, & Norhashim, 2012; Phillips & Knowles, 2012). However, small-business entrepreneurs have encountered challenges related to business skills and planning, which may lead to low business performance and high failure rates (Nwachukwu, 2012). Agwu (2014) and Bagire and Namada (2013) researched the factors contributing to the failure of small enterprises in African nations. These factors include (a) lack of business skills, (b) shortage and inadequate cash flow, (c) lack of controls and corrective actions, and (d) poor business management.

In developing countries such as Liberia, small-business startup plays an integral part in rural-country survival (McCoskey, 2011). Data and research showed that Liberia has been weak in the development of small-business entrepreneurs (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2012). In this study, I explored the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. This section includes information about the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, main research and interview questions, conceptual framework, the definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, and the literature review of the study.

Background of the Problem

Liberia was the first internationally acknowledged self-governing country in Africa after declaring its independence in 1847 (Tarway-Twalla, 2008). From 1950 to 1986, poor governance, economic and political exclusion, growth without development, and increasing political militancy led to Liberia's first civil war in 1990 (Tarway-Twalla, 2011). Before the civil war, the per capita income was U.S \$750, while the yearly gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was 5.7% (Tarway-Twalla, 2008). In 2007, the calculated GDP per capita was U.S. \$500 (Tarway-Twalla, 2008). The civil war caused a substandard socioeconomic situation in Liberia, leading to fewer formal sector industries and employment compared to prewar levels (Tarway-Twalla, 2011).

These economic and social challenges caused Liberia to rank in the top five countries on the list of third-world countries (Kieh, 2004). Unemployment levels in Liberia have remained high, with figures ranging from 80% to 85% for some years (Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, 2014). With these economic difficulties, postconflict development in Liberia is extremely challenging, and business failure has been a regular event (Naude, 2013). Many economic-development practitioners have recognized microenterprise and small-business development as a promising economic-development strategy, especially in rural communities (Castello & Boike, 2013; Shahidullah & Haque, 2014). Morales and Marquina (2013) noted that small businesses play critical roles in the development of industries and economies. Daly (2015) and Igwe and Oragwu (2014) found that being self-employed provided an escape route from poverty. Viewed as the *prime mover* in developing countries, entrepreneurship can

initiate the development process (Naude, 2013). Small-business entrepreneurs' business skills development and sustainability in Liberia's postwar development may drive financial development and enhance living conditions in the country.

Problem Statement

Over 35 years of gross economic mismanagement and business failures led Liberia's GDP to collapse by 90% in less than two decades (IMF, 2012). As a result of a general lack of business skills, up to 80% of Liberian small-business entrepreneurs fail in business beyond the first year (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2014; International Finance Corporation [IFC], 2014). The general business problem is that some Liberian small-business entrepreneurs fail in business because of inadequate business knowledge and financial and marketing skills, resulting in a loss of profitability and often their business. The specific business problem is that some Liberian small-business entrepreneurs lack the business skills needed to succeed in business beyond the first year.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs have used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The targeted population consisted of five central regional Liberian small-business entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to uncover the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs can use to succeed in business beyond the first year. The study results may help aspiring small-business entrepreneurs in

Liberia to improve their successes in sustaining a business, which may lead to additional jobs in the local communities.

Nature of the Study

There are three basic research methods: (a) qualitative, (b) mixed method, and (c) quantitative (Patton, 2014). I utilized a qualitative methodology in this study. Astalin (2013) defined qualitative research as a preparative process of classifying data into categories and recognizing relationships among categories; this suggests that data and meaning arise naturally from the research framework. In this study, I incorporated open-ended questions in the qualitative research method to explore the concept or central phenomenon. Researchers use qualitative methods to (a) discover an initial understanding of the research problem, (b) look at a range of ideas and feelings about the problem, and (c) go deeper into issues of interest and explore nuances related to the problem under review (Khan, 2014). Lack of small-business skills for entrepreneurs in Liberia requires a comprehensive explanation of the problem (Dukuly, 2012). The quantitative method would not work for this study because quantitative data collection and findings focus on a cause and effect of the issue. The purpose of the qualitative research method is to produce a more in-depth exploration of the issue (Patton, 2014). Mixed method research is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches within a period of a study (Patton, 2014). The use of mixed method research would make this study too widespread and would produce extensive data, thus convoluting the study.

I used an exploratory case study design in this study. Yin (2014) recommended a case study design when (a) the study answers “how” and “why” questions, (b) the

researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved, (c) the study covers contextual conditions pertinent to the phenomenon, and (d) boundaries between the context and phenomenon are not clear. Other designs such as narrative, ethnographic, phenomenological, and grounded theory design would not work for this study because these designs focus on individualized participants. Narrative researchers focus on the written or voiced words or visual representations of individuals (Etherington & Bridges, 2011; Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012). The purpose of ethnography is to comprehend the sociocultural backgrounds, processes, and implications of a cultural system from the viewpoint of the individuals of that system (Raab, 2013). The premise of a phenomenological study is to describe several individually lived experiences of the same phenomenon (Patton, 2014). The grounded theory would not allow for incorporating multiple detailed responses from participants within a business (Shover, 2012). Narrative, ethnographic, phenomenological, and grounded theory design models inadequately address applied business research problems (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

Research Question

The central research question was the following: What business skills do Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year? The associated interview questions aligned with the conceptual framework.

Interview Questions

1. What business skills do you use to address your daily business constraints?
2. What business skills do you use to maximize your available resources?
3. What business skills have you used to meet your management needs?

4. What business knowledge do you use to succeed in business?
5. What skills do you find work best to manage your business finance?
6. What skills do you find work best to manage the marketing of your business?
7. What additional information would you like to share regarding business skills you use to succeed in business?

Conceptual Framework

The theory of constraints is the primary conceptual framework I used in the study. The theory of constraints is a management philosophy introduced in 1984 by Dr. Goldratt in his book *The Goal* (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). Goldratt (1984) developed the theory of constraints to propose an explanation for business owners founded on the principle that managers can identify the weakest point in an organization to improve performance processes (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit, Gunay, & Vayvay, 2014). The primary concept of the theory of constraints is that constraints are the main obstacles preventing achievement of business owners' and management's objectives (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014) and that managers can preside over these constraints to accomplish the company's goal (Dehkordy, Shakhsian, Nawaser, Vesal, & Kamel, 2013; Hakkak, Hajizadeh Gashti, & Nawaser, 2014). A constraint is anything that might prevent a system from achieving its goal (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). The main constructs supporting the theory of constraints management philosophy are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills. Hassan (2013) studied constraints to sustain the growth of small businesses and found that internal constraints facing entrepreneurs are their lack of knowledge and financial and marketing

skills. As applied to this study, the theory of constraints holds that I would expect the propositions advanced by the theory to allow participants to explore adequately skills and experiences that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year.

Operational Definition

The following definitions are for phrases and terms that appear in the study. The aim is to ensure clarity for the audience of this study regarding the meaning of certain words.

Business failure: A business failure is a business that has not made a net profit for the previous two years and may, and usually does, conclude in business dissolution (Pereira, Basto, & Ferreira-da-Salva, 2014).

Business planning: Business planning is the process of determining a business's objectives, strategies, and predictions to promote its survival and development within a particular time frame (Honig & Karlsson, 2014).

Civil war: Civil war is a war amongst citizens and structured groups of the same country (Hegre, 2014).

Entrepreneur: An entrepreneur is an individual who (a) manages, (b) organizes, (c) assumes the risk by initiatives, and (d) attempts to make a profit (Shastri & Rao, 2014).

Entrepreneurial failure: An entrepreneurial failure is a business venture either dissolved or no longer in operation (Arasti, Zandi, & Bahmani, 2014).

Entrepreneurship: Estrin, Mickiewicz, and Stephan (2013) and Stull (2014) defined entrepreneurship as the process of starting a business or organization.

Indigenous group: Indigenous groups are peoples defined in the national and international world as having a set of specific rights grounded on their historical ties with certain territories (Okada, 2012).

Irregular warfare: Irregular warfare is a violent struggle between state and nonstate for legality and authority (Peron, 2014).

Small business: Small business is an independently owned, privately held business that varies in annual revenue, sales, and number of employees. Depending on the business industry, small businesses can range from zero to 1,500 employees (Farrington, 2012; Small Business Administration, 2014).

Sustainability: Sustainability is the capability to endure without being entirely used or destroyed (Jasiulewicz-Kaczmarek, 2014).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), an assumption is essentially a realistic expectation; it is something the researcher accepts as true without concrete proof. The study included five assumptions. The first assumption was that the study would offer significant value to small-business entrepreneurs through developing skills for managing small-business success beyond the first year in Liberia's Central Region and that its results would contribute to fewer business failures as well as more entrepreneur effectiveness. Second, I assumed that the selected participants would provide valuable

information and insight to the research question and requirements needed for my scholarly doctoral study.

The third assumption was that the evaluation of the conceptual framework of the study would explain behaviors of small-business entrepreneurs toward their business skills in Liberia's Central Region. The fourth assumption was that interviewing a small sample of small-business entrepreneurs would provide insight to complement the conceptual foundation accompanying the principle research problem. The fifth assumption was that participants would answer questions openly and honestly.

Limitations

Patton (2014) defined limitations as potential weaknesses or problems in a study. Boundaries may limit the research study, and the recollections of the participants may not be fully precise with details missing. Also, the probability existed that selected participants would not want to disclose details of their business skills and would withhold information. The lack of access to financial records, such as profits and loss statements, limits substantiation of reported business success. Sample size may formulate a limitation to the research (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). A sample size of five central region business entrepreneurs who voluntarily participated in the study was a potential limitation because the sample selection was not large enough to represent the entire small-business population in the region.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries that researchers enforce before commencing a study to limit the study's scope (Mitchell & Jolley, 2014). The delimitations of the study related

to the geographical area of the participants. Liberia's Central Region was large enough for adequate insight into the study. Tarway-Twalla (2011) conducted a survey of small-business owners in the Central Region of Liberia, and the findings highlighted that a significant number of micro and small-business owners contributed to Liberia's Central Region. There were five participants, which covered a broad view of the case study. In qualitative research, the sample is evaluated regarding the quality and quantity of data, not the number of participants (Patton, 2014). An eligibility criterion for the study's participants was that all participants had, at least, 1 year of experience doing business in Liberia's Central Region.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Researchers have pointed to small and large business startups as vital in increasing per capita income, increasing employment, and equalizing financial and social circumstances in Liberia (IMF, 2012). Before the civil war, the per capita income was U.S \$750, while the yearly GDP growth rate was 5.7% (Tarway-Twalla, 2008). In 2007, the calculated GDP per capita was U.S. \$500 (Tarway-Twalla, 2011). The study results may contribute to business practice by providing business skills to Liberian small-business entrepreneurs about identifying knowledge, financial, and marketing constraints within their organization and working to resolve them. Development of small-business entrepreneurs skills may (a) aid in increasing entrepreneurs' understanding of their business and its environment and (b) facilitate planning and predictions of the significant factors that affect business survival (Chwolka & Raith, 2012). Future researchers

focusing on business skills management of small-business entrepreneurs may use the findings of the study as a mechanism for introducing better business practices for small-business entrepreneurs.

Implications for Social Change

My research study may help interested leaders with goals of creating constructive social change. Social change forms society-based results that challenge underlying social problems on an institutional, individual, civic, domestic, and international level (Berkovich, 2014). Berkovich (2014) stated that social change could modify behaviors, laws, and institutional policies to reproduce better standards of fairness, opportunity, and diversity. In post-civil war Liberia, change is necessary to empower people, shape communities, and promote development. Effectively increasing small-business management skills in Liberia may help increase per capita income and the annual GDP growth rate (IMF, 2012). Ipiranga and Aguiar (2014) posited that a rise in knowledge could contribute to the small-business activity and could contribute to the evolving business environment. The results of the data analyzed and collected in this study may effect social change because the findings could help to increase (a) small-business entrepreneurship productivity and development and (b) business survival and performance in a developing country.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The focus was on small-business entrepreneurs within the Central

Region of Liberia. Currently, Liberian entrepreneurs have been managing their small businesses through trial and error (Government of Liberia, 2013). The use of this management strategy may be attributable to their lack of knowledge of basic business skills such as business planning, financial management, human resource development and management, and competitive pricing of products and services (Government of Liberia, 2013). The primary research question stemmed from the aforementioned lack of small-business skills: What business skills do Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year?

This literature review involves an exploration of business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs have used to succeed in business. Few scholarly articles and government documents exist on the topic. Therefore, research on the business skills that small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed included other developing countries such as Benin, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon, Tanzania, Philippines, Rwanda, Iran, and Bangladesh. Keywords for retrieving the electronic sources included the following: *small-business entrepreneur, business skills succeeding in business beyond the first year, theory of constraints, small-business failures in developing countries, Liberia civil war, entrepreneurship in conflict environments, lack of entrepreneur skills in SME's, entrepreneur knowledge, financial management, and marketing skills*. To search the keywords, I used electronic library databases including Business Source Complete/Premier, ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Dissertations, Theses at Walden University, Emerald, SAGE, Business Direct within Walden University's Library, LexisNexis, and Hoover's Regional Business News. Online search

engines include Google, Google Scholar, WorldCat, Bing, and Yahoo. Table 1 shows the complete literature used in the current research study. The table consists of online scholarly and peer-reviewed publications and books.

Table 1

Synopsis of Sources for the Literature Review

Reference Type	More than 5 years old (1984-2011)	Fewer than 5 years old (2012-2016)	Total
Total literature used in the current study	17	198	215
Geminal and seminal books	2	1	3
Government sources	0	7	7
Dissertations/doctoral studies	0	1	1
Peer-reviewed articles	15	189	204
Percentage of peer-reviewed articles	7%	93%	95%

The literature review has seven categories: (a) conceptual framework, (b) factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries, (c) Liberian Civil War, (d) conflicted environments and entrepreneur success, (e) knowledge management skills, (f) financial management skills, and (g) marketing management skills. The first category is the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework for this study is Goldratt's (1984) theory of constraints. The theory of constraints is a methodology for isolating the weakest points in an organization to improve the performance of systems (Simsit et al., 2014). Constraints are the main obstacles preventing achievement of business owners and management's objectives (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014). The second category is factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries. Small-business success and failure indicators in developing

countries contribute to various factors. The factors influencing small-business success and failure in developing countries are (a) financial, (b) managerial, (c) educational, (d) environmental, and (e) economical (Bula, 2012; Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). The third category is the Liberian Civil War. The Liberian Civil War lasted for 15 years and destroyed a voluminous amount of the country's economy and agriculture (Kieh, 2004). According to Kieh (2004), a confluence of different factors causing the war included: (a) historical, (b) political, (c) economical, (d) cultural, and (e) social. The fourth category is the conflicting environmental effects on entrepreneur success. Bruck, Naude, and Verwimp (2012) found that violent conflict has a direct effect on entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs in postwar environments face disruption to commerce, finding capital, and a decreased in business stability (Schaede, 2012).

The fifth, sixth, and seventh categories focus on the small-business constraints as aligned with the study's conceptual framework. The constraints that may contribute to entrepreneurs' success in business beyond the first year are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills. The fifth category is knowledge management skills. Competent assessment and management skills of knowledge are a business owner's most valuable resources and are essential for entrepreneurship success (El Badawy & Zakarian, 2014; Ongori, Iravo, & Munene, 2013). The two constructs that compose the knowledge management skills used in this study are (a) entrepreneurs' knowledge management and (b) intellectual capital. The sixth category is financial management skills. Two constructs compose the financial management skills used in this study: (a) working capital management, which also

subdivides into cash management, receivables management, and inventory management, and (b) financial reporting and analysis. The seventh category is marketing management skills. The constraint of entrepreneur marketing management skills used in the study is marketing mix. Azadi and Rahimzadeh (2012) proposed that the marketing mix consists of the combination of (a) product, (b) price, (c) place, and (d) promotion. Figure 1 shows a model of the outlined themes in the literature corresponding to the purpose of the study.

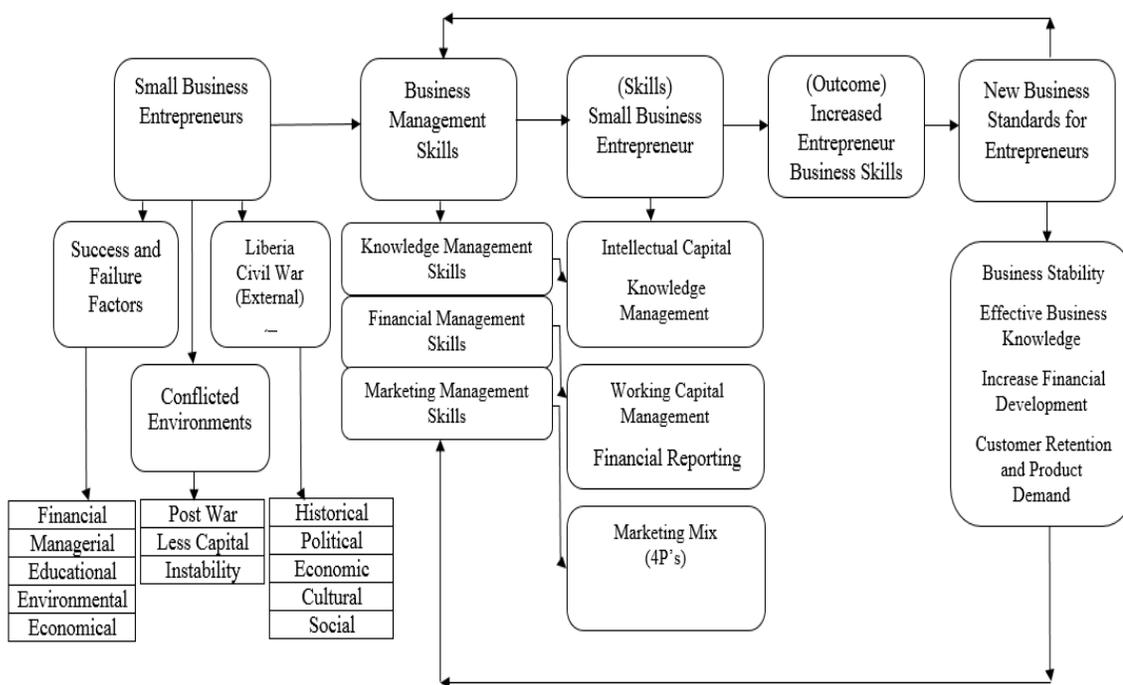


Figure 1. Small-business entrepreneurial model outlining themes in the literature that correspond to the purpose of the study.

Theory of Constraints

As applied to this study, I used the theory of constraints to explore possible skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs could implement to succeed in business beyond the first year. Goldratt (1984) developed the theory of constraints to propose an explanation for business owners founded on the principle that managers can identify the

weakest point in an organization to improve performance processes (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014). The main concept of the theory of constraints is that constraints are the main obstacles preventing achievement of business owners and management's objectives (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014) and that managers can preside over their constraints to accomplish the company's goal (Dehkordy et al., 2013; Hakkak et al., 2014). A constraint is anything that can prevent a system from achieving its goal (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). As aligned with the study's conceptual framework of the theory of constraints, the small-business constraints that may contribute to entrepreneurs' success in business beyond the first year are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills. An important constraint for companies is the absence of management skills (Olowu & Aliyu, 2015; Zubair, 2014). Fekri, Shafiabady, Nooranipour, and Ahghar (2012) applied the theory of constraints to evaluate the value of entrepreneurship education in learning entrepreneurship skills.

Goldratt (1984) introduced the theory of constraints to focus on the system constraints and to propose a set of principles and concepts to manage the constraints. Pretorius (2014) stated that the theory of constraints approach entails five steps to recognize and manage the system constraints:

1. identify systems constraint,
2. determine how to exploit system constraint,
3. subordinate all else to the above decision,
4. elevate system constraints, and

5. go back to Step 1.

Thus, if Liberian small-business entrepreneurs identify, exploit, subordinate, and elevate constraints in their businesses, they may increase their business skills and succeed in business beyond the first year. Managers use the theory of constraints as a structured framework to (a) understand the major relationships underlying their existing dilemmas, (b) identify an effective leverage point and a strategic direction for changing the current undesirable state into a more desirable future, and (c) implement specified improvements within their organizations (Shoemaker & Reid, 2006). Shoemaker and Reid (2006) stated that the theory of constraints applies primarily to managerial challenges. The constraints as identified in the study were entrepreneur lack of business skills in business knowledge, finance, and marketing (Choochote, 2013; Zubair, 2014). Olowu and Aliyu (2015) and Zubair (2014) found that inadequate management skills were the main factors to impede the evolution and survival of small businesses in Nigeria. Zubair's framework labeled small-business constraints as management skills in knowledge, accounting, and marketing. The absence of management experience challenges business owners' success (Preisendorfer, Bitz, & Bezuidenhout, 2012).

Business owners identify constraints by analyzing the fundamental problems in the organization (Simsit et al., 2014). The general business problem is that some Liberian small-business entrepreneurs fail in business because of inadequate business knowledge and financial and marketing skills, resulting in a loss of profitability and often their business. The specific business problem is that some Liberian small-business entrepreneurs lack the business skills to succeed in business beyond the first year. The

identified constraint for Liberian small-business owners is a lack of business skills including (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills. Business owners exploit constraints by quick improvements to the throughput of the constraint using existing resources (Simsit et al., 2014). In this study, small-business owners exploit constraints through management skill training (Olowu & Aliyu, 2015; Zubair, 2014). In developing countries, entrepreneurial training programs remain vital in providing the skills needed for small-business productivity (Sandhu, Hussain, & Matlay, 2012). During the exploitation of the skill training stage, entrepreneur business knowledge, financial management, and marketing management skills may be improved. Throughout the management-training phase, small-business entrepreneurs can either decrease or increase the effectiveness of constraints.

Business owners subordinate constraints by adjusting the rest of the system to allow the constraint to operate at the highest level (Simsit et al., 2014). According to Simsit et al. (2014), business owners use constraints to focus the organization on actions that improve performance. After subordination of constraints within the organization, if entrepreneurial business skills increase, the entrepreneur may reach performance that may lead to new business standards and business success beyond the first year. The new business standards that may take place as a result of effective entrepreneurial business skills are (a) business stability, (b) effective business knowledge, (c) increase of financial development, and (d) customer retention and product demand.

If business skills decrease, entrepreneurs must elevate constraints (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). Goldratt and Cox (1984) stated that to reach the elevation stage, exploitation

and subordinate stages must be insufficient in increasing the performance or elimination of the constraint. Elevation of constraints involves changes to the existing constraints, such as restructuring, additional training, divestment, or capital improvements (Fekri et al., 2012; Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014). During the elevation stage, management focuses on repeating the identifying, exploiting, and subordinate stages or any action needed to eliminate it (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). The focus of the study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. As aligned with the study's conceptual framework of the theory of constraints, if small-business owners can identify, exploit, subordinate, and elevate constraints, they may increase their business skills. An increase in business skills may result in increased entrepreneur performance and new business standards for success in business beyond the first year. Business owners use the theory of constraints to identify the weakest point in an organization and to improve performance processes (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014). Figure 2 indicates the steps to identify and manage the system constraints in the study.

