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# Small Business Sustainability Strategies in the Tanzanian Construction Materials Industry

Seraphia Robert Mgembe  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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2019

Abstract

Small Business Sustainability Strategies in the Tanzanian Construction Materials

Industry

by

Seraphia Robert Mgembe

MBA-IB, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, 2013

BCom, University of Dar es Salaam Tanzania, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

March 2019

## Abstract

Small business owners in the construction materials industry play a significant role in economic development through gross domestic product and employment. However, like other small business owners, many owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry close their businesses within 5 years. The purpose of this multiple case study grounded in the resource-based theory was to explore the strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry operating in Tanzania used to sustain business for longer than 5 years. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with 4 purposefully selected owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry and a review of daily sales records, weekly sales reports, and audited accounts. Member checking and triangulation were used to strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of the interpretation of data and information. Data analysis involved coding and thematic analysis. Themes were categorized into business establishment strategies, customer satisfaction and retention strategies, and other sustainability strategies. Findings from this study may contribute to social change by providing information on mechanisms for improving business performance; reducing the risk of failure; and creating sustainable, better-paying jobs that can increase the well-being of business owners, employees, their families, and communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to the Program Steering Committee, the management, and members of staff of the Property and Business Formalization Program for Tanzania popularly known by its Swahili acronym as MKURABITA for their encouragement and support throughout the doctoral journey. The Ex Program Steering Committee members under the leadership of the retired Captain John Z Chiligati, who allowed me to pursue this journey, approved the financial resources and provided moral support throughout the process. My heartfelt thanks also go to the current Program Steering Committee members under the governance of the retired Ambassador Daniel Ole Njoolay, who took over from where the previous members ended and continued approving the financial resources for my education until the end. Without their approval and support, I could not manage to be here today. The management and members of staff immeasurably contributed to my success through their effective performance at work. Being the chief executive officer of the program, there was a lot desired of me, which without them I could not get time to focus to the doctoral journey. Where I had to ask them to stand on my feet, they were right there for me. My achievement today is the result of support and love I received from this great MKURABITA team. God bless you all.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Small business operations play a substantial role in the United Republic of Tanzania's (URT) economy. Small and micro businesses make 99% of the entire small business sector, leaving only 1% for medium and large businesses. However, a survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] in 2014 and 2015 revealed that out of 154,618 surveyed enterprises, only 72,380 enterprises existed for more than 5 years (NBS, 2016).

The rate of small business failures supports the assertion that some people embark on small business initiatives without adequate preparation (Modilim & Land, 2017; Turner & Endres, 2017). Some people lack the knowledge and skills to succeed in small business venture for longer than 5 years. The lack of knowledge and skills include business planning, entrepreneurial characteristics, motivation, resource management, human and social capital, strategic management, education and management training, cultural capital and the link to social capital, financial capital, and geographical location. Thus, in this study, I explored the key strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry in Tanzania used to sustain businesses operations for longer than 5 years. In this section of the study, I provide the background of the business problem, purpose of this study, research question, the conceptual framework of the study, and the importance of the study. In addition, I provide a review of the current literature related to the business problem.

## **Background of the Problem**

The small and medium enterprises (SME) sector comprises a significant share of overall businesses in many countries (Magaisa & Matipira, 2017). Furthermore, the SME sector makes a significant contribution to many countries' gross domestic products (GDP) and employment (Bishop, 2018; URT, 2015a, 2012). The contribution of SMEs differs from country to country depending on the respective level of economic development. Despite the significance of small business owners in most economies, the small business failure rate is high (Kamunge, Njeru, & Tirimba, 2014; Marom & Lussier, 2015; Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). The high failure rate may result in the collapse of the small business sector, leading to a slow growth rate of the country's GDP and a high unemployment level (Kamunge et al., 2014; Marom & Lussier, 2015; Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). The collapse of many small businesses can cause emotional distress to the owners, employees, customers, and suppliers.

Owners of small businesses experience more challenges compared to owners of medium and large businesses (Buowari, 2015; Dolgih, Zhdanova, & Bannova, 2015; Isle & Freudenberg, 2015; Kusi, Opata, & Narh, 2015; Magaisa & Matipira, 2017; Wavhal, 2017). Most of these challenges center around limited access to finance, low risk-taking propensity, lack of business management skills, and weak markets (Kusi et al., 2015; Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012). Other challenges include business forms, lack of entrepreneurship capabilities, lack of record keeping skills, and lack of market expansion support (Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012).

### **Problem Statement**

Although small business owners strive to remain profitable and sustain operations (Tambwe, 2015), there is a high level of small business failure (Kamunge et al., 2014; Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). A survey conducted by the NBS in 2014 and 2015 revealed that out of 154,618 surveyed enterprises, only 72,380 (46.81%) were in business for more than 5 years (NBS, 2016). The general business problem was that more than half of small business owners fail before they reach 5 years. The specific business problem was that some owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry lack strategies to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction material industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The target population for this study was four owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry who sustained business operations for a minimum of 5 years because of their hands-on experience. Each participant was required to own a small construction materials business in the North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to be eligible to participate in this study. The results of the study might provide strategies for owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years, which can lead to positive social change by increasing employment opportunities and economic stability, resulting in the improved well-being of employees, their family members, and their communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the phenomenon under study, so their research questions often start with *what* or *how* (Yin, 2014, 2016). Qualitative researchers can provide a description of the way people experience a given research phenomenon (Hashemnezhad, 2015). Therefore, I chose to use a qualitative research method to explore the strategies owners of small business in the construction materials industry use to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Quantitative research method involves statistical analysis and examination of variables' relationships or differences (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). The quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study, as conducting it did not involve any analysis of statistical variables' relationships or differences. Using the mixed method, researchers combine both qualitative and quantitative methods (Hashemnezhad, 2015; Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). The mixed method is appropriate if the complexity level of the research problem is such that neither qualitative nor quantitative methods alone can address the problem (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015).

Qualitative researchers typically conduct research using a case study, a phenomenological design, or an ethnographic design (Araújo, Jarrin, Leanza, Vallieres, & Morin, 2017; Yin, 2014). Researchers use the case study design to focus on the process within one or more groups or organizations and obtain a holistic view of issues from various types of data sources (Yin, 2014). Ethnographic research designers intend to understand the behavior or culture of one or more groups (Jenkins, 2015), and phenomenological researchers seek to understand the meanings of the lived experience of

individuals with a profound expression of the phenomenon (Araújo et al., 2017). As I sought a holistic understanding of strategies within the context of cases rather than behavior, both ethnographic and phenomenological designs were not appropriate for this study, so I chose to use the multiple case study design.

### **Research Question**

Many owners of small businesses operating in the construction materials industry in Tanzania fail to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years (NBS, 2016). Thus, development and implementation of appropriate sustainability strategies for small business in the construction materials industry may contribute to business sustainability for longer than 5 years. The central research question was: What strategies do owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry use to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years?

### **Interview Questions**

The following open-ended interview questions were aimed at addressing the research question. The interview protocol used is as contained in the appendix.

1. What are the strategies you developed and implemented that contributed to your business sustainability in the first 5 years?
2. What are the associated skills and practices that you employed to implement the strategies towards operating a sustainable business for longer than 5 years?
3. What strategies did you use in managing business competition during the first 5 years?

4. What strategies did you use to attract, satisfy, and retain your customers during your first 5 years?
5. What external support services contributed to the sustainability of your business operations for longer than 5 years?
6. What were the key barriers you encountered in implementing your strategies for sustaining your business operations for longer than 5 years and how did you mitigate the barriers?
7. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for sustaining your business operations for longer than 5 years?
8. What additional information, if any, do you consider relevant to this study that we might not have covered in this interview?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework facilitates the creation of a lens for viewing and understanding the context of the study and creating a focus for the literature review (Atonenko, 2015). The conceptual framework for this study was the resource-based theory (RBT) developed by Barney (1991). RBT helps to explain how business resources and capabilities build up a foundation for formulating strategies and a source of direction for the business (Grant, 2001). The formulation of strategies starts from identifying and assessing the business resources and capabilities, so business analysts contemplate the RBT as an inside-out process in formulating firms' sustainability strategies (Barney, 1991, 2014; Grant, 2001). Resources capable of attaining a sustainable competitive advantage have four attributes: value, rarity, inimitability, and nonsubstitutability

(Barney, 1991, 2014; Grant, 2001). Furthermore, a firm's resources and capabilities are the primary sources of profit and the foundation for the firm's longevity strategy (Grant, 2001; Greene, Brush, & Brown, 2015).

In addition to the RBT, Grant (2001) created a 5-stage framework for a resource-based approach toward the formulation of a business strategy. The stages include: (a) analyzing the firm's resources base, (b) appraising the firm's capabilities, (c) analyzing profitability potential of the firm, (d) selecting the strategies, and (e) appraising the firm's pool of resources and capabilities. The 5-stage framework explains practical implication of the RBT for strategic management of a firm (Grant, 2001). Small businesses are more prone to resource constraints than large corporate companies. This concept along with the RBT provided a basis for understanding the strategies successful owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry used to achieve business longevity.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Business failure:* Business failure is a situation where the business owner ceases business operations resulting to zero cash flow (Khelil, 2015).