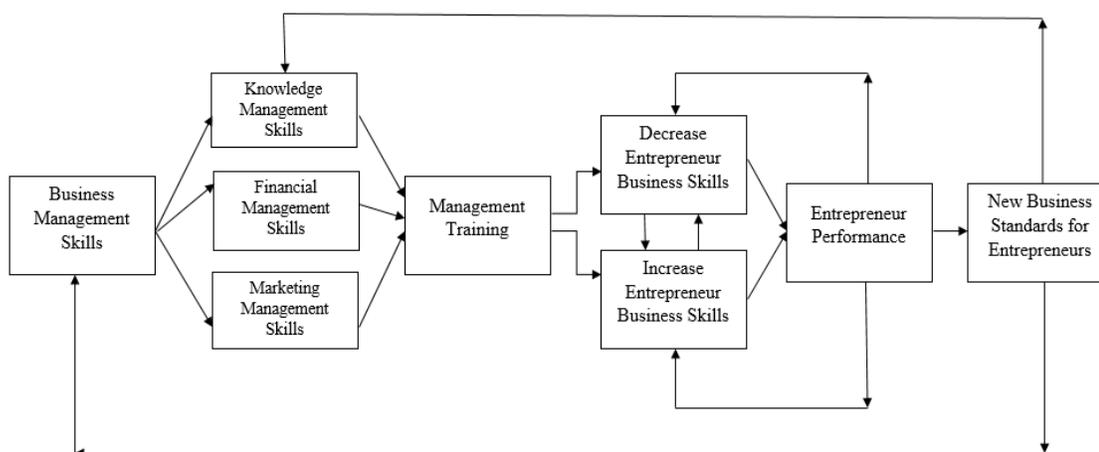


Figure 2. Business management skill model for new business standards effectiveness.

Factors Affecting Small-Business Success and Failure in Developing Countries

Small-business entrepreneurs find business failure a costly process for business operations and owners (Agwu, 2014; Solomon, Bryant, May, & Perry, 2013). However, entrepreneurs continue to take this risk because of their understanding that with their prior experiences and motivation they have the possibility of managing a small business that can succeed, resolve uncertainty, and allow a higher level of living (Hmieleski, Cole, & Baron, 2012). The need to deliver creativity and innovation often inspire entrepreneurs undergoing a business venture (Arasti et al., 2012). However, starting and managing some small businesses can be overwhelming without proper training, and this can lead to failure (Kimando, Sakwa, & Njogu, 2012).

Martin and Wilson (2014) reviewed the elusiveness of entrepreneurial opportunity and noted that while entrepreneurship research is exciting, it is empirically difficult to achieve. The elusiveness of entrepreneurial opportunity has led to numerous research studies concluding similar and varying factors for the failure and success of businesses.

One group of researchers, Fatoki (2014) and Lin, Ansell, and Andreeva (2012) argued that microbusiness owners' failure spans across four different categories: (a) solvency, (b) earnings, (c) bankruptcy, and (d) loss criterion. A business failure meets the bankruptcy criterion when the business owner legally declares bankruptcy, whereas it meets the loss criterion when there is a cessation of business operations to avoid further losses (Lin et al., 2012). The barriers to success for new ventures such as access to capital and effective management, as described by Kerr, Nanda, and Rhodes-Kropf (2014) and Kira, (2013), fall into all four categories of microbusiness failure. Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez (2013) found that three factors cause business failures in developing countries: (a) management inexperience, (b) negligence, and (c) inadequate capital. Similarly, Bula (2012) and Shonubi and Taiwo (2013) stated that the major factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries are (a) financial, (b) managerial, (c) educational, (d) environmental, and (e) economical.

Entrepreneurs can unite resources for (a) financial, (b) societal, and (c) cultural opportunities in a shifting environment by creating value for businesses and social communities (Alagirisamy, 2014; Chuang, 2013; Kibassa, 2012). Since small businesses employ over 80% of the working people throughout the world (Lofstrom & Bates, 2013), small business failure can be detrimental to economic productivity worldwide (Armstrong, 2013; Blattman et al., 2013; Halabi & Lussier, 2014). Small-business failure can also affect the social and economic survival in developing countries (Chimucheka, 2013; Coad, 2013; Wennberg & DeTienne, 2014). Business failure not only affects the individual loss of jobs, but also limits resources, decreases the production of goods, thus

depriving society of goods and services, and depletes economic and social welfare (Gnanakumar, 2012; Hertog, 2014; Obokoh & Asaolu, 2012). Unfortunately, economic factors researched over time regarding small businesses in Liberia implicate increasing business failure rates (Dukuly, 2012).

Financial. Small-business enterprises in postwar Liberia have significant potential for positive consequences such as a decrease in conflict and a stimulation of economic growth (Dukuly, 2012). However, Liberian entrepreneurs believe that having limited access to financing hinders a business (Kazimoto, 2014; Kira & He, 2012). Ng and Kee (2012) confirm the belief that Liberian entrepreneurs have by finding that financial limitation is the primary factor contributing to small-business failures in developing countries. Jafarnejad, Abbaszadeh, Ebrahimi, and Abtahi (2012) state that insufficient capital to start and sustain a business is a prime factor causing most entrepreneurial ventures in developing countries to fail. The accessibility of finance is a significant element in the development, growth, and success of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs; Abdulsaleh & Worthington, 2013). Mutyenyo (2014) and Sangsubhan and Basri (2012) identified countries with weak economic conditions and found that micro and small-scale businesses financed through credit sources propelled expansion and startup. Consequently, external financial availability positivity connected with small-business startups is an important symbol of entrepreneurship (Coleman, Cotei, & Farhat, 2013; Ly & Mason, 2012; Zubair, 2014).

However, Richter and Kemter (as cited in Ng & Kee, 2012) stated that critical success factors for small businesses are complex and multifaceted and can, therefore, not

be attributed to just financial factors. Shortage of business education, in addition to the lack of accessibility to financing, makes developing, growing, and owning a business in Liberia extremely difficult (Dahmen & Rodríguez, 2014; Kirsten, 2013). In Kenya, Bula (2012) found that in addition to finance, the factors affecting small-business entrepreneurship development are: (a) education, (b) inequality in culture power, (c) discrimination against youth, (d) corruption, and (e) limited market access. In the developing country of Benin, the success factors for small-business entrepreneurs included: (a) a good education, (b) family influence, and (c) initial financial capital.

Financial unavailability in these developing countries impedes employment and economic growth and increases poverty (Kaliba, Yigletu, Brownell, Johnny, & Ziadee, 2012). Thus, to promote sustainable economic development for SMEs in Liberia, the enterpriser's access to financial services must be improved (Kaliba et al., 2012). The problem arises when only a few small-business entrepreneurs receive financial support despite the growing policies on monetarist support (Mago & Toro, 2013).

Managerial. Panda and Dash (2014) found the lack of entrepreneurial training and experience as major constraints in developing countries. An entrepreneur's managerial skill is found to be a major determinant of the growth and survival of his or her business (Ayala, & Manzano, 2014; Olowu & Aliyu, 2015). However, in South Africa, there is a lack of managerial and business skills that are affecting the success of entrepreneurs (Preisendorfer et al., 2012). Many other researchers have supported this notion, such as Espinosa (2013), who found that the major factor causing small-business failures in developing countries is managerial incompetence. In addition, Bagire and

Namada (2013) and Morales and Marquina (2013), all found that a prime cause of microbusiness failure is limited business management planning skills.

Mahajar, Yunas, and Bin Abd Razak (2013) studied that the managerial business practices and skills used by small-business entrepreneurs were strategic, financial, marketing, and knowledge management. These managerial practices and capabilities influenced entrepreneurial decision making that led to business success and growth. In relation, Olowu and Aliyu (2015) concluded that investment in knowledge, skills, and abilities enhance the productivity of entrepreneurs.

Shonubi and Taiwo (2013) conducted a quantitative study examining how self-employed entrepreneurs in Lagos State, Nigeria managed their businesses despite never having a formal education in management. Shonubi and Taiwo used a cluster sampling technique to select and analyze 427 small and medium-scale entrepreneurs. An important contributor to an entrepreneur's success in Lagos State was the informal management knowledge and experience acquired from colleagues, peers, family, and friends (Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). Thus, Shonubi and Taiwo recommended that to be a successful manager, every unsuccessful entrepreneur should look inward and attempt to discover some inherent management characteristics that lie within them.

Educational. According to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry (2014), entrepreneurs in the Republic of Liberia lack adequate education in business development. This inadequacy creates a dilemma because ensuring the growth of a small-business startup requires gaining access to educational training and funding (Al-Hyari, 2013; Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013; Siow Song Teng, Singh Bhatia, & Anwar, 2011). Maric

(2013) and Yeboah (2014) agreed with having stated that securing adequate education and capital is the most critical aspect of small-business success. Dugassa (2012) also suggested the importance of entrepreneurship education by reviewing sustainability in small firms. Dugassa found that entrepreneurs who had undergone entrepreneurship training had better entrepreneurial intentions than entrepreneurs who had not undergone training.

Neneh (2014) found that in other developing countries such as Cameroon, lack of education, in addition to difficulties with funding and a weak and corrupted government, becomes an obstacle for entrepreneurs. In the developing country of India, Sandhu et al. (2012) prepared a qualitative study to explore the educational needs of small-business entrepreneurs working in the agricultural subdivision of the Indian economy. Sandhu et al. concluded that in India and other developing countries such as Liberia, entrepreneurial training programs remain vital in providing the skills needed for small-business productivity.

Environmental. In Liberia, environmental factors such as rapid population growth, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental degradation have the most effect on small-business farmers (Alfaro & Miller, 2013; Cant & Wiid, 2013; Cornforth, 2013; Gardner, 2014; Magigi, 2013). When changes in the environment of developing countries occur, there is more uncertainty for small business than there is for large corporations (Nwachukwu, 2012). Similarly, deterioration of the physical environment around cities mainly affects the urban poor (Rishi & Khuntia, 2012). Generating a successful business in Liberia entails lessening the poverty level and increasing the educational level (Brown,

Locario, & Notman, 2011). However, relative poverty in Liberia has minimally changed since the 1990s (Chen & Ravallion, 2013).

In developing countries such as Liberia, many new businesses cease because of the shortage of access to infrastructural resources (Panda & Dash, 2014). Poor infrastructure is a particular environmental challenge facing Liberian entrepreneurs and their small firms (Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Gorlorwulu, 2011). Infrastructures needed for economic development such as ample power supply, adequate roads, suitable rivers, and rail-transportation facilities are in excessively unappealing conditions in most African countries (Mohan, 2013). According to the U.S. Commercial Service (2012), important motivators of development in Liberia include (a) farming, (b) forestry, (c) mining, (d) industrialization, and (e) amenities. The poor infrastructure in rural Liberia has limited the country's timber shipments (IMF, 2012). Poor-quality roads, bridges, ports-of-entry, electrical grids, and water systems present major difficulties to national travel (Masood & Shah, 2012; Mohan, 2013). One challenge of inadequate transportation and poor-quality roads in Liberia is the increased cost business owners experience for moving goods within country boundaries (IMF, 2012). Moreover, the unattainability of electric power during operations and production processes causes damage to goods and equipment, which also increases the cost to small-business entrepreneurs (Mohan, 2013). Strong land and water transport infrastructures can substantially influence the economic growth of a developing country (Rasul, 2015).

Another example of poor infrastructure in Liberia is the problem with information technology and communication (Tambo, Ugwu, & Ngogang, 2014). Liberia, like most

third-world countries in Africa, has an incomplete information and communication infrastructure (Gardner, 2014; IMF, 2012). This weakness results in the low level of Internet usage (Pejovic, Johnson, Zheleva, Belding, & Parks, 2012). Liberia has minimal telephone penetration and computing infrastructure as well as inadequate broadcasting facilities (IMF, 2012).

In relation, Arthur (2011) stated that the destruction of the physical infrastructures of (a) telecommunications, (b) airports, (c) ports and harbors, (d) roads, (e) energy supplies, and (f) health and education in Liberia was associated with continuous wars and conflicts. Liberia's 14-year civil war destroyed domestic agricultural production, extension services, veterinary and agricultural education, and domestic food security (Stanturf, Goodrick, Warren, Chamley, & Stegall, 2015). Regardless of the association between poor infrastructure and war, the African governments disregard this connection because of government corruptions and poor policies (Semali, Baker, & Freer, 2013).

Liberia continues to be a highly impoverished country with the IMF and Liberian experts estimating the real 2011 GDP of \$599.5 million USD and an expected 2012 USD of \$656.4 million (U.S. Commercial Service, 2012). Infrastructure rehabilitation in Liberia can make a positive contribution to the life of ordinary people (Percoco, 2012). The revitalization of the Liberian economic market and the establishment of infrastructure can address food and agriculture security, water and sanitation issues, and establish empowerment for the rural poor (Arthur, 2011). Dessus, Hoffman, and Lofgren (2012) stated that spending on infrastructure tends to cause relatively strong and immediate growth, as well as poverty reduction.

Also speaking to Liberia's impoverishment is inflation. Inflation in Liberia increased from an average of 7.5% in December 2010 to 8.5% in 2011. Inflationary forces drove food and energy rates up while restricting domestic product supply (Gardner, 2014; IMF, 2012; Tarway-Twalla, 2008). According to Ezeh, Bongaarts, and Mberu (2012), the financial sector in Africa has slow growth because of economic difficulties in developing countries. Since the 1990s, the Freeport of Monrovia, used for international trade services, shows limitations (Munive, 2011). Amenities and security at the country's only international airport are advancing (U.S. Commercial Service, 2012). Liberia's unskilled labor force and literacy rates rank in the bottom 10 of African countries, contributing to the country's decreasing economic environment (African Development Bank Group, 2013).

Economical. Multinational enterprises (MNEs) are multination corporations that have competitive advantages. These advantages allow MNEs to survive in foreign countries and affect local economies through their spillover effects (Malik, Rehman, Ashraf, & Abbas, 2012; Ocloo, Akaba, & Worwui-Brown, 2014). MNEs are critical players in the growth of global business (Giuliani, Gorgoni, Gunther, & Rabellotti, 2014; Hayat, 2014; Louart & Martin, 2012; Schoon & Duckworth, 2012). Their entry into developing countries has a direct effect on the labor market, productivity, wages, and employment. An MNE's goal is to educate the locals with global business knowledge and enhance their economic system (Heimonen, 2012; Nigam & Su, 2013). Nigam and Su (2013) demonstrated an example of global knowledge with Indian managers and management systems that used Western influences because they (a) received a Western

education, (b) had work experience in the West, and (c) worked in Western business models within India.

Small and medium enterprises also play an important part in the economies of numerous countries (Nwachukwu, 2012). SME's are critical to economic success and achievements of both developing and developed countries (Long, 2013; Pack, 2012; Waziri, 2012). The success of these small businesses in developing countries decreases unemployment and promotes improved living conditions (Ibrahim, Dorina, & Abdelrazek, 2014). However, Ng and Kee (2012) proposed that government involvement and support is essential in developing countries. Government involvement can pose a problem for developing countries such as Liberia because the legal system is vulnerable and unpredictable, and the regulations pertaining to enterprises and contracts are unreliable (U.S. Commercial Service, 2012).

Liberia Civil War

Liberia's first civil war prompted a massive collapse in the country's financial, governmental, and social stability, causing most international traders and foreign businesses to leave the country (IMF, 2012). Liberia was a developing country before the civil war (Kieh, 2004). According to Kieh (2004), a confluence of types of factors causing the war included: (a) historical, (b) political, (c) economical, (d) social, and (e) cultural. Thus, one factor alone does not explain the origin of the civil war.

Historical factors. The historical factor returns to the roots of Liberia. In the early 1820s, free slaves from America returned to Africa as a result of the implementation of various laws to help the slave system in the United States (Munive,

2011). Munive (2011) proposed that, since Liberia was a coastal country, the country was efficient enough to accept migrant slaves. When the free slaves arrived in Liberia, they met various indigenous ethnic groups residing in the area (Brown et al., 2011). The American-Liberian free slaves decided to create a system similar to the American slave operations. The American-Liberian free slaves created a class system that would minimize the rights of native Liberians and use them for free labor. This overhauling of the indigenous ethnic group caused numerous wars against both sides, but through close contacts and support of America, the American-Liberian group tyrannized the native indigenous groups (Kieh, 2004).

Political factors. The large issue was that the American-Liberians prohibited Liberia's indigenous groups from having Liberian citizenship and from performing civic tasks while still requiring them to pay taxes (Kazanjian, 2011). The system continued until Liberian President Tubman took office in the early 1940s (Kieh, 2004). Implementation of new systems allowed indigenous ethnic groups to vote and own some land (Kazanjian, 2011). Kazanjian (2011) stated that various political factors contributed to the Liberian Civil War; one being that the American-Liberians established laws that only benefited them. According to Kieh (2004), regarding human rights, various regimes (presidencies) violated the constitutionally guaranteed rights of the Liberian people's freedoms of assembly, association, speech, thought, and press. Various presidential regimes used bullying, violence, and killing of the native indigenous ethnic groups to control and remain in political power. Dukuly (2012) stated that successful operations of SME's are a critical factor in the attainment of propoor growth and for minimizing

Liberia's reversion to political conflict. Another political factor leading to the war was Liberia's lengthy history of conducting fraudulent elections. As per the Guinness Book of World Records, the 1927 presidential election between President Charles D.B King and Thomas J.R. Faulkner was one of the most fraudulent elections worldwide (Kieh, 2004).

Economic factors. Economic factors in the country also influenced the civil war. According to Kieh (2004), similar to the economies of other peripheral capitalist states, the Liberian economy was nonindustrialized and export-oriented. The basis of the economy was rubber, iron, ore, timber and other minerals (Munive, 2011). There were two classes in Liberia: the upper class and the lower class. The upper class consisted of lawyers, artists, and high government officials while the lower class consisted of farmers that worked for cash. The lower class produced income by selling their labor and farming services to the upper class. Most of the lower class lived in rural areas and were not at an advantage regarding social and economic services from the upper class (Kazanjian, 2011; Kieh, 2004). According to Kieh, the upper class consisted mainly of American-Liberians and their families. These situations caused increased conflict regarding economic stability between classes. The source of dispute was the unequal apportionment of income and wealth, political control, and social assistances (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). The presiding class, representing 4% of the Liberian population in the 1970s and 6% in the 1980s, regulated 65% and 70% of the domestic capital (Kieh, 2004).

Cultural factors. An important cultural factor that influenced the civil war was ethnicity (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). Liberia consists of 16 ethnic groups including Caribbean, other Africans, and American-Liberians (Kieh, 2004). Kieh (2004) researched

and found that conflicts between ethnic groups and American-Liberians were a constant issue in Liberia history. There had been various wars over land, trade, and property in the country well before the American-Liberians arrived. When the American-Liberians arrived in the 1820s, the primary conflicts between the American-Liberians and native Liberians were over citizenship, taxation without representation, political involvement, territory, and command over the economic and political authority (Munive, 2011). The American-Liberian referred to themselves as civilized and referred to the indigenous ethnic groups as *bush* or *country* people. Kieh stated that there was also ethnic conflict over skin color. The American-Liberians considered the lighter skin citizens civilized and superior to the darker skin citizens. Kieh's conclusion to the major conflict that led to the civil war was that the American-Liberians and the light skin Liberians held all the wealthy professional jobs such as lawyers, merchants, and self-employment while the indigenous ethnic groups worked for labor or farmed.

Social factor. The social factor in the country that provoked the civil war was the poor health and educational systems in the country (Brown et al., 2011; Stith, 2012). According to Kieh (2004), in 1989, the literacy rate in Liberia stood at a dismal 85%, and only 33% of the total population of about 2.5 million people had access to health care. The civil war destabilized the medical education system and obligated many providers and health-related non-government organizations (NGOs) to depart the country (Knowlton et al., 2013). With appropriate training for small-business entrepreneurs, developmental success can lead to social and economic effectiveness (Naude, 2013). The disturbance of the educational system led to high rates of illiteracy. In 2007, 41% of 15 to

19-year-old girls and 47% of 20 to 24-year-old women could not read (McCarragher et al., 2013). These medical and social educational factors contributed significantly to the Liberian Civil War. Excess rural-urban migration, public worker layoffs, returning refugees from other countries, and a vast number of postwar affected rehabilitated youths made up the social-economic world of postwar Liberia (Borba et al., 2015; Kieh, 2004).

Conflicted Environments and Entrepreneurs Success

Liberia is a third-world country facing post-civil war reconstruction. The perception of the third world serves to individualize countries suffering from the increased level of poverty and low economic development (Abouraia, 2014). In addition to the major factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries, Liberia's small-business entrepreneurs also face historical and post-civil war factors (Bula, 2012; Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). Entrepreneurs in postwar environments face the disruption of commerce, the tough search for capital, and the decrease in business stability (Djip, 2014; Schaede, 2012). In a global review of small and medium enterprise strategies, Kulemeka, Kululanga, and Morton (2015) asserted that external conditions such as regulation, industry conditions, and broad economic conditions are critical determinants of success.

As a developing country, the majority of Kenya's employment is constructed by medium and small businesses (Njanja, Ogutu, & Pellisier, 2012). Thus, Njanja, Ogutu, and Pellisier (2012) studied small-business enterprises in Kenya to identify the effects of external circumstances on internal management skills. Njanja et al. and Chadomoyo and Dumbu (2012) stated that the external factors as issues are not in the management's

control, specifically the political and legal, economic, sociocultural, and technological factors. Kenya, like Liberia, experienced an upsurge of challenges including a provisional coalition government, financial decline, implementation of a novel constitution, and hostility towards cultural diversity (Njanja et al., 2012). Njanja et al. studied the effects of challenges on management skills including strategic management, marketing skills, and interpersonal skills. Njanja et al. proposed that there is a significant correlation between management skills and environmental factors. Njanja et al. concluded that the environment had no noteworthy effect on the execution of the medium and small-business environment factors. Njanja et al. suggested that external environments affect execution by changing the management tactics of businesses. Therefore, the main regulating factors are the character of the business and the ability of managers to react to the environment by dictating strategies.

Bruck et al. (2012) reviewed the effects of violent mass conflicts on entrepreneurship in developing countries. Bruck et al. established that violent conflict, such as civil wars, resulted in various consequences to small-business entrepreneurs. Bruck et al. concluded that entrepreneurs are required to adjust their supply chain and manage information rapidly to survive within a conflict-torn environment. Canares (2011) used case studies of entrepreneurship in rural, violence-conflicted Philippines to argue that conflict has minor effects on deciding to initiate and maintain entrepreneurial movements. Canares found that conflict influenced investment and expansion decisions of entrepreneurs. Canares concluded that in rural, violence-conflicted Philippines, both

violence and peace drives entrepreneurs to respond either to survival needs or opportunities.