*Business success:* Business success is the ability of a firm owner to continue the business operations for an indefinite period (Khelil, 2015).

*Business survival:* Business survival is a situation whereby businesses have not succeeded or failed because they continue to exist in business despite them approaching failure (Lussier & Corman, 2015).

*Competitive advantage:* Competitive advantage is the benefit the firm has over competitors resulting in the firm consistently outperforming other firms in the same industry (Malika & James, 2016).

*Resources:* Resources refers to a generic construct that encompasses assets, capabilities, organization processes, firm attributes, information, and knowledge that the firm not only controls but also uses in conceiving and implementing strategies for sustainability (Malika & James, 2016).

*Small business:* A small business is any nonfarm economic activity in manufacturing, service, commerce and mining industries (Marwa, 2014) with five to 49 employees and/or with a capital investment between Tanzania shillings 5.0 million and 200.0 million (URT, 2003).

*Strategy:* Strategy refers to steps that provide direction in conducting business and sustaining relationship (Aeron & Jain, 2015).

*Sustainable competitive advantage:* Sustainable competitive advantage is the benefit that a firm owner/manager maintains and enjoys a competitive advantage for many years (Malika & James, 2016).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Assumptions and limitations refer to factors that are beyond the control of the researcher (Zientek, Nimon, & Hammack-Brown, 2016). Although assumptions relate to the facts that the researcher assumes are true but can not prove, limitations refer to potential weaknesses of the study that are outside of a researcher's control (Yin, 2014; Zientek et al., 2016). Delimitations are facts that are under the control of the researcher

but provide bounds for the study (Yin, 2014; Zientek et al., 2016) as well as the limited choices that the researcher marks to alert the readers about the scope of the study (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014).

### **Assumptions**

The assumptions of the study helped in avoiding misrepresentations and bias in the research. This study entailed four basic assumptions beginning with the willingness of successful owners of small businesses in the Tanzania construction materials industry to participate in the interviews. I assumed that all the owners of small business in the Tanzania construction materials industry who sustained business operations for over 5 years would be willing to take part. A different assumption was that the participants would be truthful and not biased while giving their answers. I also assumed that interview questions and business documents would apply to the central research question. The final assumption was that the study would result in professional and social change to families, the business community, local economy, and the community as a whole.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this research study was the sample size, which was limited to four owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry. A second limitation was the time constraint that resulted from confining the study to only one geographical location. The third and final limitation was the population for the study, which was limited to the construction materials industry rather than the entire sector of small businesses.

## **Delimitations**

I delimited participation in the study to owners of small businesses in the Tanzania construction materials industry who sustained their businesses for longer than 5 years. A further delimitation was the operational definition of the size of business whereby I delimited the study to small businesses with employees between one to 49 as defined by the URT (2003). Medium and large companies were not part of the study.

## **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore strategies owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Most owners of small businesses fail before reaching their fifth anniversaries (Johnson, 2015; NBS, 2016). According to the NBS (2016), out of 154,618 surveyed enterprises, 82,238 (53.19%) did not reach 5 years of operations from startups. There were several studies in Tanzania on barriers and constraints that affect small business profitability, growth, and sustainability (Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; Tambwe, 2015). However, there have been fewer studies on strategies for small business sustainability for longer than 5 years.

This study can contribute to business practices by offering information regarding business sustainability strategies and more awareness of owners of small businesses interested in the strategies for sustaining their business operations for longer than 5 years. The study's results can enhance the understanding of owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry regarding how to sustain business operations longevity. Owners of small businesses tend to learn from each other's success (Emrich,

2015). Because of the application of learned strategies, owners of small businesses may create mechanisms for improving the performance of their businesses, reduce the risk of failure and hence the creation of sustainable better-paying jobs. Sustainable, better-paying jobs may result in wellbeing of business owners, employees, their families, and communities.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the strategies that owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry used to sustain small business operations for longer than 5 years. The small business sector promotes growth in many economies as a place for employment (Bush, 2016), GDP, and revenue for local and central government authorities (URT, 2003, 2012, 2015a, 2015b). Therefore, the literature review was conducted to identify literature on strategies successful owners of small businesses use to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. A review of the empirical literature is also a way to identify gaps and questions about the topic (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the literature review is a critical analysis regarding the theoretical, methodological, thematic, profession, and technical information related to the scope and foundation of the study (Wanga, 2017). Thus, for this study, the literature review was instrumental in answering the research question on the strategies owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years from the start-up date.

In the context of this study, the primary sources of the literature were from peer-reviewed journals, research reports, government documents, and dissertations on small

business competitiveness and longevity. The area of resources as key factors towards small business success in Tanzania and the world as a whole was a well-researched subject (Godwin-Opara, 2016). However, there is little information on the strategies small business owners in Tanzania used to maintain business operations for longer than 5 years. In conducting the review of the literature, and using the foundation construct, my focus was on the owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry.

Some of the key terminologies used to identify the literature included *small business*, *small business success factors*, *small business performance constraints*, *small business challenges*, *business sustainability strategies*, and *competitive advantage*. Some of the databases that I used to retrieve the literature included Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management Journals, ProQuest Central, Walden Library dissertations, and Government of Tanzania website. Other official websites visited included the Tanzania Investment Center website, National Economic Empowerment Council website, Property and Business Formalization for Tanzania website, and the NBS website. Online engines used for this study included Google advanced search and Google Scholar. Furthermore, I used the Ulrich's Serials Analysis Systems website to verify the peer-reviewed literature, which indicated that 219 (98%) out of 223 kinds of literature were peer-reviewed remaining with four (2%) not peer-reviewed. A summary of resources incorporated in this study as a result of the literature review is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Sources of Data for Literature Review*

Reference type	Published between 2015-2018	Older than 5 years	% of sources
Journals	147	23	76.0
Dissertations	20	0	9.0
Government	5	2	3.2
Others	20	6	11.8
Total number of reference	192	31	100
% of reference	86.0	14.0	100

Exploring the strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years might assist all other owners of small businesses in their efforts to continue business operations for 5 years and beyond. The review of literature included the following subtopics: RBT and small business, resource-based value, an overview of the small business, the economic contribution of the small business sector, and motive to start a small business. Other subtopics included education and training, business management skills, access to finance/capital, business location, access to business information, small business and taxation, business failure stigma and strategies towards sustainable competitive advantage. These concepts and constructs provided the background information necessary for understanding the context of the study towards answering the research question.

## **Resource-Based Theory and Small Business**

Many researchers use RBT as a management tool to analyze a firm's resources and capabilities for achieving business sustainability (Bromiley & Rau, 2016). The RBT is about the use of internal tangible and intangible resources to attain a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, 2014; Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2011; Grant, 2001). The evolution of the RBT began in 1959 when Penrose considered the relationship between resources of a firm and the growth of the business; Penrose examined firms as bundles of productive resources and found that different firms possess different packages of these resources. Then Barney (1991) defined *resource* in identifying the resource characteristics for attaining a sustainable competitive advantage. The definition is not as much different from today's definition, which is a generic construct that encompasses assets, capabilities, organization processes, firm attributes, information, and knowledge that the firm controls and uses in conceiving and implementing strategies for sustainability (Malika & James, 2016). Scholars have categorized resources into physical, human, and organizational assets (Barney, 1991, 2001). Owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry possess and manage different resources available for implementing strategies for efficiency and effectiveness of business operations. Thus, knowledge of resources is important to the success and sustainability of small businesses (Madu, 2016).

The RBT is one of the most prominent theories that researchers use to describe, explain, and predict relationships, performance, and sustainability of business operations (Bromiley & Rau, 2016). Scholars have linked business performance to resources and the

firm's ability to generate sustained competitive advantage. The question is whether all resources are capable of generating competitive advantage for the firm and sustain it over time. For example, RBT has contributed to human resource management in terms of marketing (Mathur, 2015). Building on branding, which is a firm's promise to its customers, the relationship between the firm and its customers might be a source of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 2014). Employees might also be a source of sustained competitive advantage (Mathur, 2015). The RBT is also helpful for understanding sources of interfirm profit differentials and explaining the persistent performance differences among firms such as rivalry restraint, information asymmetry, and commitment timing (Shafeey & Troutt, 2014). Using the traditional industry paradigm and the input resource view, scholars have discussed reasons for performance differences among firms in the same industry. Both perspectives share two assumptions: resources are heterogeneous and the heterogeneity is long standing in a certain period (Barney, 1991, 2001; Grant, 2001; Shafeey & Trott, 2014).

Most owners of small businesses who use the RBT have benefited from the ability to achieve control of resources and implement strategies for sustainability, profitability, and efficiency (Akaeze, 2016). In this study, I used the RBT as a lens for exploring the strategies used by owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry possess tangible and intangible resources that may become a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, I used the RBT to

comprehend success strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to achieve sustainability.

### **Resource-Based View**

The resource-based view (RBV) is about the internal resource view to determining the reasons for the performance differences among firms in the same industry (Barney, 2014). In the context of the RBV, a firm is an integration of tangible and intangible resources that a firm possesses, controls, and uses for efficiency of the firm (Shafeey & Trott, 2014). Researchers have used the RBV for evaluating the management of product and service quality delivery. For instance, Barney (1991) used the RBV theory to evaluate the health care quality improvement. However, RBV can depend on the mode of application (Bromiley & Rau, 2016), and it may lack clarity and measurement of validity (Hitt, Carnes, & Xu, 2016). Barney introduced two essential questions for discussing the resource-based value proposition: (a) why are some firms more successfully than others in the same industry? and (b) how can firms create and sustain long-lasting competitive advantage? One possible answer to Barney's question on firms' performance variation could be the heterogeneity of resource allocation, which researchers should reflect on in terms of causes and consequences (Ketokivi, 2016).

Scholars who have discussed the RBV have confined themselves in explaining the source of performance differences and ways in which firms can sustain competitive advantage over time. For example, Barney (1991, 2001, 2014) and Kaufman (2015) argued that not all resources have the potentials of creating a sustained competitive advantage. Resources that can lead to a sustainable competitive advantage have the

following four key features: value, rarity, inimitability, and nonsubstitutability.

Additionally, a firm can attain sustainable competitive advantage by continuously outperforming its competitors (Mathur, 2015). Andersson and Evers (2015) as well as Rice, Liao, Galvin, and Martin (2015) also posited that a small business in a similar environment might have a different competitive advantage. The firm must be able to undertake a continuous implementation of change and adoption with the creation and acquisition of the resources to stay competitive (Mathur, 2015). Shafeey and Trott (2014) replaced the nonsubstitutability characteristic of the resource with the organization, thus making value, rare, imitability, and organization framework instead of value, rarity, imitability, and substitutability framework for the resources to become a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

**Valuability.** Valuability is one of the four key features of the resources that can create competitive advantage, as valuable resources are a source of competitive and sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Valuable resources are resources that can be used to implement strategies for lowering costs and increasing revenue (Shafeey & Trott, 2014). Thus, low costs and increased revenues are functions of firms' growth and longevity. Furthermore, a valuable resource has the potential of increasing customers' willingness to pay (Shafeey & Trott, 2014). A resource is valuable if it can help the owners of small businesses to optimally tap external opportunities and assist in setting the external threat to a minimum (Barney & Hesterly, 2012). Such resources help implementation of strategies that improve efficiency and effectiveness (Barney, 1991). It is important for the availability of appropriate infrastructure to realize the full potential of

the resources towards competitive advantage (Barney & Hesterly, 2012).

Understanding of marketing enhances the value creation process. Many owners of small businesses have lacked the marketing understanding (Godwin-Opera, 2016), which is key to the value creation process. Owners of businesses that exploit valuable resources increase the economic value of the business (Barney, 1991, 2001). Human resources form part of the resources that can sustain competitive advantage, which is why it is important to discuss human resources as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. According to Kaufman (2015), there is a direct relationship between the human resources practices and the organizational outcomes.

**Rarity.** Rarity is another key attribute of a resource that is a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, 2016). According to Barney (1991), rareness applies to the use of bundles of resources to create value. Thus, it is essential to know how rare a valuable resource of a firm should be to generate competitive advantage. It is important to combine different resources for making them rare and difficult to imitate (Kabue & Kilika, 2016), thus becoming a source of sustainable competitive advantage. A valuable resource possessed and used by a large number of firms to implement value-creating strategies cannot be a source of competitive advantage because each firm can exploit the resource in the same manner (Barney, 1991). The bundle of resources may involve physical capital resources, human capital resources, and organizational capital resources (Barney, 1991). Practical usage of managerial skills results in the proper selection of strategy and competitive weapons as well as ensuring the proper combination of resources, which makes the competitiveness of the firm.

**Inimitability.** Resources can bear the valuability and rarity characteristics yet unable to generate competitive advantage unless they are inimitable (Barney, 1991). Imitability is about the possibility of imitating and using the resources to implement a firm's strategy (Barney, 1991; Kabue & Kilika, 2016). Valuable and rare resources can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage if the firms that do not possess the resources cannot access them (Barney, 1991). The competitive advantage is on the exceptionality of the resources such that opponents might not promptly replicate its usage (Barney, 1991). Barney (1986a, 1986b) described such resources as imperfectly imitable. Some resources can only be developed over an extended period, and if the ability of the firm depends on certain unique historical conditions, it might be difficult to imitate the development and use of a particular resource in the implementation of a strategy (Barney, 2001). Additionally, causal ambiguity is the impossibility of developing a resource in a short or medium term before usage (Barney, 2001). Long-term generated resources are costly, and hence, competitors might not readily imitate them.

**Nonsubstitutability.** For a valuable, rare, and inimitable resource to be a source of sustained competitive advantage, it should also bear the nonsubstitutability attribute (Kabue & Kilika, 2016). Scholars have described nonsubstitutability resources as firms' resources that do not have other strategically equivalent resources available for the firm's implementation of its strategies (Barney, 1986a, 1986b, 1991). According to Barney (1991), a firm that fails to imitate a valuable and rare resource to implement a strategy cannot use a different resource to implement the same strategy. In a neoclassical microeconomics point of view, inelastic resources and capabilities become a source of

competitive advantage (Barney, 2001). Firms that possess resources that are inelastic in supply stand a high chance of making super profits for an extended period (Barney, 2001). Some resources such as land are fixed in supply. Firms that possess and use resources fixed in supply also can make a super profit for an extended period (Barney, 2001). Firms that make a profit have either implemented low-cost strategies and/or implemented high revenue generation strategies. These firms have a high probability of longevity and achieving competitive advantage.

**Organizational process.** The organizational process includes the formal reporting structure, management control systems, and compensation policies. Despite the four attributes embedded in a strategic resource, there should be organizational processes to realize sustained competitive advantage (Shafeey & Trott, 2014). There is a link between the firm's financial behavior and its capability to mobilize assets and social capital (Tchankam, Feudjo, & Gandja, 2016). The firm's capability to mobilize capital along with the firm's financial behavior might result in a sustained competitive advantage. Thus, there is a high need to consider the importance of proper management and planning of the organizational resources including among others the working capital (Charitou, Elfani, & Lois, 2016).

Other scholars have linked the importance of working capital with the planning of the resources; thus, despite the importance of owning working capital in business success, without proper planning it is a waste of resources. According to Charitou et al. (2016), working capital is the capital available to meet day to day operations as they fall due. Working capital elements include cash, stocks, receivables, and payables. Sustainable

competitive advantage is a result of the firm's ability to implement strategies that exploit their internal strengths, responding to the external opportunities, neutralizing the external threats, and avoiding internal weaknesses (Barney, 1991).

There are some similarities in the description of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threat (SWOT) analysis and the RBT. Through SWOT analysis one sees the use of internal and external forces phenomenon in assessing the firm's performance capabilities, while the RBT reckon the internal and external resources in measuring business success (Madu, 2016). Before analyzing the firm's sustainable competitive advantages, researchers used organizational resources to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threat (SWOT) of the respective firm (Barney, 1991, 2014). Thus, through SWOT analysis the researcher sees how owners of small businesses can optimize the internal strengths to respond to external opportunities and the use of internal forces to normalize external threat (Barney, 1991).

Qehaja and Kutlovci (2015) emphasized the significance of human competence and posited that firms can not create competitive advantage without its human resources. Employees become a source of competitive advantage through behavior, perception, and dedication (Mathur, 2015). Based on the concept of perception, behavior, and dedication owners of the small business can utilize effective procedures and do away with ineffective procedures (Barney, 2014). Researchers, categorize sets of behavior that might result in sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 2014) thus, owners and sole proprietors in the construction materials industry can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage through behavior, perception, and dedication towards business

sustainability. Employees can be a source of competitive advantage but with caution because, in case of employees turnover, the outgoing employees can transfer company knowledge to the competitors (Coff & Raffiee, 2015).

### **Overview of Small Business**

Small enterprises make up a significant part of the business sector in many countries. A study carried out in the process of preparing Tanzania's business register revealed that the micro business accounted for 77.3% of the entire business register while the small business accounted for 21.7% (NBS, 2016). This level of significance of micro and small enterprises provided a rationale for depth understanding of the small business sector.

Many enterprises in the small business category are in sole proprietorship and few in partnership and private limited liability companies (URT, 2012; Wavhal, 2017). In Kenya, sole proprietorship represented 70% of small businesses (Kamunge et al., 2014) while in Tanzania, sole proprietorship stood at 96.4% of small businesses followed by partnership that accounted for 3.5% leaving 0.1% for private liability companies (URT, 2012). One of the main features of the sole proprietorships is lack of legal personality since the business, and the owner are the same person in the eyes of the law. Consequently, the lifespan of small businesses in such an environment is subject to the lifespan of the owner of the business (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015; Rocha, Carneiro, & Varum, 2015). Thus, small business owners should opt for partnership, joint ventures, strategic alliances as strategies for capacity building towards sustained competitive advantage (Magaisa & Matipira, 2017). On the other hand, sole proprietors benefit from

fast and flexible decision making as a result of its owner-based management characteristic (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017).