McCoskey (2011) investigated the misrepresentations instituted by foreign direct investment on the entrepreneurial activity of preconflict Liberia. McCoskey found that the ruling population in Liberia allocated domestic entrepreneurship to foreign firms. McCoskey concluded that foreign entrepreneurs benefited from Liberia's natural resources. While benefiting the presiding class, foreign entrepreneurs disabled the progression of labor market deepening and competitiveness and permitted the sustained limitation of power towards the rural Liberians. Chowdhury (2011) studied a conflict-torn region in Bangladesh, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), to isolate the elements of free enterprise in the CHT region compared to nonconflicted regions. Chowdhury concluded that starting and maintaining an enterprise in the CHT region demands additional funds and business knowledge. Chowdhury also concluded that violent conflict cultural characteristics are more discouraging to entrepreneurs in the CHT than in other regions. Traditional financing models are unsuccessful when devastating and protracted conflicts severely reduce domestic managerial and entrepreneurial capacities (Gorlorwulu, 2011).

Thus far, the discussion in the literature has focused on business success and failure indicators in developing countries, historical factors related to Liberia's civil war, and conflicted environment effects on entrepreneurship success. The factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries discussed were (a) financial, (b) managerial, (c) educational, (d) environmental, and (e) economical (Bula, 2012; Dorrego, Costa, & Fernández, 2013; Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). The Liberian Civil War

lasted for 15 years and destroyed a voluminous amount of the country's economy and agriculture (Kieh, 2004). Schaede (2012) stated that entrepreneurs in postwar environments face disruption to commerce, difficulties finding capital, and decreases in business stability. Njanja et al. (2012) found that the environment had no noteworthy effect on the execution of the medium and small-business environment factors. Based on the literature discussed, numerous external and internal factors may limit small-business entrepreneurs in Liberia's Central Region.

The focus of the study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR; 2012), in Liberia, many small and medium-sized business owners lack basic business skills, such as bookkeeping, marketing, and product placement. Having a clear and structured business plan may turn into a clear predictor of the success of the project (Fernández-Guerrero, Revuelto-Taboada, & Simón-Moya, 2012). As aligned with the study's conceptual framework of the theory of constraints, the small-business constraints that may contribute to entrepreneurs' success in business beyond the first year are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills.

Business Management Skills

Zubair (2014) revealed that the constraints impeding financial evolution and survival of small-enterprises in the developing country of Nigeria are (a) ineffective management, (b) absence of training and skill, and (c) insufficient need for merchandise and services. An entrepreneur essentially decreases his failure rate by training and

developing strong skill sets (Koledoye & Adeola, 2014; Panda & Dash, 2014). The development of small and medium-size enterprises has long been on the political agenda to create employment and economic growth (Kibassa, 2012; Morales & Marquina, 2013). However, small business failures can be detrimental to social and economic survival in developing countries as well as worldwide (Blattman et al., 2013). Business failure can cause individual loss of jobs, limitations of resource production of goods and services in the culture, a decrease in goods and services, and a depletion in economic and social welfare (Gnanakumar, 2012; Hertog, 2014; Obokoh & Asaolu, 2012).

One of the primary causes of microbusiness failures is limited business-management-planning skills (Bagire & Namada, 2013; Etzioni, 2014; Morales & Marquina, 2013). Pryor, Toombs, Anderson, and White (2009) found that small-business entrepreneurs commence their journey striving for excellence. These small-business creators need their businesses to succeed to reach personal success; yet, many of these entrepreneurs do not have the knowledge to operate their businesses strategically, and they frequently do not utilize quality systems (Pryor et al., 2009). Further, Choochote (2013) found that SME's lack in management, technology, marketing, and finance capabilities in comparison to large enterprises. Pryor et al. recommended that small-business leaders utilize multiple management models and standards in conjunction with quality initiatives and tools to improve their organization and their operations.

Entrepreneurs use business management skills in their plan to perform effectively in competitive markets (Morales & Marquina, 2013; Osinde, Iravo, Munene, & Omayio, 2013). Failure and success are the two boundaries of the performance scale (Bélanger,

Lafrenière, Vallerand, & Kruglanski, 2013). Osinde et al. (2013) and Santos and Brito (2012) proposed the various measurements and levels of performance within organizations as (a) financial performance, (b) business performance, (c) social performance, (d) environmental performance, and (e) organization effectiveness. The performance of an organization is contingent on the proper management of measurements and levels (Osinde et al., 2013; Santos & Brito, 2012).

Osinde et al. (2013) studied the effects of multiple management skills and strategies on the performance of medium and small businesses in Kenya, a developing country. The management strategies selected were (a) human resource, (b) strategic management, (c) financial, (d) entrepreneurial, (e) marketing, (f) interpersonal, and (g) environmental. Osinde et al. observed that organizational performance was contingent on the selected strategy, environment, and structure. Osinde et al. concluded that within the small-business environment, the values that have the most effect on business performance are (a) marketing management skills, (b) finance capitalization skills, and (c) entrepreneurship management skills. Strategic management factors and human resource proved unfavorable to performance. In general, skilled managers achieve expected levels of output (success) and vice versa for failure (Osinde et al., 2013).

Knowledge Management Skills

Lack of business knowledge is a major constraint hindering the growth of SME's in developing countries (Chowdhury, Islam, & Alam, 2013). Chowdhury et al. (2013) stated that SMEs with more experienced, educated, and skilled employees are expected to be more efficient. Shannak, Masa'deh, and Akour (2012) stated that knowledge

management is a skill that fosters creating, sharing, learning, enhancing, organizing, and applying knowledge to benefit both the organization and its customers. Additionally, Shannak et al. proposed that the knowledge strategy concept bridges strategic management and knowledge management by building on the knowledge-based view of the firm. A skilled entrepreneur recognizes this unique knowledge, either existing in the firm or required for a projected situation, and drafts ways to develop and capitalize on it (Acur, Kandemir, & Boer, 2012). Skill building is an approach to achieving organizational goals and objectives that will help determine the organizational vision and lead to competitive advantage (Acur et al., 2012).

More recently, organizational performance has increasingly become a knowledge-related issue (Kianto, Ritala, Spender, & Vanhala, 2014). The fact that many business failures in developing countries are attributable to incompetence in the management and identification of crises highlights this relationship (Stevens, 2015; Zhu, Wittmann, & Peng, 2012). That is why it is of such importance that businesses in developing countries with constant crises and changes have procedures in place for managing knowledge in flexible environments (Ugalde-Blinda, Balbastre-Benavent, Canet-Giner, & Escribá-Carda, 2014). According to Solomona and Davis (2012), the major issues facing entrepreneurs in countries of the South Pacific include (a) deficient industry and market information and (b) poor business knowledge and planning skills. Co (2004) conducted research in the Philippines, a country whose small-business environment is similar to Liberia's, and offered learning lessons to other developing countries. Co taught the following in his or her lessons: (a) small-business entrepreneurs must understand the

macroeconomics of small-business formation and development; (b) government should enable entrepreneurs to prosper by not having them pay high taxes; and (c) small-business owners flourish not only through financial assistance but also through consultation, technical and marketing assistance, and training.

In addition to knowledge management, intellectual capital is another crucial element of knowledge in organizations (Hsu & Sabherwai, 2012; Kianto, Andreeva, & Pavlov, 2013; Kianto et al., 2014). According to Kianto et al. (2013), the focus of intellectual capital management is on the strategic level and encompasses matters such as consumer relationships, business practices, and brands. Meanwhile, knowledge management encompasses activities dealing with information on the operational and tactical levels.

Knowledge management. With evolving global technology, knowledge management became an important strategic factor of organizations because it associates with business capabilities to achieve competitive advantage (Durst & Wilhelm, 2012; Hadizah, 2013; Zaied, Hussein, & Hassan, 2012). The focus of knowledge management (KM) is to understand competitive advantage, build on core capability, and produce intellectual capital (Sook-Ling & Yee-Yen, 2014). Investment in knowledge skills and abilities has shown to enhance the productivity of entrepreneurs (Olowu & Aliyu, 2015). Thus, competent assessment and management skills of knowledge are a business owner's most valuable resources and are essential for entrepreneurship success (El Badawy & Zakarian, 2014; Ongori et al., 2013). As Perry (2014) stated, the 21st

century is the century of knowledge, and those who use the most knowledge will become the leaders in their fields.

According to Kayani and Zia (2012), the typical stages of the knowledge management process are (a) gathering, (b) storing, (c) sharing, (d) structuring, (e) generating, (f) controlling, (g) codifying, (h) exploiting, and (i) distributing. Kayani and Zia's framework theorized that knowledge management becomes a critical concern for organizations because it can (a) offer benefits containing improvement in the business process, (b) create a competitive edge, (c) save money and time, and (d) increase the communication which improves productivity. Kayani and Zia presented a framework validating Wiig's (1993), and William and Bukowitz's (2000) models of knowledge management, which corresponds to the purpose of the study. Wigg's model showed that during the process of knowledge management, individuals and companies must look to (a) build, (b) hold, (c) pool, and (d) use knowledge. William and Bukowitz's model of knowledge management included (a) getting, using, learning and contributing knowledge, and (b) assessing, building, sustaining and maintaining knowledge. Kayani and Zia stated that successful knowledge management in organizations leads to (a) improvement in customer service, (b) employee retention by recognizing the value of their knowledge, (c) acceleration of innovation by encouraging ideas, and (d) cost reductions by eliminating redundancy or unwanted process. Figure 3 indicates the breakdown of the study's entrepreneur business model, which basis is upon a compilation of the frameworks and models described above. The figure also shows how the increase and gain of business knowledge affect the effectiveness of entrepreneurs' success and new business standards.

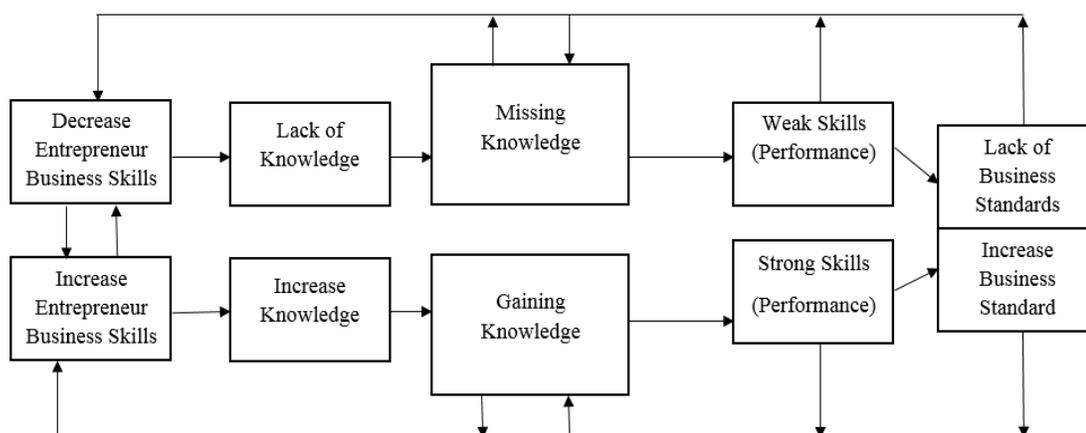


Figure 3. Increased entrepreneur business skills model for new business standards effectiveness.

Pauleen and Gorman (2011) described the personal management of knowledge as a developing set of comprehensions, abilities, and experiences that allow individuals to succeed and survive in multifaceted and evolving social and organizational settings. Pauleen and Gorman determined that one can remain competitive by applying five personal knowledge management strategic skills: (a) management, (b) utilization of technology, (c) social and communication skills (d) lifelong learning, and (e) estimating and predicting. Thus, by developing effective personal knowledge management, small businesses increase their intellectual capital (Pauleen & Gorman, 2011).

Klapalova (2012) researched the barriers and drivers of entrepreneurship stemming from external as well as from internal environments in South Moravia, Czech Republic. The participants of the study were owners and managers of small and middle-sized tourism and hospitality enterprises. Klapalova's results showed that the two primary barriers are a lack of the managers' knowledge and poor work performance. Similarly, Megdadi, Al-Sukkar, and Hammouri (2012) studied factors and benefits of knowledge

management practices by small businesses and midsized organizations in Irbed, a District of Jordan. Megdadi et al. determined that the relevant factors necessary for SME management for maintaining business success and progress are (a) training, (b) education, (c) strategy, and (e) purpose. Maric (2013) found that workers with knowledge are potential entrepreneurs and are of critical importance to an organization.

Saini (2013) studied the effect of knowledge management practices on small businesses. Saini found that small and medium enterprises encountered finance, skill, and resource inadequacies. Managers frequently lack managerial knowledge and organizational competencies, indicating poor business planning (Saini, 2013). Saini concluded that implementation of knowledge management was a fit way to resolve these issues and improve a small or medium-sized enterprise's capabilities in innovation and business performance. Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the study's entrepreneur performance model for new business standards effectiveness.

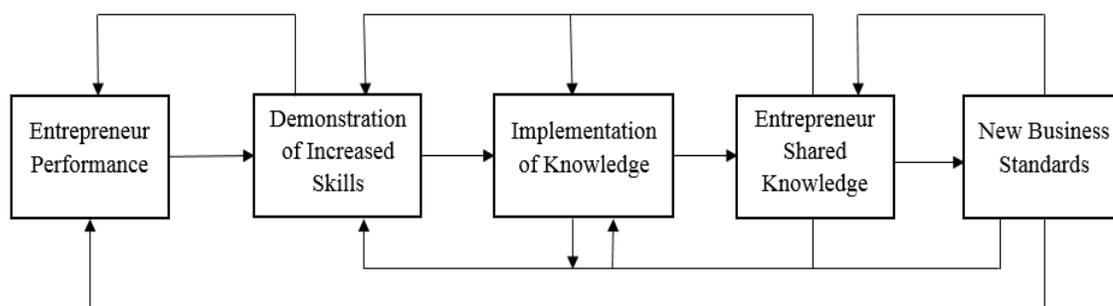


Figure 4. Entrepreneur performance model for new business standards effectiveness.

Burja and Burja (2013) described the Romanian entrepreneurship environment capacity as advantageous for determining the sustained economic growth and transition

into the knowledge economy. Burja and Burja discovered that the characteristics of an effective entrepreneurship environment that focuses on knowledge economy include (a) efficient functioning of factors; (b) strongly connected knowledge creation processes, namely in synthesis; (c) education sector; (d) research; and (e) intellectual capital infrastructure.

Maas, Bunders, and Zweekhorst (2013) studied the social entrepreneurship of Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) in the developing country of Bangladesh. The goal of the study was to determine the best approach to improve the conditions of underprivileged individuals living in developing countries. Maas et al. found that entrepreneurs operating in resource-constrained surroundings made do with accessible resources in a practice called bricolage. Bricolage is an educational process in which one acquires and transforms knowledge to create new and advanced solutions to enhance both the society and entrepreneur's conditions (Maas et al., 2013). Smith and Blundel (2014) defined bricolage as an entrepreneur's ability to use or make whatever material or idea they have available to them in the immediate now, to create some form of business effectiveness. Smith and Blundel stated that any successful entrepreneur constrained by circumstances with a budget of zero will make use of what they have. Linna (2013) investigated an entrepreneur's utilization of bricolage in developing countries. Linna learned that local entrepreneurs widely used bricolage as a component of the advancement procedures in resource-constrained environments of developing countries.

Intellectual capital. Intellectual capital refers to knowledge that can convert into value and involves intellectual resources such as experience, knowledge, and intellectual

property (Rexhepi, Ibraimi, & Veseli, 2013). Intellectual capital is fundamental to economic knowledge and has become an intangible asset that generates strategic value for companies (Anatolievna Molodchik, Anatolievna Shakina, & Barajas, 2014; Marcin, 2013; Ngwenya, 2013). An increase in intellectual capital, accomplished by investing in the training of employees and entrepreneurs, has been shown to increase a company's market value (Cohen, Naoum, & Vlismas, 2014; Dammak, 2015). Hence, it is beneficial for organizations to initiate efforts to gain an understanding and expertise in managing intellectual capital to create future economic and knowledge wealth (Fischer & Marsh, 2014).

According to Jardon and Martos (2012), three components of intellectual capital are (a) human capital that lies within people such as experience in business, education, and motivation; (b) an organizations' structural capital; and (c) relational capital within the organization and the environmental relations. The different components of intellectual capital are essential for SME's and are the basis of the success of the business (Ugalde-Blinda et al., 2014). Intellectual capital involves investment in all three components: human, structural, and relational capital (Santos-Radrigues, Faria, Cranfield, & Morales, 2013).

Hormiga, Hancock, and Valls-pasola (2013) demonstrated the importance of intellectual capital by analyzing management techniques of intellectual capital frequently used by entrepreneurs in new endeavors. Hormiga et al. then related these criteria to business performance and revealed that utilization of managerial techniques has beneficial effects on business performance. Although launching an enterprise is

complicated for entrepreneurs (Ucbasaran, Shepherd, Lockett, & Lyon, 2012), Hormiga et al. found that if entrepreneurs utilize some practice of intellectual capital measurement, they can achieve superior results. Hormiga et al. concluded that entrepreneurs employing intellectual capital for new ventures must detect, measure, and utilize intellectual capital in venture formation and business development.

Intellectual capital is also critical to entrepreneurs' success in developing countries (Jamak, Ali, & Ghazali, 2014; Salman, Mansor, & Babatunde, 2012). Intellectual capital allows for an increase in the performance of entrepreneurs and the survival of small businesses in developing countries (Shirokova, Vega, & Sokolova, 2013). Jardon and Martos (2012) concluded that compared to large companies, small enterprises require intellectual capital for competitive advantage because small-business enterprises have fewer material resources. Distinct segments of intellectual capital and different environments determine which process is necessary to better an organization's business performance (Jardon & Martos, 2012).

In the newly developing country of Costa Rica, the role of intellectual capital and entrepreneurial characteristics as innovation drivers was examined (Ugalde-Blinda et al., 2014). Ugalde-Blinda et al. (2014) analyzed three intellectual capital components: structural, relational, and human capital. The focus was to evaluate how entrepreneurs handled a crisis environment through the innovation of different ideas that could create new business opportunities. Ugalde-Blinda et al. determined that elements of entrepreneurs' human capital such as their business experience, their training in innovation, and their relationships with institutions (higher education and other support

institutions) clearly contributed to achieving better innovation results. Positive relationships existed between structural capital and innovative entrepreneur success because, in medium and small businesses, it is easier to create an environment that is conducive to innovation from flexible structures and flatter organizations (Ugalde-Blinda et al., 2014). Lastly, Ugalde-Blinda et al. also noted that in regards to relational capital, a manager's capability to develop cooperation networks with customers, suppliers, or support institutions is of utmost importance. The findings from the Ugalde-Blinda et al.'s qualitative study can also pertain to Liberia, which has a postconflict challenging economic and crisis-filled environment similar to Costa Rica's (IMF, 2012).

Fatoki (2014) investigated the effect of management capabilities (focusing on owners' previous business experience and training) on South African immigrant-owned business performance. Fatoki found a connection between an entrepreneurs' performance and education and determined that higher education levels correlate with higher business performance. Entrepreneurs with prior work related experience performed superiorly compared to owners lacking previous training. Fatoki concluded that being knowledgeable helps entrepreneurs to be innovative and that intellectual capital is essential to the managerial process to maintain competitive gain. Intellectual capital is the main source for improving business performance (Tarride & Osorio-Vega, 2013).

Financial Management Skills

A constraint to the growth and development of small businesses is the absence of financial management skills (Chowdhury et al., 2013). Fatoki (2012) defined financial management as the management of finances of a business to attain the financial goals of

the business. Financial management requires preparing, planning, coordinating, and managing the financial tasks including the attainment and operation of the organizational funds (Fatoki, 2012). Jindrichovska (2013) and Xavier (2013) stated that poor financial-management skills by owners and managers are the main cause of the underlying problems of small and medium-sized businesses. A universal challenge that small businesses face is inadequate financial management (Carsamer, 2012; Salikin, Wahab, & Muhammad, 2014). Mayer-Haug, Read, Brinckmann, Dew, and Grichnik (2013) stated that financial management is possibly one of the least glamorous aspects of entrepreneurship. However, financial management is essential to inaugurate and operate a small enterprise successfully. In developing countries, financial management has a critical role in managing a business (Salikin et al., 2014).

Fatoki (2012) described that the categories of financial management decisions are: (a) investment decision: process of planning and managing a firm's long-term investments; (b) managing working capital: ensuring adequate cash flow for an organization to reach short-term debt requirements and operational costs; (c) financial decision: raising of finance from various sources; and (d) dividend decision: decision with regards to the net profit distribution.

Having effective financial business skills are part of the framework of managers becoming decision makers to increase estimated profit and decrease the costs and risks to meet business objectives (Mohammadzadeh, Aarabi, & Salamzadeh, 2013). Two constructs compose the financial management skills used in this study to explore small-business entrepreneurs in Liberia's Central Region. The constructs include (a) working

capital management that also subdivides into cash management, receivables management, and inventory management and (b) financial reporting and analysis (Okafor, 2012).

Working capital management. Working capital management is essential to the practice of financial management by any organization (Agyei-Mensah, 2012; Fatoki, 2014). Research findings indicate that significant development of capital management in small and mid-sized business sectors leads to fewer firms failing (Agyeri-Mensah, 2012). Managing the SME's working capital is a continuous task that warrants a business the necessary resources to continue operating and prevents costly disturbance (Xavier, 2013). Poor working capital management in SME's arises as a result of lack of proper financial management practices and planning inadequacies in cash management (Karadag, 2015; Mfopain, 2013; Uwonda, Okello, & Okello, 2013).

Agyei-Mensah (2012) researched how small firms in the developing country of Ghana managed working capital. Agyei-Mensah determined that firms inadequately managed their working capital, which substantially affected the sustainability of the organizations. The cause of mismanagement of the working capital is attributed to the following: (a) 83% of businesses lacking computers, (b) 60% of owners having little accounting background, (c) 57% of owners preparing their budgets, (d) 80% of businesses repetitively selling their services and goods on credit, and (e) SMEs having little knowledge inventory management practices (Agyei-Mensah, 2012). Agyei-Mensah concluded that small business entrepreneurs in Ghana lacked the administrative skills, financial management skills, and formal education, and consequently mismanaged the working capital.

Xavier (2013) studied the connection between strategic competitiveness and working capital management of SMEs in the developing country of Rwanda and found that working capital management implementations influence the strategic competitiveness of SMEs. Xavier recommended that for effective working capital management, an enterprise must be financially literate and ensure: (a) ample cash is accessible to meet daily cash flow requirements, (b) payment of creditors maintains a continuous supply of merchandise and services, (c) disbursement of salaries when due, and (d) continuous supervision of receivables.

Sucuahi (2013) studied the financial proficiency of small-business owners in Davao City, Philippines and concluded that the four signs of financial literacy are financing, saving, budgeting, and bookkeeping. Davao City entrepreneurs had sufficient knowledge of savings, and they understood that surplus was necessary to have savings (Sucuahi, 2013). However, Sucuahi noticed that entrepreneurs did not consistently put their knowledge to action and did not set aside funds for unforeseen future expenses. The majority of entrepreneurs did not deposit any percentage of their surplus in the bank, and they did not use their savings to invest in their own business or to invest in other business opportunities. Entrepreneurs used another source of funding, such as loans rather than their savings (Sucuahi, 2013), even though Salikin et al. (2014) proposed that running a business with no outside funds (loans) reduces the monetary risk of the company, and allows for less complicated decision-making. Similarly, Chowa, Masa, and Ansong (2012) found that the majority of the African population makes little to no use of formal savings.