Small and medium enterprises are a world branded contributors of economic measure indices entailing employment (Berisha & Pula, 2015; Wavhal, 2017) and GDP. Despite its popularity and economic significance, scholars are yet to come up with a universal definition (Berisha & Pula, 2015; Oparaocha, 2015). The European Union, the World Bank, and some other countries strained to define SMEs in view to bringing up a harmonized definition but in vain. Most of the European Union countries and the United States defined SMEs using turnover and number of employees (Gbandi & Amisah, 2014). Nigeria has more than one definitions depending on the source of the definition, nevertheless, the main basis falls on turnover, capital employed and number of employees (Gbandi & Amisah, 2014).

In Tanzania, the Ministry of Industry and Trade provided the number of employees and the value of investment in machinery as the basis for defining SMEs (URT, 2003). For this study, I adopted the Ministry of Industry and Trade definition whereby the number of employees and the value of investment in machinery as the basis for the definition. In this context, Marwa (2014), defined a small business as any non-farm economic activity in manufacturing, service, commerce, and mining industries, established for profit that has fewer than 49 employees and or with capital investment in machinery of up to Tanzania shillings 200.0 million. One US Dolar is equivalent to Tanzania shillings 2,290.61 as per the Bank of Tanzania anmean rate prevailed between December 01, 2018 to December 31, 2018. Despite the varying SME definitions, all

bases align with the RBT that grounded this study. Thus, owners of small businesses use the tangible and intangible resources to implement strategies for attaining sustainable competitive advantage although, not all resources can make a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, 2001, 2014). Resources capable of achieving sustainable competitive advantage bears four attributes of value, rarity, nonsubstitutability, and inimitability.

The small business owners could acquire another small business in various circumstances including the event that the owner passes away and that other family members are resistant to take forward the business (Lester & Lipinski, 2015). In some cases, the owner of small business might find overpowered by the market competition and decides to retire from the business, and therefore, the owner might decide to sell the business to another small business practitioner. However, selling a small business to another small business is a multitasking and a challenging procedure requiring due conscientiousness including giving reasons that satisfy the potential buyer over the decision to sell the business.

Many small businesses failed to reach 5 years after the startup date (Kamunge et al., 2014; Kusi et al., 2015; Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012; Wavhal, 2017). The average lifetime of small business in Tanzania is only 4.1 years (URT, 2012). Researchers and scholars who discussed small business failure argued that small business failure to reach 5 years is a common phenomenon in many economies. Academicians and researchers shared many factors constraining small business performance from growing up and sustaining operations for longer than 5 years. The most featured factors entailed

limited access to finance/ capital, low risk-taking propensity, lack of business management skills, and weak markets (Kusi et al., 2015; Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012). Others include business forms, lack of entrepreneurship capabilities, lack of record keeping skills (Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012), and lack of market expansion support. Furthermore, unfriendly regulatory framework from the local government also constraint small business capabilities (Magaisa & Matipira, 2017). Other critical reasons for the underperformance of most small businesses include low products demand, high competition, and defaulting customers as (URT, 2012). Owners of small businesses required possession and usage of planning, business management, and technical skills to be able to organize efficient use of the available resources (Kamunge et al., 2014).

Intense competition both domestic and international intimidates survival of small businesses especially in developing countries (Marwa, 2014; Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). Owners of small businesses face stiff competition both from their peers and from large business firms. Henceforth, many small businesses with such stiff competition hardly survive 2 years (Kamunge et al., 2014). According to Kamunge et al. (2014), the owners of small businesses are unable to stand for quality products and unable to satisfy a broader clientele. Moreover, owners of small businesses can neither expand nor modernize their businesses to serve big orders (Kamunge et al., 2014).

Buowari (2015) in his study on factors required for small business sustainability in Nigeria indicated that small firms have more productivity capability compared to large firms. Despite the capabilities, small business fail due to lack of business education

among other reasons at the startup stage. Small businesses are more labour intensive than the medium and large firms, therefore, small businesses are capable of creating more employment than large firms (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; Buowari, 2015). Lussier and Corman (2015) carried out a test on the differences between successful and failed small businesses. The results of the study revealed that owners of successful small businesses used professional advisors to manage business operations. Additionally, some owners of successful small businesses had their parents owning small businesses before. In the ensuing discussions, I delivered a broad exploration of business shackles connected to strategies for small business performance and longevity.

### **Economic Contribution of the Small Business Sector**

The small business sector forms the primary driver of innovation necessary for social and economic development (Bush, 2016; Kusi et al., 2015). It had also been a hub for employment generation in many economies in the world (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2015; Tan & Ng, 2015; Wavhal, 2017). Owners of small businesses also made a significant contribution in various economies through the development of new products and services (Eijdenberg, Paas, & Masurel, 2015; Kusi et al., 2015). Moreover, the small business sector provided livelihood opportunities to the community (Ayandibu, & Houghton, 2017). The small business sector further contributed to poverty reduction (Maksimov, Wang, & Luo, 2017) and enhances the government efforts in narrowing the gap between rural and urban economies (Boyd, 2015; Kusi et al., 2015; Wavhal, 2017). Through small business undertakings, money transfuses through community members' hands and hence improved

money circulation in the economy. Additionally, small business activities ensured diffusion of skills (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015) from one practitioner to another. Kamunge et al. (2014) emphasized among others the ability of the SMEs sector in creating wealth and promotion of the development of innovation in many economies. Following the small business importance in generating jobs, the owners of small business have the role of activating and establishing more new business ventures (Madu, 2016; Van Gelderen, Kautonen, & Fink, 2015).

In the United States, the small business sector comprised of 27.9 million enterprises that accounted for 99.7% of the SME sector and contributed employment of 48.0% of the entire private workforce (U.S. Micro and Small business Administration, Office of Advocacy, 2016). In Taiwan, the SMEs sector accounted for 97.43% and contributed 78.3% of the GDP and 78.43% of employment generation (Chiang, 2014). In many economies, SMEs account for over 80% of the overall business registers. In South Africa SMEs accounted for 90% (Ayandibu & Houghton, 2017), 90% in Nigeria (Magaisa & Matipira, 2017), and 97.2% in India (Wavhal, 2017). On the other hand, high small business mortality rate in Nigeria, resulted to a reduced SMEs contribution on the Nigerian GDP to as low as 10% (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015).

In Tanzania, micro and small businesses accounted for over 99% of the business sector out of which 77.3% and 21.7% were micro and small enterprises respectively (NBS, 2016; URT, 2012). Micro and small businesses in Tanzania contributed 27% of the GDP (Mashene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012) with employment generation

contribution of 66.9% of the total workforce (URT, 2015b). In this study, the focus was the owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry.

### **Motive to Start a Business**

Adequate preparation before embarking on small business s vital in ensuring growth and longevity (Modilim & Land, 2017; Turner & Endres, 2017), yet, some owners of small businesses embark on business undertakings without adequate preparations (Mashenene & rumanyika, 2014; Turner & Endres, 2017). Adequate preparations include ensuring availability of business premises, access to adequate finance/capital, business management skills, human capability and other internal resources (Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014). Many owners of small business who undertook adequate preparations before starting the business managed to go beyond 5 years (Madu, 2016; URT, 2012). Using qualitative multiple case study research design, Madu (2016) studied the success strategies for small business owners in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in which Madu reported that 33.3% of the interviewees considered inadequate preparation to start a business as a barrier towards success in business. While Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014) considered adequate preparations to include availability of business premises, access to adequate finance/capital, business management skills, human capability and other internal resources, Kautonen, Hatak, Kibler, and Wainwright (2015) and Kohlbacher, Harstaff, and Levsen (2015) focused on establishing the potentiality of the market in responding to the product as adequate preparations. However, there is a relationship between adequacy in preparation to start a business and the motive to start a business.

Different individuals have different motives to start a business. Scholars discussed motivation to start a business from the perspective of human essence (Block, Sandner, & Spiegel, 2015). According to Van Gelderen et al. (2015) starting a business is a result of a translation of an intention to do business in action. Many entrepreneurs who had intentions to start a business but could not translate their intentions into actions (Van Gelderen et al., 2015) were unable to start any business. Inability to translate intentions into actions is what Block et al. called it lacking the motive to do business. Nevertheless, motivation to do anything springs out from a human essence covering feelings, reasoning, opportunities, and principles (Block et al. 2015). Some individuals translated their intentions to do business by leaving paid-up job to start small businesses (Rocha et al., 2015). Human essence produces a pressure that may result in commercial conceptualization for business start-ups and growth (Brixy, Sternberg, & Stüber (2012). Thus, Brixy et al. (2012) described motivation as the inner force pressing an individual to enter into a profit-making undertaking. Such individuals have high propensity to take a risk and thus the high possibility of staying in business for over 5 years.

Motivation to start a business is a pull and push mechanism that theorists claimed as a single set of circumstances that push and pull an individual to act and follow a set goal respectively (Bates & Robb, 2014). People wishing to work as small business owners faced more constraints than opportunities (Allinson, Braidford, Houston, & Stone, 2015). Owners of Small businesses embarking on business out of necessity lacked adequate preparation for starting a business and hence inability to achieve sustainable competitive advantages (Buowari, 2015; Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; NBS, 2016;

URT, 2012). Tan and Ng (2015) introduced the age factor of the motive to venture into small businesses. According to Tan and Ng (2015) the young generation feared from starting a new business.