In terms of budgeting, Sucuahi (2013) found that microentrepreneurs are moderately literate on controlling their business spending; however, they are not consistent regarding planning when and what to spend on their business. Business owners also had moderate literacy about generating written monthly plans for business sales and spending, but they did not execute these plans consistently (Sucuahi, 2013). Additionally, budgets were not regularly monitored. Sucuahi concluded that business owners in Davao City, Philippines were not prepared to manage their business properly.

Gorlorwulu (2011) studied the sustainability of job formation in conflicted settings such as postwar Liberia, emphasizing on the weak economic markets of SMEs. Gorlorwulu showed that a business manager's access to credit in a postconflict environment was a challenging issue. Currently, there are three sets of leading credit markets in Liberia: (a) households/firms as potential borrowers, (b) formal lenders such as banks, and (c) informal lenders such as friends and relatives (Dukuly, 2012). However, Dukuly (2012) concluded that the credit markets of Liberia are underdeveloped, segmented, and have high levels of inconsistent information, leading to allegations of screening errors, credit market participation, and access.

To attempt to resolve the issues surrounding financial management and working capital management, owners of enterprises should take further responsibility for their learning by creating a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and skill training (Fatoki, 2012). Fatoki (2012) recommended for nonfinancial managers to attend university organized training programs on business finance management.

Financial reporting and analysis. The findings of a qualitative study by Amoako (2013) and Mutanda, De Beer, and Myers (2014) showed that inadequate bookkeeping and the absence of rudimentary business-management skills can lead to small-business failure in Africa. Accounting is important to the development of SMEs, and a reporting system is an essential decision-making tool of management (Amoako, 2013; Nwaigburu & Eneogwe, 2013). Effective small-business bookkeeping results in a manager's success by (a) increasing project purchase, (b) increasing sales, (c) determining break-even points, and (d) promoting efficient financial analysis for decision-making. On the other hand, poor bookkeeping is a source of startup business failures (Kofi, Adjei, Collins, & Christian, 2014; Msipah, Chavunduka, Jengeta, Mufundza, & Nhemachena, 2013; Ngoepe, 2014).

In Liberia, many SME owners lack bookkeeping knowledge (CFR, 2012). Most business owners do not have administration skills including bookkeeping, marketing, inventory management, and staff supervision; hence, business owners do not manage daily transactions and are unable to validate their expenses and revenues at term (Nyamwanza, Mapetere, Mavhiki, & Dzingirai, 2012). According to Bacon (2015), improving financial accounting environments enhances the quality of financial statements in Liberia. Financial institutions and potential investors rely on financial reports to make private sector investment and credit decisions (Bacon, 2015; IMF, 2012). In Nigeria, a country with an economy similar to Liberia, Nwaigburu and Eneogwe (2013) explored how accounting affected an entrepreneur's training for sustainable development and self-sufficiency. Entrepreneurs with fundamental knowledge in accounting and business skills

became more self-sufficient and achieved business success more than entrepreneurs with no knowledge (Nwaigburu & Eneogwe, 2013).

Accurate bookkeeping and comprehensive accounting processes ensured proper financial management in small and medium enterprises (Amoako, 2013). Amoako (2013) analyzed data from the responses of 210 SMEs to a structured questionnaire to determine the bookkeeping approaches of entrepreneurs in Kumasi, Ghana. The majority of small-business entrepreneurs failed to sustain thorough accounting reports because they did not want to expose their financial status (Amoako, 2013). Amoako suggested that organized training programs are necessary to motivate managers to maintain adequate accounting records.

Fatoki (2014) used financial planning, analysis and control, bookkeeping, understanding of funding sources, business terminology, finance and information skills, use of technology, and risk-management to gauge the financial proficiency of business owners in South Africa. The results indicated that: (a) microenterprise owners do not engage in formal financial planning or budgeting, and (b) apart from sales books and expenses books, most microenterprises do not keep other books that will allow them to extract useful accounting information.

Sucuahi (2013) analyzed the financial competency of 100 microentrepreneurs in Davao City, Philippines and identified bookkeeping as a basic financial ability a businessperson must hold to make appropriate decisions and to reduce business risks. However, entrepreneurs in Davao City are not sophisticated record keepers (Sucuahi, 2013). For entrepreneurs to seek finance from providers, they must have: (a) reliable

financial data produced by suitable accounting systems, (b) accurate books of account, and (c) a proper accounting system (Amoako, 2013). Amoako (2013) stressed that finance providers will not invest or provide funds unless guaranteed no expected losses.

Marketing Management Skills

Entrepreneur lack of marketing skills is an essential constraint in developing countries (Panda & Dash, 2014). Marketing management is the focus of most SMEs, influencing the growth of market sales and of innovative and financial plans (Havlicek, 2011). The entrepreneur drives marketing management, which is opportunistic, intuitive, and profit-driven (Sok, O’Cass, & Sok, 2013). Marketing of products and services is vital to small businesses because their size and their reduced ability to influence puts them at a disadvantage when compared to large firms (Ugalde-Blinda et al., 2014). Kiveu and Ofafa (2013) stated that market constraints facing SMEs in developing Kenya include: (a) inadequate market research, (b) incompetence in exploring niche markets, (c) substandard products, and (d) insufficient resources for promoting products. Nonetheless, Kaliba et al. (2011) determined that a major constraint affecting medium and small-size enterprises in Liberia is a lack of marketing.

Marketing is a leading department in organizations. Business owners use marketing to determine customer wants and needs and to manufacture or adjust products to sustain market demand (Fejza & Asllani, 2013). Fejza and Asllani (2013) stated that marketing is the link between management and customer satisfaction to generate revenue for a the business. In Liberia, many small and medium-sized business owners lack marketing and product placement skills (CFR, 2012). More specifically, entrepreneurs in

Liberia are constrained in terms of engaging in agricultural production because of a lack of marketing support services, business training, and poor roads (GOL, 2013).

Dzisi and Ofori (2014) studied the performance of small business owners in Ghana and their marketing strategies. Strategic marketing is the driving force of an organizations' status, and it aids to improve the development of innovative services and products for dynamic markets (Dzisi and Ofori, 2014). In the developing country of Kenya, Kiveu and Ofafa (2013) found that SMEs encounter obstacles when gaining access to markets because of insufficient market data, inadequate market research, and poor marketing capability. These difficulties lead to discrepancies concerning market demand and supply (Kiveu & Ofafa, 2013). Thus, Kiveu and Ofafa recommend that small and medium-size enterprise managers enhance their information and communications technology.

Havlicek (2011) studied marketing management and marketing controlling of SMEs and recommended strategies to fulfill marketing plans. The strategies are as follows: (a) deciding on a product line that corresponds to the business plan and deciding on territories within countries and local regions; (b) recognizing vital customer divisions in the prospect region and product groups; (c) deciding the employees' personal responsibilities for customer divisions, perspective region, or product lines; (d) creating price ranges, strategies, and maps; (e) selecting supply and delivery strategies; and (f) selecting communication approaches according to the participating parties, advertising selections, and sales promotion (Havlicek, 2011).

Marketing mix. Mohammadzadeh et al. (2013) defined marketing strategy as a strategy focused on events regarding competitor and customer analysis, context analysis, segmentation, targeting, and outlining a suitable standing based on marketing mix. Four elements of the marketing mix are price, product, promotion, and place. The marketing mix is an assortment of actions and decisions an organization makes to identify customer demands and to complete marketing objectives (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2013).

Marketing strategies are amongst the leading causes of new product development and success (Liu & Yang, 2014). However, Liu and Yang (2014) noted that countless entrepreneurs discount effective marketing strategies leading to the inferior performance of new product development.

The marketing mix is an assortment of marketing actions and decisions utilized by firms to market their services and merchandise (Al Badi, 2015; Azadi & Rahimzadeh, 2012; Singh, 2012). Azadi and Rahimzadeh (2012) proposed that the marketing mix consists of the combination of (a) product, (b) price, (c) place, and (d) promotion. According to Azadi and Rahimzadeh, product is the production of goods or services delivered to the market to fulfil the needs of consumers; price is what the consumer spends to attain the wanted product; place is the location of data and education about the behavior of consumers; and promotion is the utilization of marketing, media support, and public relations to generate and uphold demand for the service or product. Azandi and Rahimazdeh concluded that the four market mix model is a useful instrument for devising marketing tactics and efficacy at the operating level. When the marketing mix is

consistent and controlled, an opportunity to respond to the target market arises (Mihart, 2012).

Singh (2012) studied the 4P's model of the marketing mix to explore the competitive benefits of business marketing. Singh found that for businesses to have a competitive advantage, managers must: (a) market the correct product to fulfill the demands of the target population; (b) offer the product at the correct price; (c) notify prospective consumers of accessibility of the product, its place, and price; and (d) position the product in the correct location for consumers to purchase. Singh concluded that entrepreneurs could utilize the marketing mix as an effective method to achieve competitive advantage. Singh recommended that marketing managers become skilled in deciding marketing mix strategy by using the 4Ps as the marketing mix.

New Business Standards Effectiveness

Figure 5 shows the new business standards effectiveness model for business skills effectiveness for the study. The new business standards that may take place as a result of effective entrepreneurs business skills are: (a) business stability, (b) effective business knowledge, (c) increase of financial development, and (d) customer retention and product demand.

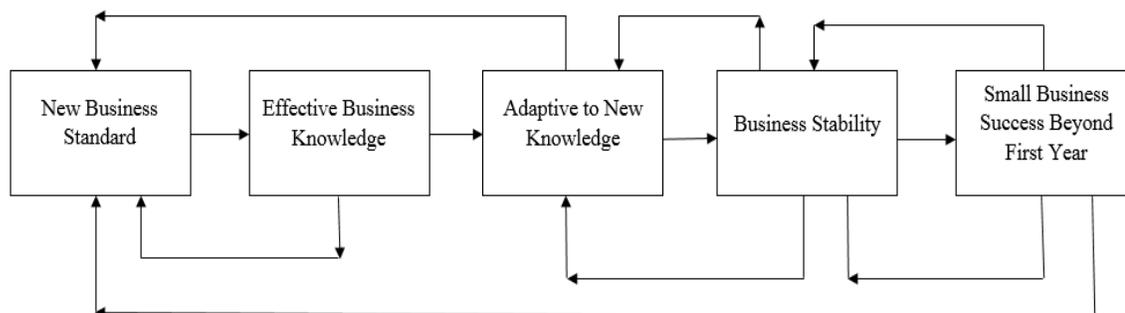


Figure 5. New business standards effectiveness model for business skills effectiveness.

Belay, Helo, Takala, and Kasie (2011) studied the effect of quality management practices in regards to business performance improvements for effective business stability. Belay et al. found that for business stability, business industries start with (a) business planning; (b) the training and coaching of employees to increase skills; and (c) autonomy in marketing, advertising, and innovative products. Agyei-Mensah (2012) determined that one attains useful business knowledge by increasing the formal education of managerial and financial management skills that in turn enhances the growth of small business. Pauleen and Gorman (2011) proposed that an individual can remain competitive by applying five personal knowledge management strategic skills: (a) management, (b) utilization of technology, (c) social and communication skills (d) lifetime learning, and (e) estimating and predicting.

Bressler (2012) analyzed small businesses' strategic skills, resources, and strengths to increase business competitive advantage and success. Bressler described the competitive advantage strategic management process as (a) understanding industry conditions, (b) acting in management, and (c) leveraging the marketing mix. Bressler concluded that managers (a) leverage timing of business activities, (b) possess a

significant deal of control in developing industry knowledge and technical expertise, and (c) demonstrate skills in leveraging the marketing mix variables.

Chowdhury et al. (2013) stated that the absence of financial management skills is a constraint to the growth and development of small businesses. Intellectual capital increases financial development, which increases the performance of entrepreneurs and the survival of small businesses in developing countries (Shirokova et al., 2013). Bianchi (2012) analyzed the effect of increases in financial development on small-business owners. Bianchi found that increases in entrepreneurial financial development had positive effects on entrepreneur performance. Salilkin et al. (2014) proposed that the success rate of entrepreneurs relies on increasing the development of entrepreneurs' financial skills. Entrepreneurs with strong financial development knowledge became more self-sufficient and achieved business success more often than entrepreneurs with no knowledge (Nwaigburu & Eneogwe, 2013).

Mavunga (2014) studied customer retention and product demand with a group of small-business entrepreneurs in Johannesburg, South Africa. Mavunga focused on entrepreneurs' customer service and strategic marketing skills. To ensure customer value, entrepreneurs in training should concentrate on the following marketing management philosophies: (a) implementing marketing research, (b) gaining a competitive edge, (c) interpreting consumer decision-making, (d) analyzing the market environment, (e) implementing marketing mix strategies, (f) marketing communications, (g) knowing the various product types, (h) targeting and segmenting markets, (i) developing effective plans for marketing, and (j) proper pricing strategies (Mavunga, 2014). Mavunga

concluded that with education and training in value retention and consumer attraction and retention, entrepreneurs may improve their business performance.

Boohene, Agyapong, and Gonu (2013) stated that one way organizations survive is by proactive and strategic relationship marketing. Boohene et al. studied banking strategies in Ghana for effective customer retention in an increasingly competitive environment. Boohene et al. found a noteworthy positive association between consumer retention and commitment and the trust and quality of service provided by managers. Boohene et al. recommended managers to focus on consumer commitment by exercising strategic relationship marketing methods to improve customer retention rates.

Synthesis and Conclusion of the Literature Review

The literature review consists of seven categories: (a) conceptual framework, (b) factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries, (c) Liberian Civil War, (d) conflicted environments and entrepreneur success, (e) knowledge management skills, (f) financial management skills, and (g) marketing management skills. As aligned with the study's conceptual framework of the theory of constraints, the small-business constraints that may contribute to entrepreneurs' success in business beyond the first year are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills.

Factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries.

Small-business enterprises in postwar Liberia have significant potential for positive consequences such as a decrease in conflict and a stimulation of economic growth (Dukuly, 2012). Bula (2012) and Shonubi and Taiwo (2013) stated that the types of major

factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries are (a) financial, (b) managerial, (c) educational, (d) environmental, and (e) economical. Chuang (2013) determined these types of factors are of importance because entrepreneurship, by generating funds for businesses and communities, can organize resources for (a) financial, (b) societal, and (c) cultural potentials in a shifting environment. To promote sustainable economic development for SMEs in Liberia, an enterprises' accessibility to financial services must improve (Kaliba et al., 2012).

An entrepreneur's managerial knowledge determines the growth and survival of his or her company (Olowu & Aliyu, 2015). Espinosa (2013) found that the leading factor causing small-business failures in developing countries is managerial incompetence. Preisendorfer et al. (2012) found that, in South Africa, there is a lack of managerial and business experience affecting the success of entrepreneurs.

According to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry (2014), entrepreneurs in the Republic of Liberia lack adequate education in business development. Siow Song Teng et al. (2011) and Shonubi and Taiwo (2013) stated that this inadequacy creates a dilemma because the most important part of ensuring the growth of a small-business startup is gaining access to educational training and funding. Dugassa (2012) suggested the importance of entrepreneurship education by reviewing sustainability in small firms and found that entrepreneurs who had undergone entrepreneurship training had better entrepreneurial intentions than entrepreneurs who had not undergone training.

Environmental challenges are the main source affecting small-business farmers in Liberia (Alfaro & Miller, 2013). In Liberia, environmental factors such as rapid

population growth, poor infrastructure, and environmental degradation have the most effect on small-business farmers (Alfaro & Miller, 2013; Cant & Wiid, 2013; Cornforth, 2013; Gardner, 2014; Magigi, 2013). Poor infrastructure is a specific environmental challenge facing Liberian entrepreneurs and their small firms (Eniola & Entebang, 2015; Gorlorwulu, 2011).

Small enterprises are vital to the economic success of developing and developed countries (Long, 2013; Pack, 2012; Waziri, 2012). Highly researched and discussed models are those used to designate the competitive advantages of medium and small-businesses (Malik et al., 2012). The success of SMEs in developing countries decreases unemployment and promotes improved living conditions (Ibrahim et al., 2014). SME's also play a dynamic part in the economies of numerous countries (Nwachukwu, 2012).

Liberia civil war. Liberia's first civil war prompted a massive collapse in the country's financial, governmental, and social stability, causing most international traders and foreign businesses to leave the country (IMF, 2012). According to Kieh (2004), a confluence of types of factors causing the war included: (a) historical, (b) political, (c) economical, (d) cultural, and (e) social. Kazanjian (2011) stated that various political factors contributed to the Liberian Civil War. Munive (2011) found that the historical factor returns to the roots of Liberia. Munive reported that in the early 1820s, free slaves from America returned to Africa as a result of the implementation of various laws to help the slave system in the United States (Munive, 2011).

There were two classes in Liberia: the upper class and lower class. Most of the lower class lived in rural areas and was not at an advantage regarding social and

economic services from the upper class (Kazanjian, 2011; Kieh, 2004). Kieh (2004) found that these situations caused increased conflict regarding economic stability between classes. The source of dispute was the unequal apportionment of income and wealth, political control, and social assistances (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). An important cultural factor that influenced the civil war was ethnicity (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). Poor health and a poor educational system were the factors that provoked the county's civil war (Brown et al., 2011). Dukuly (2012) stated that a critical factor for the attainment of pro-poor growth, necessary to minimize Liberia's reversion to political conflict, is the successful operation of micro and small-scale firms.

Conflicted environments and entrepreneurs success. In addition to the major factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries, Liberia's small-business entrepreneurs face historical and post-civil war factors (Bula, 2012; Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). Entrepreneurs in postwar environments face disruption to commerce, trouble finding capital, and decreased business stability (Schaede, 2012). Violent conflict has a direct effect on entrepreneurial success (Bruck et al., 2012). Bruck et al. (2012) concluded that entrepreneurs must rapidly process data and modify their supply chain to survive in conflicted environments.

Njanja et al. (2012) studied the effects of challenges on management skills including strategic management, marketing skills, and interpersonal skills. Njanja et al. proposed that there is a significant correlation between environmental factors and management skills. Njanja et al. noted that external environments affect performance by influencing the administration strategies the firm assumes; therefore, the main regulating

factors are the character of the business and the ability of managers to react to the environment by dictating strategies. Chowdhury (2011) concluded that starting and maintaining an enterprise in the CHT region demands additional funds and business knowledge and that violent conflict within cultural features are further suppressive to entrepreneurs in this region than in other regions.

Business management skills. A major source of microbusiness failure is limited business-management planning skills (Agyapong & Muntaka, 2012; Bagire & Namada, 2013; Morales & Marquina, 2013). Entrepreneurs use business-management skills in their plan to perform effectively in competitive markets (Morales & Marquina, 2013; Osinde et al., 2013). Osinde et al. (2013) stated that organizational performance was contingent on the selected environment, structure, and strategy. Osinde et al. concluded that within the small-business environment, the values that have superior effects on business performance are (a) marketing management skills, (b) finance capitalization skills, and (c) entrepreneurship management skills.

Knowledge management skills. Shannak et al. (2012) stated that knowledge management is a skill that fosters creating, sharing, learning, enhancing, organizing, and applying knowledge to benefit both the organization and its customers. Stevens (2015) and Zhu et al. (2012) highlighted the fact that many business failures in developing countries are attributable to incompetence in the management and identification of crises. Ugalde-Blinda et al. (2014) stated that it is imperative that businesses in developing countries, where there are constant crises and changes, have procedures in place for managing knowledge in flexible environments.

The improvement of the intellectual capital produces values on performance (Dammak, 2015). In developing countries, intellectual capital is critical to entrepreneurs' success (Jamak et al., 2014; Salman et al., 2012). Intellectual capital increases the performance of entrepreneurs and the survival of small businesses in developing countries (Shirokova et al., 2013). Fatoki suggested that being knowledgeable helps entrepreneurs to be innovative, and that intellectual capital is critical to management progress, which creates sustained competitive advantage. Kayani and Zia's framework theorized that knowledge management becomes a critical concern for business owners because it can (a) offer benefits containing improvement in the business process, (b) create a competitive edge, (c) save money and time, and (d) increase the communication to improve productivity.

Financial management skills. Jindrichovska (2013) and Xavier (2013) stated that poor financial management by owners and managers is the leading cause of the underlying problems of small and medium-sized businesses. Entrepreneurs use financial management to plan, organize, direct, and control monetary activities such as the utilization and attainment of funds (Fatoki, 2012). In developing countries, financial management has a critical role in business managing (Salikin et al., 2014). In Liberia, many small and medium-sized business owners lack acquaintance of bookkeeping (CFR, 2012).

Two constructs will compose the financial management skills used in this study to explore small-business entrepreneurs in Liberia's Central Region. The constructs include (a) working capital management that also subdivides into cash management, receivables

management, and inventory management and (b) financial reporting and analysis (Okafor, 2012). Xavier recommended that for effective working capital management, an enterprise must be financially literate and ensure: (a) ample cash is accessible to meet daily cash flow requirements, (b) payment of creditors maintains a continuous supply of merchandise and services, (c) disbursement of salaries when due, and (d) continuous supervision of receivables. Ensuring proper financial management in small and medium enterprises emphasizes the importance of accurate bookkeeping and comprehensive accounting systems (Amoako, 2013). Amoako (2013) suggested that organized training programs are necessary to motivate managers to maintain adequate accounting records.

Marketing management skills. Havlicek (2011) stated that marketing management is the focus of most SMEs, influencing the growth of product sales and of innovative and financial plans. Havlicek studied market managing and marketing control of SMEs and recommended strategies to fulfill marketing plans. The strategies are as follows: (a) deciding on a product that matches the business plan; (b) determining the region within local territories and countries; (c) identifying consumer populations in the prospect region and product-lines; (d) deciding the employees' responsibilities for distinct consumer populations, prospect regions, or product groups; (e) creating price ranges, pricing strategies, and price maps; (f) selecting supply and delivery strategies; and (g) selecting communication approaches based on the participating parties, advertising selections, and sales promotion (Havlicek, 2011). Marketing strategies are amongst the leading causes of novel product development and success (Liu & Yang, 2014). The marketing mix is a strategy used to attain competitive advantages for organizations

(Singh, 2012). Azadi and Rahimzadeh (2012) proposed that the marketing mix consists of the combination of (a) product, (b) price, (c) place, and (d) promotion.