Many owners of small businesses started their businesses in search of financial benefits. In a Tanzanian context, many owners of small businesses started their businesses to support themselves and their families (Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; URT, 2012). According to the URT (2012), 84% of the owners of small businesses identified the need to support their family as a reason of being in business, followed by 23% who mentioned the need to supplement their income amongst the major reasons of starting small businesses. Some of the owners of small businesses, believed that they could make money, and there were those who entered into business because they could not find a job elsewhere. Other owners of small businesses wanted to get a means of survival while others were encouraged by their friends to do business.

The motive to start a small business alone is not enough to explain the business owner's ability for sustainable competitive advantage. Small business owners sustainability orientation (Muñoz & Dimov, 2015), entrepreneurship orientation, market orientation and learning orientation (Lonial & Carter, 2015) are representatives of organization's capabilities. Sustainability orientation is an input at the time of starting a new business because all planning activities focus ahead at a minimum of 5 years.

### **Education and Training**

One of the critical success factors for business performance is the level of education that the owners of small businesses possess (Kusi et al., 2015). Bates and Robb

(2014) described key characteristics for owners of small businesses to successfully perform business operations including skills, knowledge, as well as understanding and recognition of customers. In a study on success strategies for small business owners in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Madu (2016) reported that 67% of the successful small business owners were Master's graduates while 33% were junior high school leavers. Madu further argued that owners of small businesses with inferior education and without business managerial skills made little progress in business performance. Training of the owners and practitioners of business might improve the business success (Kusi et al., 2015). In a study carried out to explore factors that hindered the growth and survival of business in Ghana, Kusi et al. (2015) revealed the existence of a positive relationship between profitability efficiency and the level of education. Owners of small businesses in Zimbabwe attached low priority to business training resulting to shortage of trained workforce and hence, business operations inefficiency (Magaisa & Matipira, 2017). The shortage of trained manpower also affected the survival of small businesses in India (Wavhal, 2017). In the study on the impact of entrepreneurship training on micro and small enterprises' (MSES) performance in Tanzania, Tambwe (2015) revealed that 96% of the respondents had their ability to search for markets of their products increase, hence increased business sustainability and growth.

Despite the importance of education and training in small business performance, many owners of small businesses faced the challenge of education and lack of training (Kamunge et al., 2014; Kusi et al., 2015; Magaisa & Matipira, 2017; Wahal, 2017). The small business owner is responsible for coordinating and maintaining steady flow of

resources (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Thus, knowledge of the small business owners is of paramount importance in recognizing and using the elements of sustainable development (Muñoz & Dimov, 2015). From the literature search, owners of small businesses who started businesses without business education and prior knowledge could neither survive nor achieve competitive advantage. On the other hand, entrepreneurs with prior knowledge and education managed to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years (Muñoz & Dimov, 2015). However, despite the importance of entrepreneurship education for business growth and longevity it is worth evaluating the relevance, coherence, efficacy, and efficiency of the training programs (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015).

Most of the small businesses operated and managed by uneducated owners/managers experienced a high mortality rate (Kamunge et al., 2014). A study on micro and SMEs in Tanzania in 2011 discovered that over 80% of the owners of micro and small businesses had up to primary school level education out of which 7.4% had not gone to school altogether, 7.2% had some primary education, and 73.5% had completed primary school (URT, 2012). The large percentage of those who had not received any business education before starting their businesses answers the question as to why many small businesses in Tanzania collapse before reaching 2 years. NBS (2016) reported that out of the surveyed 154,618 micro and small business, only 46.81% existed for over 5 years from their start-up dates because most of the owners were either not educated at all or ended up in primary level education a situation that had not changed much between 2011 and 2015. NBS (2016) reported that the percentage of micro and small business owners who ended at primary education level was 73.1% reflecting an improvement of only

0.4% compared to 73.5% in 2011. Secondary education improved from 11% in 2011 to 20.7% in 2015 while the level of technical education and above improved from 3.1% in 2011 to 6.2% in 2015. The low level of education for the owners of small business explains the high failure rate of business performance in Tanzania. Education and business knowledge is necessary from the point of preparing business startup (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015) and throughout the business operations.

### **Business Management Skills**

Researchers and practitioners considered the business management skills amongst the key factors that might have a worldwide impact on the performance of small businesses. Groß (2015) termed one of the skills for small business sustainability as Mobile shopping. Mobile shopping is a new way of communicating with clients. According to Kusi et al. (2015), many owners of small businesses lacked or possessed weak business management skills with impact on the small business owners' ability to prepare strategies for sustained competitive advantage. An owner of small business possessing proper business management skills is a source of sustained competitive advantage (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). On the other hand, lack of proper business management skills is a reason for the alarming small business failure rate in many economies (Alasadi & Al Sabbagh, 2015). According to Kusi et al. (2015) business training enhanced the small business owners' capability to identify potential business opportunities, determine financial requirements, and market feasibilities for business sustainability.

Most of the problems that small business owners encounter include marketing challenges, inadequate capital, and inability to access marketing information, and failure to keep proper books of accounts ring around the lack of management skills (Kusi et al., 2015). Thus, business training instills business management skills onto the small business owners and hence, the ability to mitigate most of the identified business management related constraints. Also, business management skills enhance entrepreneurial capabilities necessary for coordinating the available internal resources.

Currently, organizations operate in an ever-changing environment that requires business owners and managers to flexibly identify, assess, and adopt strategies necessary for business longevity (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieterse, 2015). However, many owners of small businesses lacked the required business management skills including skills for selecting sophisticated cash management procedures which might affect cash flow stability of the firms (Isle & Freudenberg, 2015). With the required business management skills owners of the small businesses could be able to select appropriate accounting software with suitable functionalities which, Bishop (2017) considered as key to small business success. The required features for business success included among others the automation in report generation, invoicing, receipting, and costing (Bishop, 2017). Appropriate accounting software provided the required outputs for managing the entire business operations (Bishop, 2017). Owners of small businesses are the decision makers for all aspects of the business (Bishop, 2017). Hence, lack of business management skills for the owners affect the operations of the business. Moreover, lack of

managerial skills affect the small business owners capabilities to assess the business success or failure (van Scheers, 2016).

Through the use of accounting software, the owners could evaluate the profitability of the business. Business managerial skills equip the owners of small businesses to face the changing business environment hence, get ready to cope with the changes and strategically plan for those changes (van Scheers, 2016). Also, Chang, Liu, and Chiang (2014) posited that owners of small businesses should be able to respond to the everchanging business environment efficiently and effectively. Chang et al. (2014) from the study on the relationship between entrepreneurial education and the ability to see opportunities revealed that entrepreneurs who participated in one or more entrepreneurial courses had higher chance to see opportunities. In a different note, employees development could also be an excellent means towards imparting business management skills (Beattie et al., 2014).

Many owners of small businesses are more concerned with the day to day issues rather than the long-term perspectives of the business (Kamunge et al., 2014). Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014) asserted the existence of a significant connection between business owners capabilities and the firm outcome. Many small businesses operated in a sole proprietorship structure (URT, 2012) whereby the small business owner/ manager was the primary source of knowledge for developing innovation (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014). This overdependence of the proprietor as the primary source of knowledge resulted to underutilization of the firm's intellectual resources and capabilities that ruined the business's internal attributes (Andries & Czarnitzki, 2014). Thus, researchers and

academicians see fundamental difference between the small businesses and large businesses (Josefy, Kuban, Ireland, & Hitt, 2015). A study conducted by Andries and Czarnitzki on the extent to which owners of small businesses utilize the non managerial employees in innovative development issues revealed that many of the owners of small businesses did not use their intellectual capital resources.

### **Access to Finance/Capital**

Effective financing is a source of competitive advantage (Quartey et al. 2017). However, small business operators do not readily access adequate funding from formal financial institutions (Fowowe, 2017; Kusi et al., 2015; Magaisa & Matipira, 2017; Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014). According to Fowowe (2017), constraints related to access to credit exerted negative consequences on the growth of businesses. Owners of small businesses encountered stringent rules when trying to access finance from formal sources (Bates & Robb, 2015, 2016). URT (2012) reckoned that 53% of small business owners considered access to finance/ capital as a significant success criterion in business performance. Following the difficulties, many owners of small businesses generate capital from family members, friends, and a circle of acquaintances (Isle & Freudenberg, 2015). Limited access to finances for owners of small businesses, contributed to small business failure before reaching 5 years (Bandura & Lyons, 2015; Magaisa & Matipira, 2017).

The factors related to the limitation to access finance in many Sub Saharan Africa included firm size, ownership, the strength of legal rights, and depth of information (Quartey et al., 2017). According to Fowowe (2017), firms not credit constrained grew at

a faster rate than those facing limited access to credit. There is no readily access of credit from formal financial institutions to the owners of small businesses as the case with their counterpart operators of the medium and large enterprises (Buowari, 2015; Dolgih et al., 2015; Isle & Freudenberg, 2015; Kusi et al., 2015; Magaisa & Matipira, 2017; Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014; Wavhal, 2017).