The review of the literature explores the various business skills that can enhance an entrepreneur's success in business beyond the first year, focusing on Liberia and various developing countries. The first step was identifying the theory of constraints as the conceptual framework that grounds the study. The main concept of the theory of constraints is that constraints are the main obstacles preventing achievement of business owners and management's objectives (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014) and that managers can preside over their constraints to accomplish the company's goal (Dehkordy et al., 2013; Hakkak et al., 2014). The second step, as indicated in Figure 1, was analyzing the first four out of seven categories of the study: (a) conceptual framework, (b) business success and failure indicators in developing countries, (c) historical factors related to Liberia's civil war, and (d) conflicted environment effects on entrepreneurship success. Bula (2012), Kieh (2004), and Schaefer (2012) found that historical factors including political, cultural, social, and external factors such as financial, managerial, educational, environmental, and economical factors contributed to entrepreneurs' business survival rates. Based on the literature discussed, numerous external and internal factors may limit small-business entrepreneurs in Liberia's Central Region. Third, I reviewed the last three categories of the literature review, which were the focus of the study. The small-business constraints that may contribute to entrepreneurs' success in business beyond the first year are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills. Belay et al. (2011) and Agyei-

Mensah (2012) found that for business stability, business industries start with (a) effective business knowledge achievement by increasing formal education of managerial and financial management skills; (b) business planning; (c) training and coaching of employees to increase skills; and (d) autonomy in marketing, advertising, and innovative products. Last, if small-business owners can identify, exploit, subordinate, and elevate constraints, they may increase their business skills. Increasing business skills may result in increased entrepreneur performance and new business standards for success in business beyond the first year.

Transition

The objective of Section 1 was to provide the purpose of the study, the manner carried by the study, and its importance. The goals in Section 1 were also to present a review of the academic literature and the exploration of the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year.

Categories analyzed in the literature review were (a) conceptual framework, (b) factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries, (c) Liberian Civil War, (d) conflicted environments and entrepreneur success, (e) knowledge management skills, (f) financial management skills, and (g) marketing management skills. These issues may offer a solution to small-business entrepreneurs who need to succeed in business beyond the first year.

Small-business success and failure indicators in developing countries contribute to various factors. Factors affecting small-business success and failure in developing countries are (a) financial, (b) managerial, (c) educational, (d) environmental, and (e)

economical (Bula, 2012; Shonubi & Taiwo, 2013). The Liberian Civil War lasted for 15 years and destroyed a voluminous amount of the country's economy and agriculture (Kieh, 2004). According to Kieh (2004), a confluence of types of factors causing the war included: (a) historical, (b) political, (c) economical, (d) cultural, and (e) social.

Regarding conflicted environment and entrepreneur success, Bruck et al. (2012) found that violent conflict has a diverse effect on entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs in postwar environments face disruption to commerce and in finding capital and a decrease in business stability (Schaede, 2012). The theory of constraints is a methodology for isolating the weakest points in an organization to improve the performance of systems (Simsit et al., 2014). A constraint is anything that might prevent a system from achieving its goal (Goldratt & Cox, 1984). As aligned with the study's conceptual framework of the theory of constraints, the small-business constraints that may contribute to entrepreneurs' success in business beyond the first year are (a) knowledge management skills, (b) financial management skills, and (c) marketing management skills. Entrepreneurial small-business skill success is the focus of the research question. I explored the literature for various business skills that may enhance an entrepreneur's success in business beyond the first year.

Section 2 includes a thorough description of the research methodology and design, the role of the researcher, participants, population sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, and various techniques used for the study. The segments in Section 2 include a detailed dialog on organization and data collection techniques, data analysis techniques, dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. In

Section 3, I include an introduction to the study, a discussion of the purpose of the study, the research question, a brief summary of the findings, and a detailed explanation of the outcomes of this study. Section 3 also includes the presentation of the study findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, my reflections, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Using a multiple case study approach, I explored the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. In turn, Liberian small-business entrepreneurs may increase the profits of their business with knowledge created in the study. In Section 2, I present the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization techniques, data analysis techniques, dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The targeted population consisted of five central regional Liberian small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. The implication for positive social change included the potential to uncover the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs can use to succeed in business beyond the first year. The study results may help aspiring small-business entrepreneurs in Liberia to improve their successes in sustaining a business, which may lead to additional jobs in the local communities.

Role of the Researcher

The general role of the researcher in a qualitative case study is to use the research instruments by (a) designing; (b) interviewing; (c) transcribing; (d) analyzing; (e)

verifying data; and (f) presenting the results and recommendations in an organized, ethical, and unbiased format (Patton, 2014). According to Bansal and Corley (2012), the signature of qualitative research is its solid grounding in the phenomenon. Conversely, each researcher's journey in the detection of the phenomenon is distinctive and nonlinear. Flyvbjerg (2011) stated that a researcher's role in a qualitative case study is to develop comprehensive descriptions and analysis grounded in the lived experiences of people. Qualitative researchers frequently build a case for their research questions and influence their study more deeply than quantitative researchers through flexibility, adaptation, the inclusion of personal experiences, and deep understanding of the study (Neuman, 2011). My background was a significant factor in the selection of the research topic. I invested in the research question because my native country is Liberia, and I am highly interested in contributing to social change in the country.

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects (NCPHS, 1978) produced the Belmont Report, which provides detailed protocols to protect study participants (Amon, Baral, Beyrer, & Kass, 2012). The Belmont Report identified three ethical standards: (a) beneficence, (b) justice, and (c) respect for persons (NCPHS, 1978). The NCPHS stated that the Belmont Report Ethical Principles pair with three similar means of translating principles into action: (a) informed consent, (b) fair selection of participants, and (c) assessing benefits and risks. I followed the regulations and protocol of the Belmont Report. In the evaluation of the ethical protection of the participant, there was no risk associated with answering the interview questions.

According to Yin (2014), researcher bias can change the direction or result of a case study. I remained nonjudgmental, unbiased, and impartial throughout the study, solely focusing on the business issue under study: business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Banks et al. (2013) stated that researchers should follow a basic code of conduct while undertaking a case study. Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) argued that the researcher must be careful to bracket his or her perceptions. The researcher may unintentionally include bias in method and design choice. Even the researcher's presence and body language may influence participant responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Qu and Dumay (2011) explained that to subvert the above influences, researchers can use bracketing to minimize the degrading effects of biases on the outcomes of a study. Chan et al. stated that bracketing allows researchers to remove preconceived ideas about research issues and participant responses from their study. While conducting interviews with participants, bracketing my involvement with the issues under study allowed the interviewees' perceptions of business skills that small-business entrepreneurs lack to become evident.

I used an effective interview protocol (see Appendix A) process for enhancing credibility and quality of the instruments in the study. Yin (2014) stated that the interview protocol is integral to data accuracy and quality. Utilizing a case study interview protocol, analytical memos, and data storage software contributes to the dependability of the research by enabling the development of an audit trail (Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012). Participants prereviewed interview questions and had the right to deny or approve

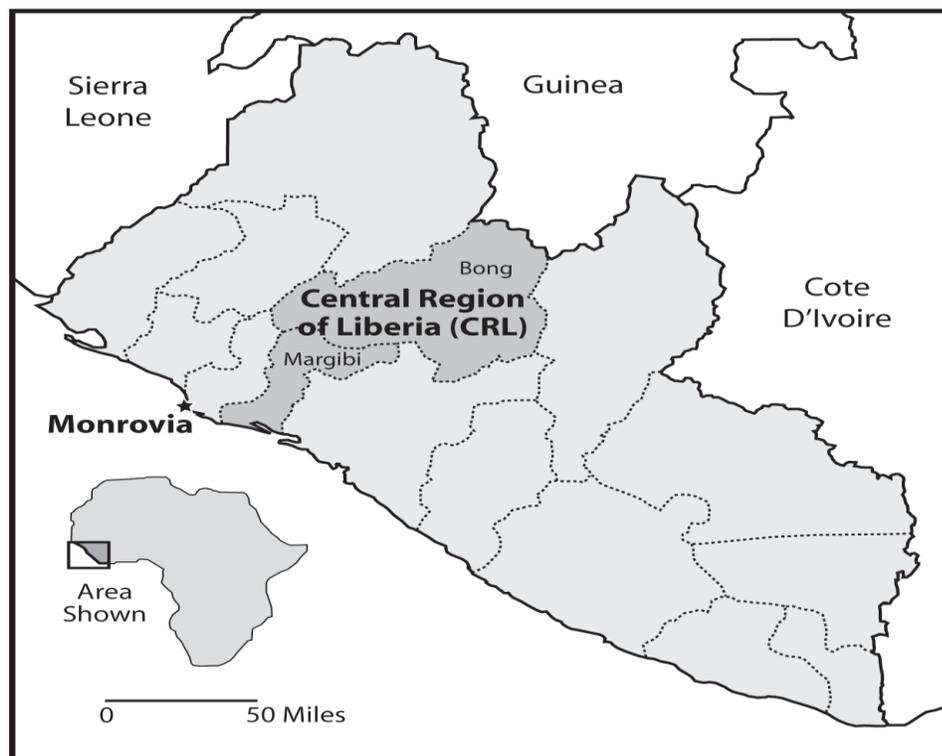
the question. Participants had the option of accepting the letter of consent that provided the approval to participate in the study.

Analysis of documents, archival records, interviews, and participant observations configured the data of this study. I transcribed and analyzed data through word coding. Word coding in qualitative research enables researchers to break data into segments to manage and analyze the data more simply (Saldana, 2013). The result of data analysis should include codes connecting each other and creating a meaningful web of concepts (Elo et al., 2014). After verifying and analyzing all data collection, I reported findings and concluded by presenting the results in an organized, ethical, and objective format.

Participants

Four qualitative data collection techniques are (a) interviews, (b) documents, (c) observations, and (d) audiovisual materials (Raab, 2013). Montserrado, Margibi, and Bong County are Liberia's largest business sections because of their central location in the capital city of Monrovia (McCoskey, 2011; Tarway-Twalla, 2011). Montserrado, Margibi, and Bong counties cover the Central Region of Liberia (see Figure 6; IMF, 2012; Tarway-Twalla, 2011). According to Tarway-Twalla (2011), before the war, more formal sector investments (e.g., mining companies, rubber plantation companies, farming projects) existed in the Central Region of Liberia than elsewhere in Liberia. The high prevalence of formal sector industries led to a decline of informal sector employment in the Central Region of Liberia preceding the civil war (Alam, 2012; McQuade, Salant, & Winfree, 2012; Tarway-Twalla, 2011). The effect that civil crisis had on the Central Region of Liberia was an upward trend of informal businesses after the war (Tarway-

Twalla, 2008). Tarway-Twalla (2008) stated that of a percentage distribution of the population by ownership of businesses, 99.8% of informal Central Region of Liberia entrepreneurs managed their own compared to other regions.



*Figure 6. Central Region of Liberia. Adapted from “The Contribution of Grassroots Businesses to Post-Conflict Development in Liberia,” by A. K. Tarway-Twalla, 2011, *Journal of Enterprising Communities*, 5, pp. 58-67. Copyright 2008 by Alfred K. Tarway-Twalla. Reprinted with permission.*

Researchers utilize sampling methods to include or exclude study participants (Kolb, 2012). Omondi, Ombui, and Mungatu (2013) created eligibility criteria for qualifying a researcher’s targeted population. I employed a census sampling and interviewed everyone in the targeted population that qualified per the eligibility criteria. Rosnita et al. (2014) used census sampling to analyze the production cost, efficiency level, and marketing process of pineapple chips businesses. Mosley, Broyles, and

Kaufman (2014) used census sampling to select participants to explore the quality of teacher-student relationships. Uchendu, Osim, and Odigwe (2015) used census sampling to study the effect of entrepreneurial education management on financial security in Nigerian universities. Researchers use the technique to pick only a few cases or participants and generate more data about a particular phenomenon (Erlich & Narayanan, 2013). Patton (2014) agreed that researchers should interview few people to obtain a profound comprehension of a phenomenon. Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Mason (2010) recommended interviewing a sample of five to 25 participants for data collection in a case study. Dworkin (2012) stated that in qualitative research, countless books and articles provide guidance and recommend sample sizes ranging from five to 50 participants.

The targeted population consisted of five central regional Liberian small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. The conditions for selecting five small-business entrepreneurs for this study were that (a) small-business entrepreneurs met the qualifications based on the definition of small-business entrepreneurs by Farrington (2012), Small Business Administration (2014), and Shastri and Rao (2014); (b) participants had operated a small business in Liberia's Central Region between 1990 and 2015; (c) participants had used business skills to succeed beyond first year; and (d) participants met the age requirement of 18 and over.

The participants for the study consisted of five central regional Liberian small-business entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. Using

Liberian small-business websites, directories, and my personal Liberian business contacts allowed access to potential participants. Potential candidates received the letter of introduction (Appendix D) describing the research study to the business owner by e-mail. Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and approval, numerous participating candidates received, by mail or e-mail, the letter of consent outlining the (a) purpose of the study, (b) criteria of the study, and (c) request for voluntary participation prior to beginning the study. To assure participant confidentiality, I used a password-protected computer and will destroy all documents, interviews, and observation notes after 5 years.

Screening of potential participants by phone involved asking them if they had operated a small business for more than 1 year during the years 1990 to 2015. Participants confirmed they were 18 years or older. If the potential participant answered “no” to any of the two screening questions, I excluded and thanked the potential participant for their interest and willingness to participate. Additionally, participants received a description of the purpose of the study and its potential benefits to Liberia’s small-business entrepreneurs. Schwieter (2011) suggested allocating each participant a number, such as P1, P2, or P3. Participants received information that their names and organization of employment would be confidential. Using a secure deposit box, I will keep all research files, raw data, interview transcripts, and consent forms for at least 5 years. Reviewing and complying with the IRB Guidance for International Research and the International Compilation of Human Research Standards addressed the concern of conducting research outside of the United States.

To meet case study methods for a study, the process must build rapport amongst the researcher and participants (Yin, 2014). Min (2012) found that the relationship between a researcher and participants is essential in understanding experiences of individuals. Unluer (2012) stated that participants are eager to disclose stories, communicate openly, and respond honestly because of the researchers' involvement with the subject. Patton (2014) proposed that to get close to a participant's experience and to personally understand the details of his or her experience, the researcher and participant must have a direct relationship within the context of his study. As a Liberian-born, American-based small-business professional myself, I have an outsider and insider connection to the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs often lack to succeed in business beyond the first year. Being an insider permitted me to understand some of the unique needs of small-business entrepreneur's and the lack of business skills that results in a loss of profitability and often their business. As an outsider, I explained to participants my board position for a nonprofit organization that enabled my work with various small-business entrepreneurs during the last three years.

Research Method and Design

Method

The research method chosen for the study was qualitative research. Qualitative research is an instrument for studying and comprehending the value that persons or communities attribute to a human or social issue (Patton, 2014). Patton (2014) stated that the course of research entails developing procedures and questions and gathering information at the participant's location. The qualitative researcher uses interviews,

photographs, field notes, conversations, memos, and recordings to create a sequence of representations of the self (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Flyvbjerg (2011) specified that qualitative researchers have a naturalistic, interpretative attitude towards life. The influential explanations and conceptions formulated by qualitative researchers can influence scholars to reflect beyond personal experiences (Bisoqni, Jastran, Seliqson, & Thompson, 2012). Qualitative researchers review topics in their usual surroundings, trying to understand the values that individuals bring to the phenomenon (Patton, 2014).

The focus of the study was the exploration of the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The primary communities and participants studied were in the Central Region of Liberia, which consists of various Liberian ethnic groups. In Liberia, presiding class, representing 4% of the Liberian population in the 1970s and 6% in the 1980s, regulated 65% and 70% of the domestic capital (Kieh, 2004). With this imbalance of wealth, it was questionable whether low-income classes consisting of small-business entrepreneurs have the proper knowledge and financial and marketing skills to maintain small-business performance. The goal of this qualitative research was to acquire an intricate, detailed comprehension of the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. To confirm this comprehensive understanding, the researcher can talk directly with people, go to their homes or places of work, and allow them to tell their stories unencumbered by expectations (Wills, 2012).

Quantitative research involves the testing of the hypotheses while qualitative approach relates to the development of themes (Kura, 2012; Neuman, 2011). Therefore,

qualitative rather than quantitative research fit this study. Neuman (2011) stated that the quantitative method deals with the mathematical analysis and interpretation of data and examines the relationship between variables. In contrast, the qualitative method relates to the personal experience and knowledge of the participants and does not examine the relationship between variables (Neuman, 2011). The use of mixed methods research incorporates qualitative and quantitative elements of the research (Denzin, 2012). Consequently, mixed methods research conflicted with this study. Caruth (2013) argued that mixed method is a complex research method that stemmed from the constraints of both qualitative and quantitative designs. Mixed methods researchers merge both quantitative and qualitative research approaches within a period of the study. Using mixed methods research would make a study too widespread and would produce extensive data that would convolute the study (Patton, 2014).

Research Design

For the purpose of this qualitative study, the focus was the case study design. The phenomenon in this case study explored the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Case studies describe, explain, or assess and evaluate phenomena such as events, persons, and programs (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), researchers use case studies to explore a contemporaneous occurrence in detail and amid its natural setting, particularly if the boundaries concerning the occurrence and its setting are not obvious. Flyvbjerg (2011) argued that the case study design proves mainly useful for studying and evaluating programs as well as for informing policies. I used a case study design for this study to

focus on the “how” and “why” of the research question: What business skills do Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year? Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014) urged researchers using case studies to determine the particulars and similarities to the case. Hyett et al. stated that this requires a thorough exploration of the physical environment, historical background, the character of the case, and political features. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) asserted that the case study method suits the need for studying more about misunderstood situations. Liberian’s poverty and small-business failure rates are factors that are lesser known and poorly understood (IMF, 2012).

I did not select other designs such as narrative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography for this study because of several fundamental differences regarding the research question. The four designs have limitations in providing detailed, interpretive, and flexible information needed for social context (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). According to Patton (2014), the narrative researcher concentrates on the narratives divulged by individuals and organizes these narratives in sequential order. Patton stated that ethnographers deliberate on the context of the individuals’ stories amidst the setting of their culture. The focus of a phenomenological study defines the significance for multiple people of their survived experience of an occurrence or concept (Patton, 2014). A grounded theory study moves beyond description and generates or discovers a theory (Patton, 2014). Qualitative methods like phenomenology or grounded theory do not readily offer the level of flexibility found in case study research (Hyett et al., 2014). With the aspiration to explore business skills and challenges of small-business entrepreneurs in

the Liberia Central Region, the ideal selection for this study was case study research design.

Mason (2010) found that compared to quantitative studies, the sample size in qualitative studies is considerably smaller. Mason argued that within qualitative research, as a study progresses, extra data does not automatically provide additional information. Qualitative researchers only concern themselves with significance and do not make simplified hypothesis declarations (Neuman, 2011). Mason concluded that the principle of data saturation could justify the number of participants in the qualitative research. The sample size of this qualitative study included all qualified participants from the population of small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs from five central regional Liberian small businesses who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. Selecting a few participants allows researchers to obtain in-depth interviews with each participant until reaching a data saturation point and until no new themes emerge (Halaweh, 2012; Mason, 2010).

O'Reilly and Parker (2012) argued that qualitative researchers reach data saturation when gathering new data in the study does not produce additional information. Fusch and Ness (2015) found that qualitative researchers reach data saturation when important issues, common experiences, and primary points repeatedly surface, and the data uncover no new information. A researcher can reach data saturation in a study when the repetition between data and concepts ends and when enough categories, themes, and correlating concepts define and explain factors that influence the study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

Population and Sampling

Population

A population consists of all the possible cases (persons, objects, events) that constitute a known whole (Englander, 2012). Sampling and population measures ensure that participants have endured the study phenomenon and can adequately respond to the research question (Daniel, 2012). The targeted population consisted of five central regional Liberian small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year.

Sampling Typologies

Three sampling methods are census, probabilistic, and nonprobabilistic. Census sampling encompasses questioning the entire population to gather all viewpoints on the phenomenon (Daniel, 2012). A significant benefit of census sampling is gathering profound perceptions from all viewpoints amongst the concerning population (Daniel, 2012). Soltani, Azadi, and Witlox (2012) used a case study and census sampling method to interview a small number of managers in rural, small food industries in Iran to gain a profound comprehension of factors affecting the development of innovations. Anderson, Marques, Shoo, and Williams (2015) stated that census sampling was adequate when using small sample sizes for the most parsimonious model in their study. A disadvantage of census sampling is that it is laborious, and capturing the total population could be a challenge (Daniel, 2012). These challenges could result in an unfinished picture of the phenomenon causing inadequate analytical generalizability (Daniel, 2012).

In probabilistic sampling, random participant selection allows individuals to have equal chances of being selected (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). Benefits of probabilistic sampling are its vast degree of representativeness, accessibility, and simplicity (Daniel, 2012). However, probabilistic sampling is tedious and laborious (Patton, 2014). Nonprobabilistic sampling is cost effective, convenient, and allows for participant selection based on the target population standards (Patton, 2014). A disadvantage of nonprobabilistic sampling is the questionable level of generalizability (Daniel, 2012). In nonprobabilistic sampling, the absence of random participant selection causes selection bias (Acharya et al., 2013).

I used a census sampling strategy. The sample size included all qualified participants including small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs from five central regional Liberian small businesses who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. Census sampling is suitable when the population size matching a study criterion is small, and when the second data resources consist of participants' observations and documentations (Daniel, 2012). Utilizing a census strategy allowed exploration of business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year and discovered common patterns in the data.

Sample Size

The sample size of this qualitative study included all qualified participants including small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs from five central regional Liberian small businesses who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. Yin (2014) explained that when a conceptual framework is well defined and succinct, a small

sample size is sufficient in a case study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) found that the insights and experiences of five to 20 participants could offer additional and useful information. Jenkins and Price (2014) justified that a small sample-size selection in a study produced a richer and deeper meaning of participants' experiences of the problem. Therefore, I incorporated all qualified Liberian small-business entrepreneurs within the five central regional Liberian small businesses. A case study is a descriptive research study in which a thorough examination of an event, group, individual, institution, or community occurs (Hyett et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). Yin stated that the strength of the case study approach is its depth, rather than its breadth.

Interviewing a sample of five to 25 participants for data collection in a case study is optimal (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Mason, 2010). Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Mason (2010) noted that researchers should interview a small number of people to obtain a profound comprehension of the studied phenomenon. Marshall and Rossman and Mason found that a smaller sample enables investigators to analyze interview responses in detail and identify essential patterns of the research question. Mason concluded that a large number of participants would diminish the investigator's ability to explore the issue in detail.

Data Saturation and Triangulation

O'Reilly and Parker (2012) stated that both the description of how to achieve data saturation and clear evidence of its occurrence supports and validates data saturation. Data saturation and triangulation maintain the transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability of a study (Denzin, 2012; Yin, 2014). The number of interviews

conducted determines the data saturation point (Mason, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). For data saturation, the sample should consist of participants who have the most knowledge to answer the research questions (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). I interviewed all qualified Liberian small-business incorporating entrepreneurs in the targeted population who had succeeded in business beyond the first year. Holding multiple interviews with each participant led to data saturation. Marshall et al. (2013) defined saturated data as the point when data ensure replication in categories during qualitative analysis. One reaches data saturation when no additional themes, codes, or information arise and when the results become replicable (Kolb, 2012). Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014) found that the data saturation point is the point when new data fails to generate a further understanding of the research questions. Participants interviewed in the order of P1, P2, P3, and so forth. O'Reilly and Parker reported that reviewing and analyzing every participant's answer to each research question in a study leads to detecting patterns and repetition of information among interviewees, thus supporting the research attainment of data saturation in a study. Patton (2014) recommended analyzing each interview with participants during the review of the data to verify themes and replication of categories relating to the conceptual factors of the study. Participants continued to interview until reaching the point of data saturation.