Davidsson (2015), Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014) and Omrane (2015) discussed the lack of collateral and low value of the collateral as amongst the constraints for the owners of small business to access finance from formal commercial banks. While Davidsson (2015), Magaisa & Matipira, 2017, Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014), and Omrane (2015) considered absence of security and lack of track records as constraints towards access to finance from formal financial institutions, Wavhal (2017) combined lack of collateral and lack of enough credit information to limit small business owners from access to credit. Many small business owners face the problem of collateral, high bank charges and inability to prepare feasibility studies for accessing finance from commercial banks (Kamunge et al., 2014). According to URT (2012), only 39.8% of the owner of small businesses in Tanzania, owned businesses premises. The remaining 60.2% segment of owners who did not own any landed property could not get collaterals for use as securities for loans from commercial banks (URT, 2012). However, 85% of owners who owned landed properties (33.83%) did not have title deeds. Thus, 72.15% of owners could not access credits from commercial banks due to lack of collateral.

Researchers claimed an aversion to taking the risk as among the characteristics of owners of small businesses (Block et al., 2015). The level of propensity to take risk

differs amongst owners of small business (Block et al., 2015). Many owners of small businesses had a low risk-taking propensity (Mashenene & Rumanyika, 2014). Economists tagged high-risk projects with high success, and hence low risk-taking propensity means operating lowly performing projects. The low-risk propensity also explains why many small businesses could not live beyond 5 years. According to Block et al. (2015), owners of small businesses who ventured into small business operations out of necessity had lower propensity to take risk compared to those in response to small business opportunities in place (Block et al., 2015). Operators of commercial banks consider the small business sector as the riskiest sector and hence the reluctance in extending credit to the small business sector practitioners (Gbandi & Amisah, 2014). In an event where loans requested were considered not small, formal financial institutions increased restrictions and the resistance level that resulted in small business owners' failure to access loans (Isles & Fredenberg, 2015). In addition to the size of the loans, loan interest on small business loans were higher compared to money loaned to medium and large firms.

Marwa (2014) avowed information opacity as one of the reasons for small business's lack of access to capital. Lack of information about the finance sector denies the small business owners' right to dare ask for a loan at startup time. Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014) observed that lack of loan information contributed to the owners of small businesses' inability to access finance from commercial banks. The national business register developed by the NBS (2016) reflected only 10.9% of the sources that came from the formal sources. Instead, 40.5% were from private sources while the

remaining 48.6% opted not to reveal their sources. Madu (2016) reported that 100% of the interviewees and 66.7% of the respondents considered discrimination of lending institutions and lack of financial support respectively affected business performance. Many owners of the small businesses do not access loan information and those who accessed loan information found the loan interest rates to be high and unaffordable.

Many owners of small businesses were unable to win public tenders (Huka, 2016). There is a direct relationship between inadequate finance and inability to win government/ public tenders (Huka, 2016). According to Huka (2016), there was a low possibility for owners of small businesses to win government tenders (Huka, 2016). Huka cited lack of adequate finance as one of the reasons that small business owners could not participate and win public tenders. A study carried out in the Municipality of Moshi in Tanzania on the level of participation in public tendering revealed that out of 50 small business owners interviewed 39 (78%) participated, but only 10 ( 25.6%) won the tenders. Moreover, 94% cited unfavorable financial condition as a barrier for the small business owners failure to win public tenders (Huka, 2016). Nagaria (2016) argued that one of the constraints that produce difficulties in accessing finance was lack of business management skills. According to Nagaria (2016), many owners of small business did not have the skills to manage finances from the point of generating the money up to the optimal use of the money. As a result, many owners of small businesses operated transactions that lacked value for money.

## **Business Location**

Business location is one of the factors that many owners of small businesses perceived as among the critical elements for small businesses success or failure (Madu, 2016). For the small businesses to excel they require penetration into a broader market (Madu, 2016). However, many small business owners perceived suitable and strategic business locations as expensive (Wavhal, 2017). Consequently, in search of an affordable, excellent business location, owners of small business found themselves falling into street vending (Wavhal, 2017) because getting a proper business location required some serious work (John, Ejikeme, & Alfred, 2015) which most owners of small businesses could not afford.

Availability of supportive culture from the local public, and provision of regulatory assistance formed part of location aspects (Maksimov et al., 2017). Because of small business broader geographical presence, Ocheni and Gemade (2015) argued that small businesses tend to contribute to better income distribution than large enterprises. In areas where the local government authorities provided the required support, SMEs proved to work efficiently and sustainably (Maksimov et al., 2017). The small business community in many areas expects the presence of adequate support from the local government authorities in the respective location. However, volatility of government policies had made it tricky for the local government authorities to provide stable support to the small business community (Wavhal, 2017). As a mitigating measure, Wavhal (2017) recommended the owners of small businesses to have strategies that would

facilitate the utilization of its internal strengths and exploit opportunities surrounding the small business environment.

Strategic business location promoted innovation, growth and improved business performance (Glaub, Frese, Fischer, & Hoppe, 2015; Madu, 2016) thus, the importance of discussing business location amongst the critical success factors for small businesses performance. Lack of innovation made small business hard to grow (Enoch & Schuaib, 2015). Enoch and Schuaib (2015) argued that for small business to grow economically and innovatively, owners should invest more time and efforts to conceptualize on ideas that are current, suitable and can sustain competitive advantage. Enoch and Shuaib further recommended owners of small business to use tri-sustainable approach if they were to sustain competitive advantage. The tri-sustainable approach involved being small but global, becoming high tech but at low cost and being artisanal and innovative (Enoch & Shuaib, 2015).

### **Access to Business Information**

Access to business information is vital to making informed investment decisions towards sustainable operations (Kamunge et al., 2014). Furthermore, business information enhance the owners business management skills for recognizing and exploring available business opportunities (Kamunge et al., 2014). Through business information, small business owners communicate to their customers within and outside the country (Groves, Feverherm, & Gu, 2015). Business information include knowing about the market, industry information, competitors, and conduciveness of the business environment in a particular economy. Many owners of small businesses especially those

operating in a rural setting were constrained with lack of information and communication technology skills (URT, 2012). Consequently, many owners of small businesses used informal channels to get business information. The URT (2012) reported that 53% of owners of small businesses in Tanzania obtained business information through word of mouth by talking to customers. Surprisingly, 44.8% accessed business information by speaking to their spouses (URT, 2012). The URT described the first three kinds of business information on the priority list of the small business owners including ways to getting subsidized loans, markets, and customers information, and business training information.

### **Small Businesses and Taxation**

Governments all over the world use taxation from individuals and businesses to provide infrastructure such as good roads, water supply, and electricity that in turn facilitated the smooth running of businesses. Thus, taxes are essential for governments as they are the primary sources of funds for government expenditure (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). Despite, scholars mentioned the negative relationship between governments and small business ability to sustain themselves (Dolgih et al., 2015). Unfriendly timing for tax payments and multiplicity of taxes demoralize owners of small businesses from paying taxes (Dolgih et al., 2015).

The payment period and the multiplicity of taxes affect the cash flow movement of many owners of small businesses. In many cases, tax payment period did not fall within the same timing with the sales receipts, resulting into severe cash flow problems to the owners of small businesses (Isle & Freudenberg, 2015). Furthermore, in some

countries like Australia, owners of small businesses had different accounting procedures from the large enterprises (Isle & Freudenberg, 2015) whereby large and registered businesses used non-cash accounting, but the small businesses used cash accounting (Isle & Freudenberg, 2015) resulting in amplified liquidity problem. The unique nature and size of small business required an exceptional way of handling tax issues for the owners of small businesses to manage the taxes and yet sustain competitive advantage. Ocheni and Gemade (2015) proposed governments to develop a friendly tax policy that encourages owners of small businesses to join the formal sector and get self-motivated to pay taxes by reducing compliance costs.

Many operators of small businesses contended about the existence of multiplicity of taxes (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015; Okolo, Okpalaojiego, & Okolo, 2016). Ocheni and Gemade (2015) in their study on the effects of multiple taxations on the performance of SMEs in Benue State observed that various impositions and the enormous tax burden contributed to the untimely close-up of many small businesses in Nigeria. Okolo et al. (2016) shared the same concern that multiplicity of taxation was a significant challenge to the sustainability of small business performance. Moreover, some investors perceived multiplicity of taxes as an unnecessary burden on the small business operators a situation that caused some investors to decide to invest their excess finances in commercial banks to avoid the high running expenses in the small business operations (Okolo et al., 2016).

Taxation is an area where government intervention is essential (Dolgih et al., 2015) for the owners of small businesses to sustain competitive advantage. Owners of small businesses operated in an environment with unpredictable markets and hence,

amplified the cash flow problem, which in return suppressed the small business owners' efforts for longevity (Isle & Freudenberg, 2015). Reduced tax rates and simplified tax regime in consideration of the small business environment ensure not only the existence of the small businesses but also their productivity and profitability that might result into high tax payment compliance (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015).

Unstable cash flow resulting from a multiplicity of taxes was amongst the challenges that owners of small businesses faced (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). Owners of small businesses need to remain with some money for activities other than taxes and levies payment (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015). A study on the effects of multiple taxations on the performance of SMEs in Benue State in Nigeria revealed that 63% of respondents agreed that multiple taxations affected the growth and survival of SMEs. Wavhal (2017) also discussed the adverse effect of the multiple taxations of the sustainability of small businesses. Wavhal (2017) further argued that to be able to manage the multiplicity of taxes owners of small businesses had to use tax consultants, which is also a cash flow burden to the businesses. Many researchers and scholars, therefore, recommended that governments should develop tax systems in view to facilitating tax collection according to size and profits generated by businesses (Ocheni & Gemade, 2015).