The eligibility criteria for the study's participants consisted of (a) small-business entrepreneurs that met the qualifications based on the definition of small-business entrepreneurs by Farrington (2012), Small Business Administration (2014), and Shastri and Rao, (2014); (b) participants had operated a small business in Liberia's Central

Region between 1990 and 2015; (c) participants had used business skills to succeed beyond first year; and (d) participants met the age requirement of 18 and over. A participant must have met these requirements. I used semistructured face-to-face interviews with participants. Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2012) stated that the advantage of face-to-face interviews is that it compels more nonverbal, amiable routines, loose conversations, and full expression of humanity within participants. Ratislavova and Ratislav (2014) and Mealer and Jones (2013) argued that face-to-face interviews provide visual cues and are considered richer than telephone and e-mail interviews.

After IRB review and approval, numerous participating candidates received letters and e-mails for effective data collection. After participant selections, I contacted the participants via e-mail to finalize the agreement to participate in the study. The body of the e-mail included requested times and dates regarding interview procedures. Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez (2015) found that participants value the opportunity to pick their location, time, and space at their convenience. The interviews took place in a setting that was suitable to the participant's comfort. During the semistructured face-to-face interview, participants confirmed that the interview environment was effective for communication.

Ethical Research

Four principles of qualitative research are (a) honesty, (b) confidentiality, (c) right to privacy, and (d) written informed consent (Patton, 2014; White et al., 2014). The conduct towards participants is an important subject that researchers must take into consideration during research decision-making (Campbell & Scott, 2011). Campbell and

Scott (2011) stated that observing ethical principles is essential to complete the research successfully. A researcher's ethical responsibilities to research are (a) ensuring integrity, (b) avoiding plagiarism, (c) avoiding conflicts of interest, (d) handling data, (e) following ethical procedures, and (f) regarding health and safety research ethics (Campbell & Scott, 2011). Following, I explain the sections of the study including the consent process, how participants could withdraw from the study, maintenance of data, and listing of agreement documents.

According to Grady (2015), participants sign an informed consent form developed by the researcher before they engage in the research. The purpose of the consent form is to protect the participant's rights during data collection (Yin, 2014). Strech, Kahass, and Hirschberg (2015) found that a consent form is ethically acceptable if researchers provide participants sufficient material to make sensible, informed decisions. Rowley (2012) stated that the qualitative researcher must obtain consent from each research participant to conduct an interview. Ellis (2011) identified that the consent forms include identification of sponsoring institutes, the purpose of the research, benefits of participating, and levels of participants' involvement. The form also includes a statement of consent, confidentiality, and expectations from participants (Patton, 2014).

Before the start of data collection, the Walden University IRB, approval number 02-09-16-0311801, ensured the proposal met proper protection guidelines. Upon receiving IRB review and approval, participating candidates received, by mail and e-mail, the letter of consent outlining the (a) purpose of the study, (b) criteria of the study, and (c) request for voluntary participation prior to beginning the study. Participation in a

study must be voluntary and must occur with informed consent (Cox, 2012; Nijhawan et al., 2013). Participants should scan and e-mail signed consent forms to the researcher specifying their willingness to contribute to the study freely. Participants need to sign and e-mail the consent forms to the qualitative researcher before interviews since the consent form is the contract for participants to partake in the research study (Rowley, 2012).

Amon et al. (2012) stated that participants could abandon the study at any point without direct communication with the researcher. Downey and Chang (2013) specified that participants could abandon the study without penalties. To withdraw from the study, participants could contact me in whatever method worked best for them (telephone, e-mail, etc.). If participants requested to withdrawal in writing, participants had the option to complete, sign, scan, and e-mail the “Right to withdraw from the research and destroy information in writing” form (Appendix C). If participants withdrew, they received interview notes for their disposal.

Participants participated in the study without incentives to avoid encouraging participation. Downey and Chang (2013) stated that participants cannot receive compensation during a study. Singer and Ye (2013) and Bernstein and Feldman (2015) argued that several reasons why people participate in studies include egoistic reasons such as receiving money. McCurdy (2013) stated that studies which use monetary and nonmonetary incentive have significantly higher participant response rates than studies that do not include rewards. Since incentives can be coercive and can affect the quality of the data collected, I did not offer incentives for the study.

Pollock (2012) studied the ethical conduct of qualitative research and found that researchers' regard for autonomy necessitates voluntary participation. Marshall et al. (2014) proposed that participant's voluntary participation in the research is vital to ethical practice. Patton (2014) stated that qualitative researchers begin with the stipulation that all research participation must be voluntary. Participants received reminders of their strictly voluntary participation agreement. Records of the participants' voluntary participation agreement were on consent form and participants received reminders before the start of the interview (see Appendix A). Obtaining the participant's identification while ensuring him or her that it was confidential protected each participant's identity and rights in the study. Additionally, each participant received a number (e.g., P1, P2, P3) representing each participant throughout the study. The study population included adults ages 18 and over. It is normal for a person in a developing country to have a small local rural business at the age of 18 to help feed his or her family (Stanturf et al., 2015).

Notifying participants of their privacy and confidentiality status, as well as the safe locations for data storage, is a requirement (White et al., 2014). Strech et al. (2015) proposed that the identity of participants stay confidential by placing their information in a safe and secure place and by not using the names of the individual organizations or the individuals in the study. All eligible participants received assurances regarding their anonymity to assure their names and names of their organizations remained strictly confidential. As mandated by Walden University IRB regulations, participants received notification about destroying their data after 5 years. To protect the participant confidentiality, I will maintain the qualitative research data and collection in a secure

deposit box for at least 5 years before destroying the data. Commercial software designed to remove data from storage devices will erase records stored on computer disks and shredding will destroy paper records. Interested participants can obtain a copy of the research findings.

Data Collection Instruments

Instruments

The researcher is a critical instrument to qualitative research (Cox, 2012). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument. Qualitative researchers are the primary instrument; however, researchers can reuse an instrument or generate a data collection instrument (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Maimbo and Pervan (2005) recommend keeping two central objectives in mind when collecting data for further analysis: triangulation of perspectives and data from numerous participants and sources. Maimbo and Pervan stated that in the selection of instruments, triangulation and the collection of multiple sources of evidence are effective tools. Case studies can involve the use of various data methods (Yin, 2014).

According to Yin (2014), multiple data sources and theoretical schemes provide dependability and credibility in qualitative case studies. The use of more than one data source is a technique known as triangulation. Maimbo and Pervan (2005) highly recommended this technique as a mechanism for increasing both the credibility and dependability of qualitative research. Esling and Agon (2012) recommended semistructured interviews, examination of existing documents, and participant observations as data collection instruments. For the collection of data, the semistructured

interview was the secondary instrument I used to acquire detailed information about business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs could implement to succeed in business beyond the first year.

Ahmad and Alaskari (2014) used semistructured interviews to develop an assessment methodology used to evaluate the performance of SMEs in the manufacturing division. Chisholm, Mann, Peters, and Hart (2013) found that semistructured interviews enable exploration of new ideas by participants. Rachel and Hine (2012) used semistructured interviews for the flexibility to capture the diversity of views from participants. According to Kisely and Kendall (2011) and Qu and Dumay (2011), when conducting a qualitative case study that results from direct interaction with the study participants, a semistructured interview is an effective data collection instrument.

The secondary data consisted of participant observations and organizational documents pertaining to the entrepreneur's business skill. Using document collection as a research instrument created a deep analysis by demonstrating business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs could apply in succeeding in business beyond the first year. Identifying themes from the government and organization reports and documents added consistency and transferability to the data gathering method of the study. For statistical data, I used websites, governmental reports, and archival records of Liberia's Central Region in validating participants' responses during the interviews.

Yin (2014) stated that in case studies, the researcher's observation of participants provides meaning from themes and patterns of the phenomenon. Peredaryenko and Krauss (2013) proposed that researchers use participant observations to observe and learn

about the things people do in the normal course of their lives. Lakshmi (2014) stated that researchers triangulate data based on observations. I used an observation protocol to validate the semistructured interview responses. During participants' observation, my focus was on the exploration of the perceptions and observations of business skills performance that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs often lack to succeed in business beyond the first year. Details of the observation protocol reside in Appendix E.

The data collection methods included a USB digital voice audio to record interviews. I conducted open-ended interview questions to explore the fundamental factors of the business problem and purpose for the study. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), utilizing open-ended questions allows interviewees to provide defined responses while being able to expand. Pacho (2015) used open-ended interview questions to discover understanding about a specific phenomenon from the insider's viewpoint. Qu and Dumay (2011) stated that participants offer comprehensive responses if asked open-ended questions. Yin (2014) stated that researchers can generate a detailed response from participants by using an open-ended interview.

Effective interview protocol (see Appendix A) processes enhanced the credibility and quality of the instruments in the study. Interview protocol is a critical aspect of data accuracy and quality (Yin, 2014). I followed the procedures and general rules of this design when using the instrument. The researcher must create the case study interview protocol before the data collection phase (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The investigator uses the interview protocol as a guide to accomplish data collection and to increase the dependability of the case study (Yin, 2014). Lauckner, Paterson, and Krupa (2012) found

that case study researchers who used the interview protocol, analytical memos, and a data storage system developed an audit trajectory that furthered the dependability of the research.

Data collection is credible when the data gathering process is stable and not self-contradicting (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Using the same interview protocol (see Appendix A) and interview questions for each participant improved the confirmability, dependability, and credibility of the study. According to Yin (2014), a standard protocol has multiple sections: (a) a summary of the case study topics, issues, and objectives; (b) field practices such as sources of information and credentials; (c) specific case study questions the researcher must ask during data gathering; and (d) a case study report format and outline for the narrative. Yin found that the researcher's ability to guide participant dialog along a predetermined line is crucial for effective and focused interviews. Draper and Swift (2011) used a protocol to direct the process that participants adhered to in completing interactions. The protocol guide provided absolute structure to the interview and satisfied the requirements of disclosure in the case study research (Draper & Swift, 2011).

To enhance the dependability of the data collection instrument, I presented a draft of the research questions to an expert academic practitioner with interests in small-business development for his or her opinions. These opinions helped to improve the transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability of the data collection instrument and the total study. The academic expert, with sufficient and relevant educational background and experience in small-business skills, reviewed the interview

questions for confusion, clarity, and alignment. Broeders et al. (2014) used an expert reviewer in their qualitative study to analyze existing documents and evaluate their usefulness in confirming guidelines for qualitative methods. Bhana, Flowerday, and Satt (2013) used an expert reviewer to validate any assumptions, comments, and recommendations of data collection instruments to remove ambiguity and ensure completeness. Kelly, Jenkinson, and Ziebland (2013) used an expert reviewer to flag and critique items that participants could not answer.

A simple process was necessary for participants to complete the instruments. I reviewed the interview questions for inconsistencies. Participants previewed interview questions and had the right to deny or approve the questions. Researchers used data cleaning to improve data quality by identifying and eliminating inconsistencies and errors from the data (Patil & Kulkarni, 2012). Evaluation of all instruments ensured effective data collection. Data in this qualitative case study appeared in appendices, tables, and graphs. Availability of appendices, tables, and graphs are essential to data availability and future recommendation for further research (Yin, 2014). A copy of the research instrument and the interview protocol is in Appendix A of the doctoral study. The Table of Contents has a record of the location of instruments and the interview protocol to allow others to repeat the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data Collection Technique

The sources of data collection were interviews, examination of existing documents, and participant observations. Multiple sources of data improve the credibility and dependability of a study (Yin, 2014). The interview format was a semistructured

analytical approach comprised of open-ended questions used to gather data and acquire insight into business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. An interview is a dialogue amongst the researcher and the participant for answering the research question (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). I used semistructured interviews, participant observations, and the collection of business documents about business skills as the research instruments to gather data for the case study.

Semistructured Interviews

For the study, I was the data collector and used a USB digital voice audio, a pen, a notebook, Microsoft Word, Excel, and the ATLAS.ti software as my instruments. The use of audio recording gives the advantage of accessing a full record of rich sources of data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Yin (2014) suggested using semistructured interviews for qualitative studies. I used the best-known practices for qualitative data collection techniques provided by others within the literature (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012; Pacho, 2015; Yin, 2014). The primary source of documentation for the interview was a recording device. If the participant refused to use the recording device, I changed the primary source of documentation to pen and notebook. According to Xu and Recker (2012), triangulation through comparing transcribed interview data with written interview notes ensures the credibility of the transcribed facts. I used Excel and Microsoft Word for organizing the data and the ATLAS.ti software for data analysis.

Following the interview protocol checklist to ensure a consistent data collection process (see Appendix A) was the first data collection step for the study. I read each line

of the checklist to participants and checked all appropriate questions on the interview protocol with participants' permission. All interviews occurred at the participant's business location. The duration of the semistructured interviews was 1 hour as cited in the consent form. The interview duration depends on a participant's perceptions of the research and the details of their experiences (Cronin-Gilmore, 2012).

Wahyuni (2012) and Merlino and Rhodes (2012) suggested that interview sessions start with a casual introduction and conversation about the research topic to create rapport with the participant and make him or her comfortable. A formal interview with each participant started after the introduction, and I asked each participant to share their life experiences regarding their inefficiencies in small-business planning. Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommended the questions to be open-ended so participants can have sole discretion of how to address the questions. The data collection process continued until reaching validation of data saturation. Data saturation relates to the depth of the sample and the ability to find repetition in the data through interviewing the qualified employees from the sample (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

Participants Observation and Journaling

After the conclusion of the interview, participants walked me through their daily business management routine, primarily focusing on business owners' knowledge, financial, and marketing management skills. The business skills observation process involved taking field notes at the entrepreneur's place of business. Observations covered each participant and occurred at different times. Yin (2014) indicated that the advantage of participant observation is the capability to cover events in real time. On the contrary,

disadvantages include bias from the researcher's actions and the probability of missing pertinent facts (Yin, 2014). The observation protocol (see Appendix E) includes vital tasks used for effective observation. The tasks were observing (a) participants business constraints, (b) how participants used their business management skills, (c) how participant used business skills to manage business finances, (d) how participant managed marketing-business skills, and (e) participants use of the business skills that were disclosed during the semistructured interviews. Observations lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes per participant.

Leedy and Ormrod (2013) endorsed reviewing and maintaining a journal throughout a study. Journaling is an integral part of the qualitative research (Snyder, 2012). Hayman, Wilkes, and Jackson (2012) found that journaling is an excellent method to recognize patterns and themes in the data. I conducted journaling throughout the interviews and observation process. Yin (2014) confirmed that keeping a journal to record ideas during the data collection process will formulate additional data and may enhance the credibility of the study.

Document Review

The most commonly used sources of evidence for case study research are interviews, documentation, direct observations, archival records, participants' observations, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) stated that case study researchers use numerous sources of data to explore case specifics. Interviews and documents, periodicals, books, and examinations of existing documents served as the fundamental data components of my data collection technique. Well-informed

interviewees can provide valuable insights into the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Yin's three approaches to collecting information are (a) utilizing multiple data sources, (b) assembling an organized collection of data, and (c) maintaining a systematic approach for authentication. Secondary data included entrepreneurs education and business background, planning documents, and financial records used in their everyday business practice. I triangulated data by using the interview data and documents obtained from all participants.

There are advantages to semistructured face-to-face interviews. Doody and Noonan (2013) stated that an advantage of semistructured interviews is that during the interview, the researcher can explore new paths not initially considered. Researchers use the flexibility of semistructured interviews and ask open-ended questions to explore issues that arise spontaneously. According to Mojtahed, Nunes, Martins and Peng (2014), semistructured interviews in qualitative studies increase the credibility of a study because participants have innumerable amounts of freedom for conversations to flow freely. Opdenakker (2006) mentioned that face-to-face interviewers can observe social cues such as body language, voice, and intonation. Opdenakker noted that interviewers used social cues as additional information than just the verbal answer of the participant.

There are potential disadvantages of conducting semistructured face-to-face interviews. Qualitative researchers listen to participants during interviews to gather insights, meanings, and confirmation of the multiple events described (Jap, 2012). Because of the flexibility of semistructured interviews, researchers must establish an environment of active involvement and must listen, use nonverbal communication, and

observe cautiously (Patton, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Researchers may project their opinions, ideas, and perspectives to participants (Mojtahed et al., 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour (2014) and Block and Erskine (2012) mentioned that a disadvantage of face-to-face interviews is that they lack the technological advances that online and telephone interviews have to overcome geographical dispersal and financial, time, and physical mobility boundaries that previously negatively affected on-site interviews.

After interviews, member checking allows all participants the opportunity to validate the accurate presentation of their interpretations (Harper & Cole, 2012). Qualitative researchers use member checking to improve the accuracy of the study by allowing participants to validate the data and the significance of their interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) stated that by utilizing member checking and multiple-participant data sources, researchers are more able to enhance credibility in case study designs. For the current study, member checking occurred with each interview throughout the study. During member checking in the study, I (a) reviewed and interpreted the interview transcript, (b) synthesized each question, (c) provided a copy of the synthesis to participants, (d) asked participants if the synthesis represented their answers or if there was any additional information, and (e) continued member checking until there was no new data collection. Documents served as a source of evidence. Yin (2014) stated that the review of the participant and documents to corroborate interview statements may increase the credibility of the study. Yin

concluded that data collection through document review complemented semistructured interviews for a comprehensive case study.

Data Organization Techniques

In qualitative studies, a significant concern is the data organization process (Davidson, 2012). Leedy and Ormrod (2013) described the organization of qualitative data as following these actions: (a) checking data, (b) reviewing and maintaining a log, (c) utilizing a qualitative data analysis program to record raw data, and (d) evaluating all notes. During the process of data arrangement, I recognized patterns, trends, and prevailing themes that emerged.

Tasic and Feruh (2012) stated the first step to decreasing research errors is data checking. During the data checking process, researchers must check for consistency, data verification, and quality (Yin, 2014). I used ATLAS.ti for data organization and analysis software. After checking the data and comparing all transcribed recordings and interview notes, I entered all of the raw data into the ATLAS.ti software.

Maintaining a journal through the data collection and study process is an effective way to organize data (Draper & Swift, 2011). Keeping a journal to record ideas during the data collection process will formulate additional data and may enhance the credibility of the study (Yin, 2014). Lamb (2013) claimed that researchers journal to document their individual research journey and to authenticate the research data collected. According to Humble and Sharp (2012), for qualitative researchers, the act of keeping a journal and keeping incorporates in the research process provides a data set of the researcher's reflections on the research act. Maintaining adequate journals and reviewing all journal

memos and notes continuously throughout the study increased observation and awareness (Yin, 2014).

After checking the data and comparing all transcribed recordings and interview notes, I entered all the raw data into the ATLAS.ti software and consequently reviewed all inputs and re-read my notes. Franzosi, Doyle, McClelland, Rankin, and Vicari (2012) used the ATLAS.ti software to study different text analysis software. Scales (2013) found that ATLAS.ti is a tool researchers use to specify qualitative information through coding. Smit (2014) and Ali, Vitulano, Lee, Weiss, and Colson (2014) stated that using the ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis computer software generates effective empirical data interpretation and assists with theme development, coding, and data interpretation. Analysis and identification of any patterns and themes that emerged began after organization.

Mooney, Collie, Nicholson, and Sosulski (2014) recommended that researchers password protect their computer or personal laptops used for research in public and living spaces. Kennan and Markauskaite (2015) stated that project storage, archiving, and maintenance of data integrity are major issues in data management. Cordoba, Pilkington, and Bernroider (2012) recommended that researchers store data from a study for a minimum five-year period before deleting. The organized raw data password resided on an external hard drive, and hard copies remained stored and locked in a secure safety deposit box. I will maintain all data for a minimum five-year period before deleting information and destroying hard copies. Commercial software designed to remove data

from storage devices will erase records stored on computer disks and shredding will destroy paper records.

Data Analysis

After collecting and organizing the data, I repeatedly read the information several times and made notes to capture and seize the true meaning of the data. An important step in the research process is the analysis of the data (Saldana, 2013). Data analysis involves (a) evaluating, (b) categorizing, (c) organizing, (d) analyzing, and (e) rearranging data to extract observational-based assumptions (Yin, 2014). Before beginning data-analysis process, researchers should precisely review the interview questions and then transcribe the interview recordings (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Combs, 2012).

Qualitative researchers use triangulation as a technique to reinforce the credibility of a study (Fielding, 2012). Five forms of triangulations exist: (a) investigator triangulation, (b) data triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, (d) environmental triangulation, and (e) methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012; Fielding, 2012). I used methodological triangulation in the study. The combination of interviews with secondary data serves to demonstrate methodological triangulation (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012) and functions as a framework for exploratory case studies (Yin, 2014). Zauszniewski (2012) found that methodological triangulation is common in cases in which researchers use multiple sources of information to check the consistency of different data sources. In this research, for information on the business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year, methodological triangulation supported the responses from the participants with the information-selected documents. Data

analysis for this qualitative case study addressed the research question cogently with findings resulting from the study. The focus of the study was to identify various themes and categorize accordingly in relation to possible skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs could implement to succeed in business beyond the first year. The interview question guided the research and served to collect data from participants. Following the interviews, I evaluated the data consecutively to pinpoint the findings and attain an effective conclusion for the study.

Data Analysis Software

According to Yin (2014), computer assistant tools and software such as ATLAS.ti, NVivo, and HyperResearch are effective qualitative data analysis software. I used the ATLAS.ti software to analyze, code, and organize the raw data. The main focus of the ATLAS.ti data analysis software is to serve as a consistent and reliable tool (Grise & Huertas, 2013). Researchers use software programs to code and group substantial quantities of narrative text, gathered from interviews or written documents, such as newspaper articles (Yin, 2014). The main benefits of utilizing ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software consist of (a) increased flexibility, (b) management of extensive quantities of data, and (c) accurateness of research, and (d) advanced credibility and dependability (Kikooma, 2010).

Data Coding

Out of the five case-study analytic techniques discussed by Yin (2014), I used the pattern-matching technique for the study. Yin found that one of the most useful techniques in case study analysis is pattern-matching. Iacono, Brown, and Holtham,

(2011) used pattern matching to emerge theories within the literature and to enhance credibility and confirmability. Ro (2013) used a case-study research with a pattern-matching technique to explore adult readers' anxieties and motivations regarding second-language reading. McCormack, Rock, Swanson, Burton, and Massolo (2014) used pattern-matching techniques for their qualitative data analysis on physical activity patterns in urban neighbourhood parks. According to Yin, researchers use pattern-matching techniques to compare a single or multiple different predictions with an empirically based pattern. Yin concluded that internal credibility of a case strengthens when the patterns match. Entrepreneurial small-business success and failure is a topic that is popular in various research studies (Al-Hyari, 2013). The codes formulated in the study created patterns across the data relative to business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Triangulating data from both the documentation and interview transcripts related to effective entrepreneurs' business skills will corroborate the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2014).