Small business owners in Tanzania, like others in the Sub Saharan Africa (Quartey, Turkson, Abor, & Iddrisu, 2017) face oppressive tax regime as a drawback in doing business. There were tax hikes in the mobile money transfers, banking services, tourism, and cargo transit impeding small business growth among others. Because of high

taxes, was the high cost of doing business that consequently resulted in closure of many small businesses.

### **Business Failure Stigma**

Business failure stigma affected many small business owners from a performance improvement perspective (Simmons, Wiklund, & Levie, 2014). Simmons et al. (2014) argued that many owners of small businesses were either unwilling to follow formal business exit procedures or if exited, they were unwilling to reenter in the business world to avoid humiliation from the business community. On the other hand, those who used business failure as lessons for further improvement managed to push themselves forward for more innovation and sustainability strategies.

### **Strategies Toward Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

Aeron and Jain (2015) defined a strategy as steps that provide direction in conducting business and maintain external relationship. Business strategy is a tool for manipulating resources controlled by the firm in view to creating a competitive advantage (Mathur, 2015). However, Grant (2001) amplified the definition of a strategy by adding the element of the firm's internal resources and capabilities following the vitality of the resources and capabilities information and execution of strategies. Owners of small businesses realized that traditional ways of competing with rivals did not assure them a sustainable competitive advantage (Godwin-Opra, 2016). Thus, owners of small businesses required the capability to form and execute strategies that would ensure a steady flow of resources for sustainable implementation of strategies towards competitive advantage and business longevity (Madu, 2016).

When small business firms competed with large firms, small business firms failed due to lack of strategies to compete with large firms. However, Breznik and Lahovnik (2014) posited that there are both advantages and disadvantages for small firms to compete with large firms. Inadequate resources are one of the disadvantages that small business owners have compared to large firms while the advantages included the possibility of shared vision and the strategic proactivity.

Another strategy that owners of small businesses could use to generate capability for sustained competitive advantage was the possibility of easy acquisition of another small business to strengthen the business (Lester & Lipinski, 2015) although, getting the appropriate buyer of a small business is a big challenge. Most of the small businesses sold were a result of failure, death of the owner(s) of the business, sickness of the owners and or inability to compete in the market (Lester & Lipinski, 2015). Before purchasing a business, the purchaser would like to carry out due diligence including financial statements check, tax returns verification, and making inquiries with customers and suppliers since acquisition could mean buying someone's problem (Lester & Lipinski, 2015). Acquisition of business includes the business, employees, and change of operating standards, regulations, and procedures for doing the business to the buyer's choice. In such an environment, Lester and Lipinski, (2015) argued that the purchased businesses completely lose its identity, goodwill, and loyalty built for an extended period. Lester and Lipinski (2015) further argued on the importance of timely decision making and acting transparently as among the strategies for small business longevity.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The review of professional academic literature entailed scholarly articles and government documents. In the literature review, I broadly discussed shackles related to small business performance with a focus on the strategies owners of small businesses used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. I started by reviewing the literature related to the RBT that formed the conceptual framework for the study. The RBT involves the use of resources in sustaining competitive advantage. Moreover, I covered the overview of small business as a stepping stone towards the exploration of the strategies that small business owners used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. From the literature review, I specifically covered the economic contribution of the small business sector, the motive to start a business, business and business education, business management skills, adequate finance/ capital and business location. Others were access to business information, business location (Coff & Raffiee, 2015), as well as small business and taxation.

## **Transition**

Section 1 was an introduction to the essence of the doctoral study, and it entailed an overview of the study, the problem statement, the purpose statement, the significance, nature of the study, and the conceptual framework grounding the study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies small business owners in the Tanzanian construction material industry used to sustain business operations for longer

than 5 years. Section 1, also included the review of literature that provided insights as to what the prior studies said about the failure or success of the owners of small business.

In section 2, I described rationale for using a qualitative case study to explore strategies owners of small businesses used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years in Tanzania. Moreover, section 2 entailed a detailed description of the research method and design, population and sampling, data collection instruments, and techniques selected for the study. Section 2 also comprised comprehensive correlation of data organization and organization techniques, data analysis, reliability and validity elements.

Section 3 will comprise of an overview of the study, covering introduction, the purpose statement, research question, and findings. Furthermore, section 3 will contain (a) application to professional practice (b) implication for social change (c) recommendations for action and further study. I ended up section 3 with (a) the researcher's reflections, (b) summaries and concluding statements.

## Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I discuss the (a) purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) participants, (d) research method and design, and (e) population and sampling. I also discuss (a) ethical considerations of the research, (b) data collection, (c) organization of data and analysis techniques, and finally, (d) discourse issues related to reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction material industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The target population for this study was four owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry who sustained business operations for a minimum of 5 years because of their hands-on experience. Each participant was required to own a small construction materials business to be eligible to participate in this study. The results of the study might provide strategies for owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years, which can lead to positive social change by increasing employment opportunities and economic stability, resulting in the improved well-being of employees, their family members, and their communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument for establishing a framework for the research including a selection of method and design and deciding the appropriate sample size (Flick, 2015; Roller, 2015). Qualitative researchers should

always know what they are studying to clarify issues from the planning stage and avoid mistakes (Allen, 2015). A qualitative researcher is also responsible for the credibility, generalizability, reliability, objectivity, and reflexivity of the collected data (Marshall, Cardon, Oddar, & Fontenot, 2016). Qualitative researchers are capable of knowing what is in the data collection process and are responsible for the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments necessary for accurate representation and proper organization of the materials to maintain appropriate chain of evidence (Yin, 2014). It is also the responsibility of the researcher to ensure adequate participation of the participants with the free exchange of ideas between the researcher and the participant. Participatory research provides a lens for exploratory and understanding for both the researcher and the participant (Bradbury-Jones & Broadhurst, 2015). Additionally, for successful multiple case study research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the participants possess the experience of the phenomenon (Ferrazzi & Krupa, 2015). The researcher also indicates the planned length of time with the participants, and through the consent form, the researcher reflects the information regarding the participants' options (Laerkner, Egerod, & Hansen, 2015).

As the CEO of the Property and Business Formalization Program in Tanzania, whose objective includes ensuring growth and sustainability of business operations, exploring strategies owners of small businesses in the construction materials used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years was of interest to me. The over 10 years experience with the Property and Business Formalization Program as director of finance and administration and later in the capacity of a CEO provided me the

opportunity to understand small business owners' work environment; I noticed owners of small business in the construction materials industry failing to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years despite their engagement in the formal sector. To avoid bias, I ensured not to interview small business owners known to me, as research findings should be free from the researcher's views and interference (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016). Additionally, consistent use of procedure and protocol in data collection helps the researcher to reduce bias in qualitative data collection (Guetterman, 2015). I thus used the same interview questions for all participants to help mitigating possible bias. The interview protocol (see the ppendix) was the guiding tool for the interview with each participant.

As a qualitative researcher, I was an interviewer, a witness, moderator, experimenter, and a facilitator of the research process. Through reliable data, I was able to evaluate the research outcomes (National Institute of Health, 2014) of exploring the strategies owners of small businesses in the Tanzania construction material industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The goal of this study was to report data from participants in a truthful and unbiased manner rather than manipulating conclusions. Because data collection involved human interaction, compliance with the guiding principles developed in the Belmont Report was of necessity, which included respect of persons, motivations of beneficence, and application of justice (Bowser & Wiggins, 2015; Ferreira, Buttel, & Ferreira, 2015). Following the link between the purpose, the implementation of the research methods, and the validity of the resulting findings (Baškarada, 2014), I was responsible for ensuring alignment between the

purpose, the methodology of implementation, and the findings of the study (Yazan, 2015).

There are three interview methods commonly used by qualitative researchers: structured, unstructured, and semistructured interview methods (Doody & Moonan, 2013). I selected semistructured interview method to collect data from the owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry. Semistructured interviews allow for a varying number of questions and flexibility for participants' ideas and situations (Alshenqeti, 2014). Additionally, audio recording of interviews with verbatim transcriptions can reduce possible bias in data collection (Araújo et al., 2017). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument responsible for safeguarding the data collected and complying with the ethical codes of conduct (Araújo et al., 2017; Rezaie, Khazaie, & Yazdani, 2016). For this study, I used a data collection protocol that would keep the data safe for 5 years when I will destroy the data.

### **Participants**

The target population for this study was owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry with investment in machinery of up to Tanzania shillings 200.0 million and employment of fewer than 49 employees who sustained business operations for longer than 5 years. Owners of small businesses in North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania represent owners of small businesses in Tanzania; thus, the population was appropriate for the study. The sample size, however, depends on the complexity (Araújo et al., 2017) and sensitivity (Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, & Murphy, 2016) of the study because there is no specific answer as to the appropriate number and size of the

sample. For example, Andersson and Evers (2015) indicated three participants as the minimum number of participants for a case study research, whereas Guetterman (2015) considered four to five cases to be appropriate. Nevertheless, Yap and Webber (2015) argued that a large number of participants is not necessary in attaining accurate assessment of small business.