The remaining analytic techniques are (a) explanation building, (b) time-series analysis, (c) logic models, and (d) cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2014). I did not use explanation building because, according to Yin (2014), in most existing case studies, explanation building has occurred in narrative design form. The predominant use of time-series analysis and cross-case synthesis techniques is in quantitative-method analysis, and the logic model does not meet standards of further study of the research question (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Therefore, I did not use time-series analysis, logic models, nor cross-case synthesis techniques in the study of process development and developing ideas.

Qualitative data analysis is a recursive, progressive, repetitive, inductive, and holographic procedure (Saldana, 2013). After recognizing patterns in data, data coding combines the data into categories, ideas and themes (Gale, Health, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). Peng, Jianwei, Hsien-Ming, and Lina (2012) found that the coding process allows researchers to break data into segments to analyze and manage the data more easily. Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013) proposed that developing coding schemes for semistructured interview data is effective in transcribing interview questions. The three primary coding methods as described by Saldana (2013) are (a) initial coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) theoretical coding. Open coding is identical to initial coding, and selective coding is identical to theoretical coding (Saldana, 2013). Saldana stated that coding would help organize and interpret the data.

Initial coding. Initial coding takes place during the first cycle of coding (Stevens, Lyles, & Berke, 2014). Saldana (2013) theorized that initial coding is the foundation that grants researchers a direction for the course of research and additional investigations. Saldana recommended condensing extensive amounts of data into smaller distinct segments during the initial coding. During this stage, researchers can (a) link raw data to the research question, (b) recognize patterns from the literature and data, and (c) find classifications of recurring data to categorize (Saldana, 2013; Seidel & Urquhart, 2013).

Axial coding. Axial coding use expands the analysis conducted during initial coding. According to Kikooma (2010), the aim of axial coding is to reorganize fragmented data generated from the initial coding. When analyzing case-study data after playing with the data, a general strategy must emerge (Yin, 2014). The strategy will help

researchers to treat evidence equitably, produce compelling analytic findings, and discard alternative interpretations (Saldana, 2013). Saldana (2013) observed that researchers discover the qualities and properties of the categories by linking categories and subcategories.

Theoretical coding. Theoretical coding, also known as selective coding, transpires throughout the second phase of coding qualitative data (Saldana, 2013). Saldana (2013) observed that theoretical coding encompasses all formerly identified categories and codes. Gale et al. (2013) stated that during theoretical coding, qualitative researchers incorporate prior categories into a main category. As stated by Saldana, researchers use theoretical coding to recognize potential connections among categories and to progress the analytic findings of the study towards a theoretical route.

I applied pattern-matching, initial-coding, axial-coding, and theoretical-coding methods to guide the data analyzing process. Pattern matching served to emerge theories from the literature; initial coding aided in breaking the raw data into smaller, controllable data groups; reviewing the categories, linking categories, and reconvening data around themes will apply axial coding; and theoretical coding will support the synthesizing and construing phase of data analysis (Gale et al., 2013; Saldana, 2013). During the synthesizing and construing phase, I combined existing categories into one cohesive category where themes emerged from.

Data Analysis Consistency

The central research question answered by this study was what business skills do Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year? I

presented data analysis results as aligned with the research question. The themes analyzed symbolized interpretation of the indications of the data (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Data interpretation and organization occurred by the results of the interview questions. The explanation consisted of (a) research results, (b) findings, and (c) a research conclusion (Seidel & Urquhart, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was the theory of constraints. The theory of constraints is a methodology for isolating the weakest points in an organization to improve the performance of systems (Simsit et al., 2014). The main concept of the theory of constraints is that constraints are the main obstacles preventing achievement of business owners and management's objectives (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014) and that managers can preside over their constraints to accomplish the company's goal (Dehkordy et al., 2013; Hakkak et al., 2014). I explored the business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. After revealing the various business skills, I assessed the strategies to previous literature results. The analysis of the data included identifying and exploring themes associated with Liberian entrepreneurs' business skills in knowledge, finances, and marketing. This analysis helped determine the business skills Liberian entrepreneur used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The data analysis aligned with the conceptual framework of this study. The constraints preventing Liberian small-business entrepreneur success in business beyond the first year, arrangement of common themes, occurring words, and phrases supported a connection between the lack of entrepreneur

business skills and entrepreneurs' business success beyond the first year. The outcomes and factors of entrepreneurs' decision to identify, exploit, subordinate, and elevate constraints in their businesses led to entrepreneurs having further control over their business constraints by being able to better manage their business skills.

Dependability, Credibility, Transferability, and Confirmability

Sinkovics and Alfoldi (2012) stated that quantitative researchers have different views on validity and reliability that are not pertinent to qualitative research.

Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) found that qualitative researchers have implemented four balancing components to address the credibility, trustworthiness, and soundness of qualitative research. The four components are (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Addressing these approaches is imperative to ensure qualitative rigor (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014).

Dependability

Kemparaj and Chavan (2013) determined that rigorous qualitative researchers adopt the concept of dependability for the quantitative concept of reliability. The researcher observing the same thing twice and then the scholar obtaining the same results indicates dependability (Walker, 2012). Flyvbjerg (2011) stated that qualitative research study dependability comprises of the consistency of procedures and processes all through the study. Zohrabi (2013) stated that the uniformity of the interview questions strengthens the creditability and dependability of the study results. I presented a draft of the research questions to a small-business expert for his or her opinions to ensure the dependability of the data collection instrument. Bhana et al. (2013) used an expert reviewer to enhance the

credibility of any assumptions, comments, and recommendations of data collection instruments to remove ambiguity and ensure the completeness.

As proposed by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), a systematic inductive approach for data ensures dependability. As recommended by Scales (2013) and Smit (2014), the ATLAS.ti content analysis software program will ensure data analysis and coding consistency. Qu and Dumay (2011) stated that possible limitations of the interviews relate mainly to the bias of interviewers and the responses. According to Neuman (2011), while conducting interviews, researchers must concentrate on the process of ensuring constancy. Neuman concluded that these consisted of the proper protocol in the order of interview questions. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) stated that an objective of qualitative research is to reduce researcher bias and error. To control the bias of interviewers and the responses, I designed an interview protocol checklist (see Appendix A) that guided the interview process. Each participant received the questions in the same order.

Credibility and Transferability

Leedy and Ormrod (2013) theorized that qualitative validity involves trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity. Kisely and Kendall (2011) define credibility as a determination of the accuracy of the study results based on if the researcher truly evaluated the originally proposed question. To confirm the credibility and transferability throughout the study, I included in the study: (a) pattern matching, (b) methodological triangulation, (c) member checking, (d) census sampling, and (e) expert review. Iacono et al. (2011) used pattern matching to emerge theories within the literature and to enhance

credibility. Yin (2014) found that credibility of a case strengthens when the patterns match. Cho and Lee (2014) found that researchers use qualitative data analysis to construct concepts and theories from emerging themes and patterns. I used pattern matching to enhance the credibility and authenticity of the study.

According to Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2012), the credibility criteria in qualitative research involves the use of triangulation to confirm that the results are believable or credible from the participants' perspective. Five forms of triangulations exist: (a) investigator triangulation, (b) data triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, (d) environmental triangulation, and (e) methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2012; Fielding, 2012). I used methodological triangulation to guide the credibility criteria of the study. Denzin (2012) found that triangulation involves utilizing multiple sources of information to improve the credibility of the study. Triangulating information involves comparing data collected from participants, thus resulting in the wider applicability of the findings and increased credibility of the results (Xu & Recker, 2012). Triangulation is a means for a researcher to enhance credibility within a study by reinforcing participant responses with the information stated in the selected periodicals, books, and government reports. Yin (2014) stated that the review of participant and government documents to corroborate interview statements improves the credibility of the study. Utilizing triangulation in qualitative research improves the credibility of a study (Kisely & Kendall, 2011).

Validating participants through member checking enhances the accuracy, integrity, and reliability of a qualitative study (Harper & Cole, 2012; Miner-Romanoff,

2012). During member checking in the study, I (a) reviewed and interpreted the interview transcript, (b) synthesized each question, (c) provided a copy of the synthesis to participants, (d) asked participants if the synthesis represented their answers or if there was any additional information, and (e) continued member checking until there was no new data collection. Qualitative researchers use member checking to improve the credibility and dependability of the study by verifying the meaning of the results (Harper & Cole, 2012). From this perspective, qualitative researchers aim to understand or describe the concerning issues from the perspective of participants (Yin, 2014). Therefore, small-business entrepreneurs from the Central Region of Liberia were the most qualified people to evaluate the credibility of the results. All participants in a study should have the opportunity to review and verify the accuracy of their statements through member checking (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Harper and Cole and Houghton et al. (2013) found that qualitative researchers use member checking as a quality control process by allowing participants to evaluate their statements for accuracy.

Anney (2014) defined transferability as to the extent that the results of qualitative research can transfer or generalize to other contexts or circumstances. According to Drabble, O’Cathain, Thomas, Rudolph, and Hewison (2014), qualitative researchers can improve transferability by systematically describing the assumptions and the research context that were fundamental to the research. To address transferability in the study, I used census sampling to ensure the population and sample yielded the most relevant, plentiful, and valuable information to address the research question. The interview protocol served to enhance clarity during the interview process.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the potential for other researchers to substantiate the results (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). The credibility of qualitative studies is challenging to document since it explores whether the researcher's instrument allows the study to confirm the research object (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). To address confirmability in the study, I consulted an expert review. I presented the research questions to an expert academic practitioner with interests in small-business development for his or her opinions to ensure confirmability of the data collection instrument. The small-business expert academic practitioner, with sufficient and relevant educational background and experience in business planning, reviewed the research questions for confusion, clarity, and alignment.

According to Iqbal, Gul, Lakhani, and Rizvi (2014), in research, one achieves data saturation with repeated noting of particular themes or behaviors, affirmation of a general picture of information, and when no new or relevant information emerges in the newly constructed theory. Based on interviews conducted and information elicited from a study, the researcher reaches data saturation when he or she notices the repetition of information among interviewees and no new information emerges after interviewing the last participant (Halaweh, 2012). Participants interviewed in the order of P1, P2, P3, and so forth. As recommended by O'Reilly and Parker (2012), to support the research attainment of data saturation in the study, after each interview, I reviewed and analyzed participant's answers to each research question to detect patterns and repetition of information among interviewees. Dworkin (2012) and Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014)

stated that researchers reach data saturation when data becomes repetitive, and no additional information arises. O'Reilly and Parker stipulate stopping the interview when reaching data saturation. Member checking tied into data saturation in the study after I (a) synthesized each question, (b) provided a copy of the synthesis to participants, (c) asked participants if the synthesis represented their answers or if there was any additional information, and (d) continued member checking and followed-up interviewing until there was no new data collection. Using methodological triangulation and respondent feedback on a sample size of five participants enabled attaining data saturation and enhanced the reliability of the study results.

Transition and Summary

The objective of Section 2 was to provide a description and justification of the research process. The research processes consisted of an expert review used in the study to refine data collection plans. The plans also consisted of the criteria for (a) design and method; (b) participant selection process; (c) sampling of participants; (d) instructions to ensure ethical research; (e) overview of organization plans and data collection; and (f) the addressing of the dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. The focus of the qualitative case study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. I used interview questions to produce feedback to support an enriched understanding of small-business skills procedures. The primary data collection analyzed a population of business entrepreneurs over the age of 18 that have operated small businesses in Liberia's Central Region between 1990 and 2015 and have used business skills to succeed beyond the first

year. Through this analysis, an attainable structure evolved to provide an enhanced understanding of the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year.

The desire to bring social change to postconflict Liberia through the life of small-business entrepreneurs and to maintain sustainable small-business practices was essential to the study. The purpose of the study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Section 3 of the study includes an overview of the study, summary and exploration of the data collected, critical findings, presentation of result findings, recommendation of action, and future research.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory multiple case study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The research question that guided this study is as follows: What business skills do Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year? The research participants included five central-regional Liberian small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs who had succeeded in business beyond the first year.

Data collection included semistructured face-to-face interviews with each participant, observation of participants at their places of business, and the collection of company documents about entrepreneurs' education, business background, planning documents, and financial records used in their business everyday practice. Data analysis revealed three business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. The first was business knowledge skills, which increases entrepreneur intellectual capital and business knowledge. To have a successful small business, entrepreneurs must understand the macroeconomics of small-business formation and development (Castello & Boike, 2013; Shahidullah & Haque, 2014). The second skill identified was bookkeeping. Effective bookkeeping skills improve the business owner's ability to track daily transactions and justify the expenses and profits. The last emerging theme was pricing skills. Creating adequate price ranges and strategies

creates customer retention, product demand, and customer attraction to increase Liberian small-business entrepreneurs' business success beyond the first year.

Presentation of the Findings

This subsection contains the outline of the three themes that arose from exploring the study's data. As discussed by O'Reilly and Parker (2013), I reached data saturation when I stopped receiving additional information from my review of the interview data, organizational documents, and participant observation notes. I identified three themes related to business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year: (a) business knowledge, (b) bookkeeping, and (c) pricing.

Thematic Categories to Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was the theory of constraints. The theory of constraints is a management philosophy used by business owners to identify the weakest point in an organization and to improve performance processes (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014). The analysis of the data included identifying and exploring themes associated with Liberian entrepreneurs' business skills in knowledge, financing, and marketing. The data analysis aligned with the conceptual framework of this study. Figure 7 shows the identification of themes from the data analysis as it related to the five focusing steps of the theory of constraints methodology for identifying and eliminating constraints.

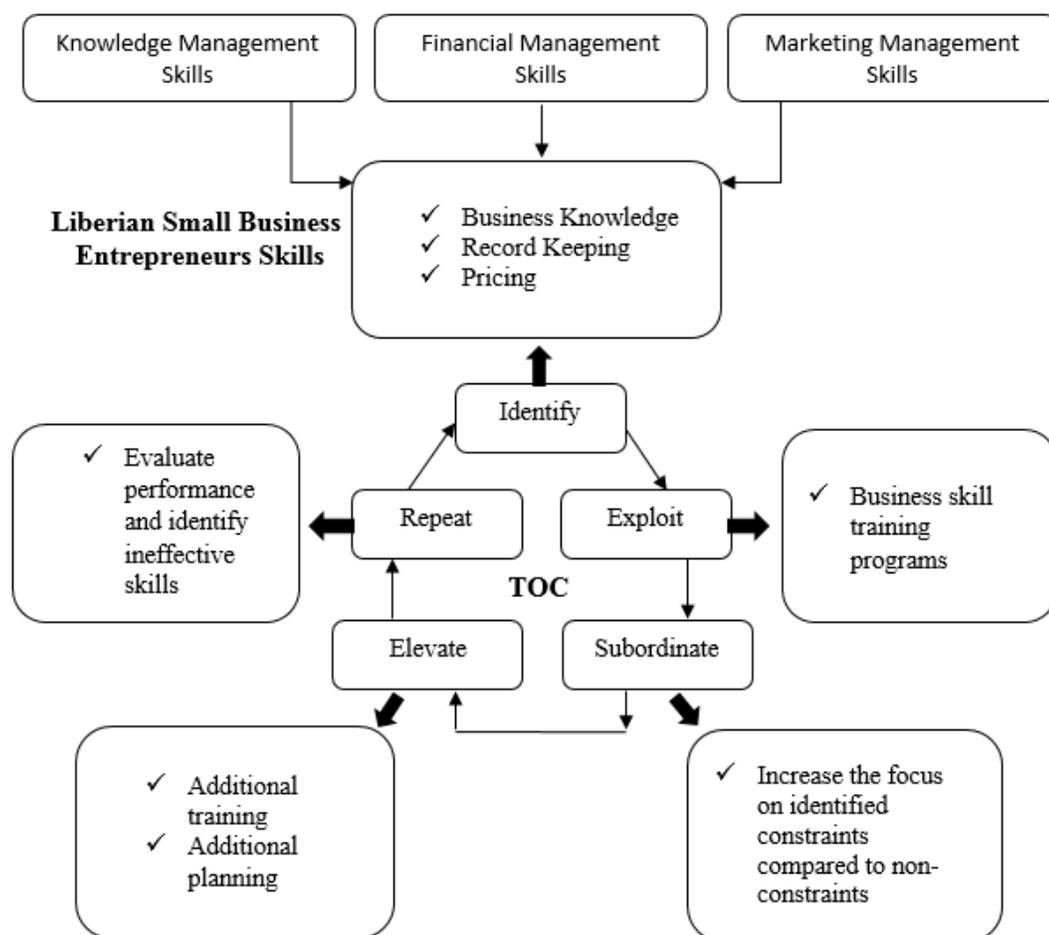


Figure 7. Small-business entrepreneurial model outlining themes of themes from the data analysis as it related to the five focusing steps of the theory of constraints methodology for identifying and eliminating constraints.

If small-business owners can identify, exploit, subordinate, and elevate constraints (themes), they may increase their business skills. An increase in effective business skills may result in increased entrepreneur performance and new business standards for success in business beyond the first year. I identified three themes from the participants: (a) business knowledge, (b) bookkeeping, and (c) pricing. I developed the themes by interpreting the participants' responses from the in-depth interviews and consequently

related these themes to the literature review and conceptual framework. The themes found in the study determine a collective set of business management skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs may have in common. Because of these comparisons, knowledge from one Liberian small-business entrepreneur about business success beyond the first year could benefit another Liberian small-business entrepreneur. Table 2 shows the thematic categories as they apply to the number of participants who considered each theme as a critical factor and the percentage of those participants.

Table 2

Business Skills That Contribute to Success of Liberian Small-Business Entrepreneurs

Thematic Categories	No. of participant who considered this as critical factor	% of participant who considered this as critical factor
Business Knowledge Skills	5	100%
Bookkeeping	5	100%
Pricing	5	100%

Theme 1: Business Knowledge Skills

The first theme discovered was entrepreneur business knowledge. Business knowledge is the ability to know how to run and manage a particular business (P3). Every business owner should have some knowledge about their business before starting (P4). Five business knowledge skills used to succeed emerged from participant responses: (a) entrepreneur continuous education, (b) ability to gain and share knowledge, (c) business knowledge of communication skills, (d) knowledge of technology use, and (e) knowledge of product and services (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5).

Most successful small-business owners in Liberia either went to school for the business they managed, were lifelong learners of the business, or had the knowledge of the business passed down through family members (P1). Personal records described four out of the five participants graduated high school or received higher degrees (document review of P2, P3, P4, P5). Three out of the five participants received some formal education regarding the business they practice (document review of P2, P4, P5). Three of the participants gave documentation of local professional events, conferences, and meetings they attended with other business entrepreneurs for information on knowledge regarding their business industry (document review of P2, P4, P5). The ability to find local conferences and professional organization meetings regarding business knowledge is beneficial to business owners (P1, P3). Olowu and Aliyu (2015) stated that investment in knowledge skills and abilities has shown to enhance the productivity of entrepreneurs.

Huggins and Weir (2012) and Kukko (2013) noted that knowledge transfer was essential for knowledge management. Business owners communicated with other business owners to share and gain knowledge regarding their daily business constraints (observation of P3). Entrepreneurs took notes of conversations with other business owners for storing and practicing (observations of P1, P3). Every business owner looking for success should have the knowledge to communicate well with potential buyers and sellers (P2, P3, P5). With a rapid moving technological world, having knowledge of the use of technology is critical (P4, P5). All of the participants had cell phones and four had internet access and computers at their place of business (observations of P1, P2, P3, P4, P5).

Four participants mentioned their business knowledge was a significant factor in their business success (P1, P2, P3, P5). An example given was the business owner's ability to know the demand of products and services in areas of the Central Region of Liberia (P2, P5). Participant observation notes (February 15, 2016) referred to participants as having excellent knowledge of products (P4). Buheji, Al-Hasan, Thomas, and Melle (2014) stated that management business knowledge skills require continuous improvement. During member checking, three participants reported there was an ongoing need to continuously gather, share, and implement knowledge of their business (P2, P3,). Danis and Shipilov (2012) and Siewiorek, Saarinen, Lainema, and Lehtinen (2012) found that acquiring business knowledge is a combination of knowledge, skills, and collaboration.

In many other research studies on small-business entrepreneurs in developing countries such as Liberia, researchers found entrepreneurs' business knowledge to be an essential part of small-business success (Klapalova, 2012; Maas et al., 2013; Megdadi et al., 2012; Nag & Gioia, 2012). Developing effective personal knowledge management allows small-business entrepreneurs to increase their intellectual capital (Pauleen & Gorman, 2011). Competent assessment and management skills of knowledge are a business owner's most valuable resource and are essential for entrepreneurship success (El Badawy & Zakarian, 2014; Ongori et al., 2013). Many of the study results indicated that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs had minimal business knowledge management skills, and increasing business knowledge through continuous education helped enhance this knowledge (Kayani & Zia, 2012; Maas et al., 2013; Saini, 2013).

Theme 2: Bookkeeping Skills

Bookkeeping was the second theme that emerged from the data. For any small-business owners, the ability to track daily expense and profit transactions can be a critical factor of success (P1). In the developing city Monrovia, one of the most challenging aspects of owning a small business is keeping records of expenses and profits. (P3, P5). Several participants agreed that keeping daily transactions of expenses and profits assisted with their next-day business planning strategies (P2, P4, P5). Participants kept records of inventory, cash receipts, and disbursement logs showing a daily profit (document review of P2, P3; observations of P2, P5).

During member checking, two participants mentioned that adequate bookkeeping is essential for information on distinguishing between personal money and business money (P1). Most small-business owners in this region fail because they believe bookkeeping is impractical because their businesses are too small (P1). A participant mentioned that knowing the profit or loss for the day directly linked to how he planned to purchase his supplies for the next day (P5). Participants' financial logs had documentation of how much each product was bought and sold for (document review of P1). Through member checking, two participants added that financial bookkeeping for a small business is an essential decision-making tool (P3, P4). Effective small-business bookkeeping results in a manager's success by (a) increasing project purchase, (b) increasing sales, (c) determining break-even points, and (d) promoting efficient financial analyses for decision making (Kofi et al., 2014; Msipah et al., 2013; Ngoepe, 2014).

Prior studies were consistent with the analysis that effective small-business bookkeeping results in entrepreneurs' success (Kofi et al., 2014). Participant observation notes revealed analysis on bookkeeping, and bookkeeping being a contributing factor to the success of the Liberian small-business entrepreneurs (observations of P1, P4). Sucuahi (2013) identified bookkeeping as a basic financial ability a businessperson must hold to make appropriate decisions and to reduce business risks. Business bookkeeping has a link to the profitability of any business (Ngoepe, 2014). As aligned with the study's conceptual framework, Shoemaker and Reid (2006) stated that the theory of constraints applies primarily to the managerial challenge. In Liberia, many SME owners lack bookkeeping knowledge (CFR, 2012). The findings of a qualitative study by Amoako (2013) and Mutanda, De Beer, and Myers (2014) showed that inadequate bookkeeping and the absence of rudimentary business-management skills can lead to small-business failure in Africa. The participants in this study focused on improving their business skills with increasing profitability was a priority (P4). The ability to make effective business resolutions for business success was crucial to personal and family survival (P3). Nwaigburu and Eneogwe (2013) explored how accounting affected an entrepreneur's training for sustainable development and self-sufficiency. Entrepreneurs with fundamental knowledge in accounting and business skills became more self-sufficient and achieved business success more than entrepreneurs with no knowledge (Nwaigburu & Eneogwe, 2013).

Jindrichovska (2013) and Xavier (2013) stated that poor financial management by owners and managers is the leading cause of the underlying problems of SMEs. In

Liberia, many SME business owners lack familiarity of bookkeeping (CFR, 2012).

Amoako (2013) suggested that organized training programs sensitize managers to the need to maintain proper books of accounts. Based on my analysis of the data and theory of constraints, bookkeeping, if elevated, is a skill that improves Liberian small-business entrepreneurs' business success beyond the first year.

Theme 3: Pricing Skills

The third theme that emerged from the data was pricing. Four participants stated that their business market pricing skills were essential to their business success (P2, P3, P4, P5). Another participant mentioned that pricing was a method to increase profitability (P1). Understanding the local markets and pricing products at the right market price may be vital to the success of a small business (P4, P5). The purpose of the study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Effective pricing is a strategy employed in the business to improve profitability (document review of P1, P5; observations of P1, P4).

One participant stated that choosing a low price to attract customers and a high enough price for business profitability is a business skill that increases his business success (P4). The participant had documentation of product price changes showing a profit on each product change (document review of P2, P3). Three participants stated that learning what their competitors charged helped to set their products prices at the right amount (P3, P4, P5). Pricing slightly below local competitors increased sales (P4).

During member checking, three participants stated that a valuable marketing skill is monitoring competitors' prices (P1, P2, P5). Monitoring competitor's prices increases

business sales because most customers always go for the lower price (P1, P2, P5).

Through member checking, one participant added that monitoring competitor prices is laborious, but it is effective in marketing product at the right price for increased profitability (P2). Business owners had documentations for development product price to improve their performance (document review of P3, P5). Entrepreneurs stated that new business owners need to understand their product market and competition (P3).

Singh (2012) and Azadi and Rahimzadeh (2012) found that one of the competitive advantages of business marketing is offering the product at the right price. Bressler (2012) stated that an effective pricing strategy lures and satisfies regular customers. Prices have a substantial influence on customers' purchasing decisions; thus, it is imperative for small-business entrepreneurs to develop reasonable pricing practices to increase business sales and customer loyalty (Milliron, Woolf, & Appelhans, 2012). Price is one of the main factors predicting customers' loyalty and product purchasing (David, El Harrak, Mills, & Ocampos, 2014; Glanz, Bader, & Lyer, 2012).

The findings indicated that effective market pricing skills enable Liberian entrepreneurs to know what other competitors are doing, the needs of the customers, and the price consumers are willing to pay. Therefore, it is essential for Liberian small-business owners to have sufficient price differentiation, product costing skills, and plans for market analysis to succeed in business beyond the first year. The findings of this study supported previous studies' findings on the topic that effective market pricing is a foundation element for any organization to succeed (Zeriti, Robson, Spyropoulou, & Leonidou, 2014). Ogundele, Akingbade, Saka, Elegunde, and Aliu (2013) analyzed

small-business marketing practices in developing countries. Ogundele et al. noted that sales promotion and the demand for products and services depended on price. A small-business entrepreneurs' market pricing skills and strategies affect the profitability of their business (Zeriti et al., 2014). Two participant's documentation showed an increase in sales as prices were adjusted (document review of P1, P4). Entrepreneurial lack of marketing skills is an essential constraint in developing countries (Panda & Dash, 2014). Effective owner's product pricing is a skill used by many profitable small-business owners.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings of this study indicate a need for Liberian small-business entrepreneurs to use business skill to enhance (a) business stability, (b) business knowledge, (c) financial development, (d) customer retention, and (e) product demand. Findings from this study may help to improve new business standards effectiveness for entrepreneurs' business knowledge, financial, and marketing skills, which could lead to business success beyond the first year. The businesses in this study had increased profits over 1 year and succeeded beyond the first year through the effective use of business knowledge and financial and marketing skills. The ability of an entrepreneur's small business to succeed for over 1 year in a developing country shows the owner's ability to use business management skills (Arasti et al., 2012; Nwaigburu & Eneogwe, 2013). Through the theory of constraints, small-business entrepreneurs with similar aims could benefit from sharing business skills by identifying the weakest point in their organization to improve performance processes (Goldratt & Cox, 1984; Simsit et al., 2014).

Comparable objectives might lead to common skills when maintaining a small business could help other Liberian entrepreneurs.

Intellectual, financial, and marketing decisions made by small-business entrepreneurs may have significant positive implications for effective (a) business stability, (b) business knowledge, (c) financial development, (d) customer retention, (e) product demand, (f) and business success beyond the first year (Agyei-Mensah, 2012; Belay et al., 2011; Chowdhury et al., 2013; Mavunga, 2014). Some small-business entrepreneurs stated that one constraint in running their business was the lack of information about business knowledge (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5). Small-business entrepreneurs can learn how to increase business survival by gaining knowledge from other small-business owners (Chimucheka, 2013). The knowledge acquired in this study may lead to increasing the knowledge and financial and marketing skills of Liberian small-business entrepreneurs, resulting in the profitability of their business.

Implications for Social Change

Successful Liberian entrepreneurs may have business knowledge, financial, and marketing skills to share, which can create opportunities to improve business stability for other entrepreneurs in Liberia. Improving small-business effectiveness could contribute to poverty reduction and economic and social development in Liberia (Government of Liberia, 2013). Small-business development and sustainability are the driving forces of economic development in many countries, especially in developing countries (Kanu, 2015). Additional skills for small-business entrepreneurs could contribute to business performance and create a positive effect on the economy (Sabella, Farraj, Burbar, &

Qaimary, 2014). Having the right business skills increases an entrepreneur's chance of survival and increases profitability (Mavunga, 2014). Knowledge gained from this study provides mechanisms for social change by giving Liberian small-business entrepreneurs additional ideas for using their business skills in their businesses. As small business developments rapidly become a growing segment of the economy, providing business management skills to this group may help increase profits in their businesses and lead to business success beyond the first year. Increasing knowledge could contribute to small-business activity and could contribute to the evolving Liberian business environment (Ipiranga & Aguiar, 2014).

The business knowledge gained from the research could also aid to create training programs for numerous Liberian colleges and institutions, and to creating resources and curriculums for future Liberian small-business entrepreneurs. Additionally, increasing business training for Liberian small-business entrepreneurs could improve business skills and influence the Liberian economy (IFC, 2014; Kirsten, 2013). Increasing academic and training programs for small-business entrepreneurship could improve the business skills of future Liberian small-business entrepreneurs (GOL, 2013; IFC, 2014; Olowu & Aliyu, 2015). The research results are useful to other small-business entrepreneurs, communities, organizations, and institutions. Social change can come from reducing small-business failures for small-business entrepreneurs through entrepreneurs' development of business skills and abilities to increase profitability (Mavunga, 2014).

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Three skill themes emerged from the study results: (a) business knowledge, (b) recordkeeping, and (c) pricing. Utilization of the three themes can help Liberian small-business entrepreneurs start a business and increase the stability, performance, financial skills, customer retention, and product demand of their growing business. As aligned with the study's conceptual framework of the theory of constraints, I identified two recommended steps for action from the study. The first, as indicated in Figure 3, the study's entrepreneur business model, Liberian small-business entrepreneurs must continuously gain knowledge of their business through business skills training to improve performance and increase their business standards. The second, current and future Liberian small-business owners should apply their business skill constraints to the study's framework. If small-business owners can (a) identify business skills they lack, (b) exploit those skills through business training programs, (c) subordinate skills by increasing focus on that skill, and (d) elevate their skills through additional training and planning, they may increase business performance and new business standards for success in business beyond the first year.

Furthermore, the Liberian Ministry of Commerce, the Liberian Small Business Administration, and the various Liberian sponsored small-business development centers in the country should use the results of this research as a resource to aid other small companies. I plan to share the results of this study with business agencies, nonprofit and

for-profit agencies, participants, organizations such as the Liberian Small Business Administration, and the Liberian Ministry of Commerce. I will publish the results of this study for the broader audience. I plan to make the results public for the government of Liberia, institutions of higher education, and for-profit and nonprofit agencies through seminars, web-nets, and conference presentations. I will also circulate the study results to Liberia's universities and schools, and to the local newspaper and magazine editors who often promote small businesses.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional research using the theory of constraints can allow small-businesses entrepreneurs to construct knowledge regarding mechanisms for using business skills for additional profits. Conducting further qualitative studies could assist in creating a comprehensive analysis of business skills that work for highly profitable small-business owners (Onyesom & Okolocha, 2014). Future research could expand the knowledge Liberian small-business entrepreneurs have to share regarding the success of their business beyond the first year.

The memories of the participants in this study may not have been entirely accurate, but the use of member checking and opened-ended questions allowed participants to expand on their opinions and provide details. Also, there is a possibility that participants may not have desired to share specifics about their success and might have repressed information. For future research, questions should draw on behaviors or practices from participants who lived experiences similar to the current study. The ability to use census sampling to focus on five businesses was a strength of this study because it

helped to acquire a deep comprehension of the interested population and to assist with transferability to the larger population.

The recommendations for further research are to apply semistructured interviews in qualitative research to gain skills, practices, experiences, and details on the business skills of Liberian small-business entrepreneurs. Also, exploring various ways entrepreneurs can better expand knowledge could prove useful by improving business skills. Investigating five businesses is effective, but further research could focus on small-business entrepreneurs who succeeded in business beyond the first 5 years. The ability to look at businesses that succeeded beyond the first 5 years could also assist in finding similarities between Liberian small-business entrepreneurs' business management skills for continuous sustainability and increased profits.

Reflections

I have a desire to help small-business entrepreneurs and motivation to drive economic development and improve living conditions in Liberia. Liberian small-business entrepreneurs have a limited amount of information on how to improve their business skills. Thus, being able to help distribute knowledge that will help entrepreneurs is extremely motivating to me. The process in this study allowed me to receive details on entrepreneurs' business management skills and learn about owning and managing small businesses in the conflicted environments of developing countries. The process showed me that participants are excited to participate in research regarding increasing Liberia's small-business environment.

The identified sample of five central regional Liberian small businesses incorporating entrepreneurs was a profound source of knowledge. The research process included recorded semistructured interviews and observations with each participant, allowing me the ability to have constructive conversations with individuals about their business practices. I felt very comfortable with each participant, and we were able to speak and communicate openly and expand on responses. Participants were proud of their businesses and their answers to my interview questions. The participants were very humble of the process and appeared to be brilliant individuals.

This study altered my perspective by inspiring me to interview the employees of small business and not just the owner. The employees have perspectives on business processes and may have different opinions from the business owner. My reflection of the participants includes a new awareness and astonishment about their commitment to success, their families, their employees, and their customers. Each of the participants was innovative, creative, approachable, passionate, and willing to share information about their business and their experience, both professional and personal. I found it inspiring to hear the study participants narrate their individual experiences. The research results derived from the data revealed the core answers that led to a better comprehension of the research question. Because of this study, I find myself looking for avenues to assist other Liberian small business entrepreneurs using similar methods and findings. I hope to use my DBA Doctoral Study experience to improve the Liberian community.

Conclusion

Persistently exploring business skills for Liberian small-business entrepreneurs is vital to Liberia's economy (Dukuly, 2012; Gorlorwulu, 2011; IFC, 2014). As a result of developing country status, Liberian small-business entrepreneurs are less profitable than the average small business, and additional business knowledge could assist these businesses in increasing the profitability and sustainability of the business (Kaliba et al., 2012; McCoskey, 2011). In addition, potential Liberian small-business entrepreneurs could use this information to assist with business strategies as they create their business plans (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2014).

The qualitative exploratory multiple case study allowed for the in-depth study of five Liberian small-business entrepreneurs from the Central Region of Liberia, who have succeeded in business beyond the first year. The study used the model of the theory of constraints. Goldratt (1984) developed the theory of constraints to propose an explanation for business owners founded on the principle that managers can identify the weakest point in an organization to improve performance processes. The purpose of the study was to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to succeed in business beyond the first year. Semistructured interviews with five small-business entrepreneurs help capture details from each participant. After transcribing each interview, I loaded transcriptions, observation notes, and business documents into ATLAS.ti software, which helped categorize themes.

Data analysis revealed three business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs used to increase profitability and business success beyond the first year. The first was

business knowledge, which includes the entrepreneur's intellectual ability to run and manage a business and to improve business stability. Entrepreneur continuous education, ability to gain and share knowledge, business knowledge of communication skills, knowledge of technology use, and knowledge of products and services was essential in gaining an effective business edge and improve profitability. Bookkeeping emerged as the second theme. Participants mentioned that adequate bookkeeping skills improved business owner's ability to track daily transactions and justify their expenses and profits. The last emerging theme was pricing. Adequate price ranges and strategies increased customer retention, product demand, and customer attraction leading to Liberian small-business entrepreneur's business success beyond the first year.

In conclusion, the exploratory multiple case study provided an approach to capture knowledge from Liberian small-business entrepreneurs about their business skills. Effective entrepreneurs' business knowledge and financial and marketing skills, which are important determinants of small-business success and failure in Africa, provide knowledge for entrepreneur business sustainability. Knowledge from the study may help other Liberian small-business entrepreneurs increase their business profits, sustainability, and economic growth. In addition, future studies focusing on Liberian small-business entrepreneurs may continue to build knowledge to assist other Liberian small-business entrepreneurs and those who aim to be a small-business entrepreneur.

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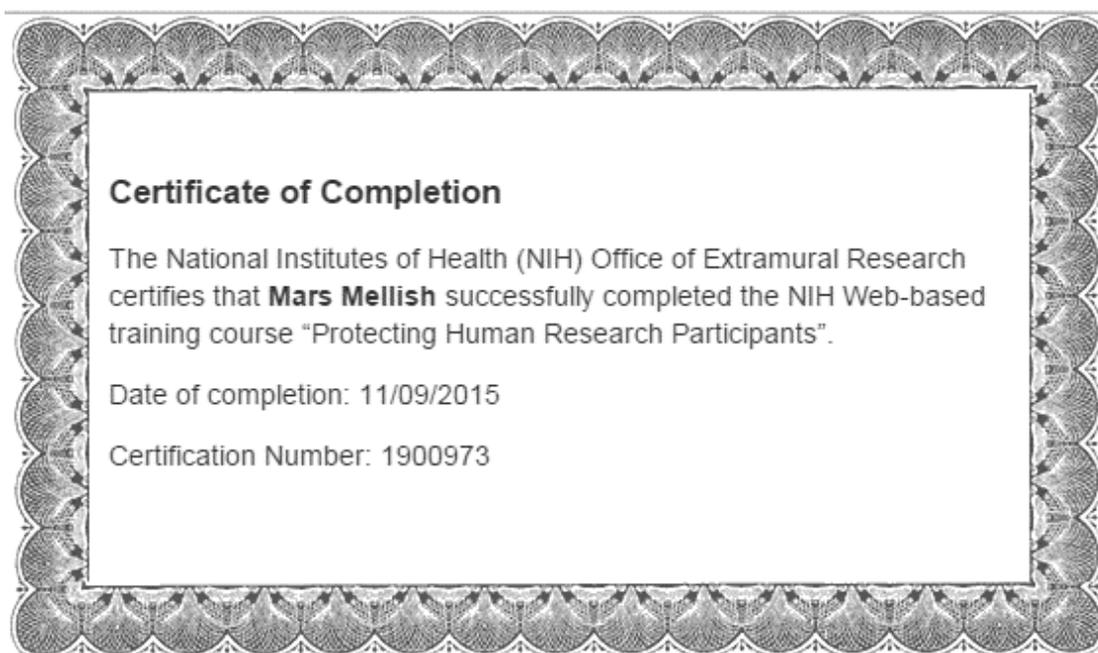
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Participant's Pseudonym: _____ Participant Code: _____	
Interview Date: _____ Total Time: _____	
What I will do	What I will say—script
Introduce the interview and set the stage—often over a meal or coffee	<p>Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Mars Mellish and I am a doctoral student at Walden University conducting my study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration. Thank you for completing the consent form, this interview will take about 60 minutes and will include seven questions regarding your experiences as a small business owner in Liberia. I would like your permission to tape record this interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year. The purpose of this study is to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year.</p> <p>At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.</p> <p>Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or return a page, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch for nonverbal queues • Paraphrase as needed 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What business skills do you use to address your daily business constraints? 2. What business skills do you use to maximize your available resources?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth 	<p>3. What business skills have you used to meet your management needs?</p> <p>4. What business knowledge do you use to succeed in business?</p> <p>5. What skills do you find work best to manage your business finance?</p> <p>6. What skills do you find work best to manage the marketing of your business?</p> <p>7. What additional information would you like to share regarding business skills you use to succeed in business?</p>
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today and for letting me interview you regarding my study.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	I would like to schedule a follow-up interview with you at the moment. Member checking will take about 10 to 20 minutes. Please give me a time and date we can speak again. Thank you.
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	<p>Welcome and thank you for your participation today. This follow-up interview will take from 20 to 60 minutes. I would like your permission to tape record this follow-up interview, so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year.</p> <p>Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the follow-up interview.</p>
<p>Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question</p> <p>Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found—note the</p>	<p>I reviewed and interpreted your interview transcript. I wrote down each question and have a succinct synthesis of the interpretation. Here is a printed copy of the succinct synthesis for each question your answered.</p> <p>I am going to read each question and each synthesis. Please inform me if the synthesis represents your answers or if there is any additional information I missed.</p>

<p>information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval.</p> <p>Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask:</p> <p>Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?</p>	1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
	2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
	3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
	4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
	5. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
	6. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
	7. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation
Wrap up follow-up interview thanking participant	Again, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today.

Appendix B: National Institutes of Health



Appendix C: Right to Withdraw from Research and Destroy Information in Writing

Note: *To withdraw from the study, participants have the option to contact me in whatever method works best for them (telephone, e-mail, etc.). If participant request to withdrawal in writing participants please complete, sign, scan, and e-mail this form.*

I Mr. / Mrs. / Ms., am a participant in the study conducted by Mars Mellish. I am requesting the right to retrospectively withdraw any consent I have given and request that any data relating to my participation be destroyed. I declare my wish to refuse / withdraw my prior consent to:

- Store and use my leftover material.
- Store and use my data up to 5 years.
- Use my data for research purposes.

I request that you proceed to destroy the leftover material, and/or the non-anonymized data associated with my participation that have been collected until now.

Sincerely yours,

Date:

Signature:

Appendix D: Letter of Introduction

Date:

Dear Liberian Small-Business Entrepreneur,

My name is Mars Mellish, and I am a student at Walden University. I am conducting a study on Liberian small business owners in order to complete my degree. I need your help to identify business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs often lack that result in a loss of profit and often their business.

I am requesting a face-to-face interview. The interview will take about one hour. With your permission and consent, I will ask you some questions and audio record your answers. Your personal information will not be published or shared and will remain confidential. I plan to share the results of this study with you, business agencies, and organizations in Liberia.

You may participate in this study if:

1. You are 18 years or older
2. You have a business license, and operated a small business in Liberia between 1990 and 2015.
3. You operated a small business in Liberia's Central Region.
4. You have used business skills to succeed beyond first year.

You will be asked to take part in an observation process after the interview. Observations will last for about 30 to 40 minutes for each participant. The observation process involves taking field notes at your place of business. The focus of the observation is to observe your business skills and possible business constraints during operations.

You will also be asked to provide daily business planning documents and financial records used in your everyday business practice.

Your participation in this study can make a difference for small businesses owner in Liberia. If you decide to participate in this study, please notify me via the contact information.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,
Mars Mellish, MBA
DBA Candidate Walden University

Appendix E: Observation Protocol

Participant's Pseudonym: _____ Participant Code: _____	
Interview Date: _____ Total Time: _____	
What I will do	What I will say—script
Introduce the observation and set the stage.	<p>Thank you for welcoming me to your place of business and your participation today. As stated in the consent form each participant will take part in an observation process.</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to explore the business skills that Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year. During this observation, I am going to observe your daily routine in regards to your business knowledge, management and financial skills. This observation will take about 30 to 40 minutes and will include me asking you three questions. For each question I would like you to go through your daily routine, which I will observe and take notes. As a small business owner myself, I know the stress and hard work it takes to become a productive business owner, so as we go through this observation please feel free to be as comfortable as possible.</p> <p>I would like your permission to take journaling notes during the observation, so I may accurately document the information you convey. All of what I observe and your responses are confidential. This observation remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of business skills Liberian small-business entrepreneurs use to succeed in business beyond the first year.</p> <p>At this time I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this observation. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.</p> <p>Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or return a page, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns</p>

	before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the observation.
Observation Task	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observing participants management skills and possible business management constraints. 2. Observing how participants acquire and use their business knowledge skills. 3. Observing how participant uses business skills to manage business finances. 4. Observing how participant manage marketing business skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure participants are comfortable before beginning questions. • Watch for nonverbal queues • Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth 	1. Can you walk me through how you get, use, learn, assess, and maintain knowledge of your business?
	2. Can you walk me through your daily financial management practices? For example working capital management (cash management), receivables management, financial reporting and analysis, inventory management, etc.
	3. Can you walk me through your daily marketing management practices? For example: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Marketing of your product to your target customers 2. How do you offer your product at the right price? 3. How do you position your product in the right place to be bought by customers? 4. How do you promote your product (example: how do you notify customers of availability of your products, price, and its place?)
	7. Do you have any additional information you would like to share regarding your daily business routine you use to succeed in your business? (Documentation, financials, etc.)
Wrap up observation thanking participant	Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today and for letting me observe your management routine for my study.

Appendix F: Alfred K. Tarway-Twalla Permission

Permission Received from Alfred K. Tarway-Twalla on 4/4/2014

Date: Fri, Apr 4, 2014 at 8:44 AM

Subject: Re: Request To Use Central Region of Liberia Map

Hi Mars.

Yes. You have my permission to use my copyright map of the Central Region of Liberia, and to modify as you see fit.

Dr. Robert N. Lussier
Director Research Institute
University of Liberia

Request for Permission Sent to Alfred K. Tarway-Twalla on 4/03/2014

Date: Thu, Apr 3, 2014 at 5:08 PM

Subject: Request To Use Central Region of Liberia Map

Hello Mr. Tarway-Twalla

I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a qualitative case study research for my DBA doctoral study. The title of my study is *Exploring Skills That Liberian Small Business Entrepreneurs Use to Succeed in Business*.

My specialization at Walden University is International Business. I was born in a third world country where businesses and the marketplace have declined substantially. Living in the United States and experiencing a different economy generated my interest in International Business. I decided on the topic of my study when I first started Walden University because I wanted to help businesses in my native country of Liberia.

I am writing to request permission to use your map of the Central Region of Liberia published in your article "The contribution of grassroots businesses to post-conflict development in Liberia." I will appreciate receiving your permission, as well as any insight that you feel would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mars Mellish