Purposeful sampling is a criterion-based and useful tool for identifying and selecting participants with information for the study (Flick, 2015; Yin, 2014). Purposeful sampling helps in gathering appropriate information from the sample for addressing the research question (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers employ numerous procedures for reaching out to the participants and in so doing they introduce rigor, which ensures trustworthiness of the research (Henry, 2015). Rigor and validity are important in qualitative research (Morse, 2015).

Using purposeful sampling approach, I identified eight potential participants who owned small businesses in the construction materials industry in the North West part of Dar es Salaam. The Kinondoni Municipal Council Trade Officer helped me gain access to the research participants by providing a list of owners of small businesses operating in the construction materials industry. The list of businesses contained telephone numbers and physical addresses of the business owners, which at different times I made phone calls to the eight potential participants informing them of my intention to conduct a study and asking for the convenient way to deliver the invitation letter. Out of the eight business owners contacted by phone, three of them declined the invitation and five agreed to receive the introduction letters. All the five owners chose hand delivery as a

convenient means to get the invitation letter. The participants received hand delivered invitation letters in Swahili with an informed consent form in Swahili. Each participant provided an “I consent” to confirm willingness to participate in the study after which they selected their convenient private venue for the interviews.

It is important that the researcher develops a relationship with the participants at the data collection point and throughout the research process. To establish a good working relationship with potential participants, I first paid a visit to each business premises during which I explained the objective of the study. Furthermore, as a means to indicate their voluntary participation in the study, and reassurance of the level of confidentiality and anonymity, I used the participant consent form, which is a confidential agreement between the participant and the researcher (Laerkner et al., 2015; Rupp et al., 2015). Before signing the consent form, the participants got the opportunity to ask questions of understanding. In qualitative research, openness and transparency to the participants during the interview enhances the quality of the data collected and the results of the study (Paine, 2015). For precision, and knowledge, I asked the participants’ permission to record the interview. Recording of the meeting ensures retention of information in view to facilitating recall and analysis (Akaeze, 2016).

Participation to the study was voluntary and the participants could withdraw from participation at any point before, during, or after the interview. I interviewed five participants, with a fallback of four participants in case of any withdrawal. The first participant withdrew at the end of the interviews, as he was not ready to share the business documents. Thus, I was left with P2, P3, P4 and P5. Criteria used to select the

participants included: (a) the participants being at least 18 years of age, (b) the participants being active in the day-to-day running of the business, and (c) the participants living or working in Tanzania. Other criteria were (a) the participant owning business in the construction materials industry and located in the North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and (b) the business being operational for more than 5 years. I conducted in-depth interviews with four experienced owners of small business operating in the construction materials industry as per my original plan.

### **Research Method and Design**

Determining the appropriate research method and design is important for facilitating understanding of the research problem. Each research method and design provide a different approach toward the readers' understanding of the problem. Researchers commonly use a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach when conducting social science studies (Yin, 2014). This research was a qualitative exploratory multiple case study design. The qualitative researcher seeks a deep motivation of the interviewees' mindset because qualitative research involves studying individuals' lived experience of a phenomenon (Barnham, 2015). A qualitative researcher is capable of providing a complex, documented description of the way people experience a given phenomenon (Hashemnezhad, 2015). Moreover, the qualitative research method facilitate the study choice and research query (Madu, 2016). Thus, the qualitative research method is relevant in the study of exploring strategies for business sustainability for longer than 5 years. I used semistructured interviews to explore and capture the perspectives of the owners of small businesses trading in the construction materials industry regarding the

sustainability of business operations for longer than 5 years. An interview is the most efficient data collection tool, as it allows the research participants to share insights related to their experience of the phenomenon (Castillo-Montonya, 2016). In the following section, I present the description of the research methods and the rationale for selecting qualitative multi-case study research method over the others.

### **Research Method**

Qualitative researchers seek to understand the phenomenon under study (Bush, 2016), and hence the questions start with “why” or “what” (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). By generating reliable data on the experience, perceptions, and beliefs of the participants, a qualitative researcher can provide a description of the way people understand a given phenomenon (Hashemnezhad, 2015). Moreover, qualitative research method is appropriate for exploring human experience (Letourneau, 2015), because the qualitative researcher can obtain first-hand information from the experienced participants. By using the qualitative method in this study, I provided insights on how owners of small business in the building construction materials industry used strategies to sustain business operations beyond 5 years.

Researchers who use the qualitative research method see things in their natural settings and seek to explore phenomenon using flexible instruments and semistructured methods (Baškarada, 2014; Hashemnezhad, 2015; Yin, 2014). In the context of this study, the phenomenon was the sustainability and business longevity by the owners of small business in the construction materials industry who sustained business operations for longer than 5 years. On the other hand, researchers use the quantitative method where

the study involves statistical analysis of variables and statistical validation and seek to confirm hypothesis (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). In this study, there were neither statistical data involved in validation nor hypothesis to confirm, and thus, the quantitative research method was not appropriate for this study. The third method is the mixed method, which combines both qualitative and quantitative methods (Hashemnezhad, 2015; Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). Researchers use the mixed method only if the complexity level of the research problem is such that neither qualitative nor quantitative methods alone can address the problem (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). In mixed research method, the researcher performs small studies either concurrently or sequentially (Bazeley, 2015). However, for this study, the qualitative method was sufficient for exploring the strategies owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years.

### **Research Design**

A research design entails the technique of conducting the research (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers typically conduct research using phenomenological, case study, or ethnographic research designs (Araújo et al., 2017). Ethnographic research designers intend to understand the behavior or culture of a group (Jenkins, 2015), whereas phenomenological researchers seek to understand the meaning of the lived experience of individuals with an expression of the phenomenon (Araújo et al., 2017; Rezaie et al., 2016). On the other hand, researchers use a case study design to focus on the process within one or more groups or organizations and obtain a holistic view of issues from various types of sources (Yin, 2014). A case study is a means for collecting information

from individuals or a group of individuals to describe and understand a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). As I sought a holistic understanding of strategies within the context of cases rather than behavior, the culture of a group or unique lived experiences of individuals, both ethnographic and phenomenological designs were not fit for this study, and thus I chose to use a case study design.

Qualitative case study designers can use descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory with *how* and *why* questions during the interview (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). In a case study design, researchers can use single or multiple case study designs (Guetterman, 2015; Turner & Endres, 2017; Yin, 2014). Researchers use a multiple case study design to focus on small groups of participants for a period (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2014). The multiple case study design is suitable for assessing *what* and *why* questions (Yin, 2014). In the context of this study, the focus was the strategies of owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry in Tanzania; therefore, I chose to use the case study design over the others. This allowed me to collect data through interviews and document review with holistic exploration of a business issue, and it provided flexibility to adapt to the available resources and procedures (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, a case study research design is a rigorous form of inquiry and a tool for evaluation and organizational learning (Baškarada, 2014).

### **Population and Sampling**

In this study, the intent was to explore strategies owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The researcher is responsible for determining the population and appropriate

sample size before beginning the research (Baškarada, 2014). The population for this study were owners of small businesses who sustained business operations for longer than 5 years and who employed between 1 to 49 employees and investment in machinery of up to Tanzania shillings 200.0 million. However, one cannot research everything and everywhere (Flick, 2015), thus, predetermining a sample size was of important to facilitate proper allocation of resources, budget, and funding proposals (Baškarada, 2014; Guetterman, 2015). Moreover, it is important for the researchers to focus on appropriate sample size instead of the volume of data (Guo, Lu, Wu, and Zhang, 2015). The researcher uses some population and sampling criteria (Flick, 2015; Yin, 2014) as well as judgments and experience (Guetterman, 2015) to decide the appropriate sample size.

A qualitative researcher can use any of the two non-probability sampling techniques to determine a sample size depending on the nature, type, and purpose of the research (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Researchers use probability and non-probability sampling techniques to decide and select appropriate sample for the study (Rahi, 2017). Probability sampling technique is the process by which using the sample protocol the researcher selects a random sample of participants from a population. The technique is appropriate for selecting a sample for quantitative research where each participant has an equal chance for selection. On the other hand, the qualitative researcher determines the sample sizes at the end of the data collection process when the researcher achieve data saturation (Guetterman, 2015). Likewise, Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) argued that, there is no predetermined sample size in qualitative researches

instead, the sample should be enough to achieve data saturation. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) described saturation in qualitative research as information power.

Moreover, participants in qualitative research do not have equal chances of selection (Etikan et al., 2016). As I did not intend to give equal chances to all owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry in Tanzania, thus, I chose to use a non-probability sampling technique to determine the sample for this study.

There is no fit for all qualitative research sample size since that each research has a particular ideal sample size depending on the study, the research question, and richness of the data (Malterud et al., 2016). According to Guetterman (2015) the qualitative researchers use small sample size because of the level of detail and intensity that the work involves. However, in qualitative research the sample size does not matter, instead, what matters is to propose the number of participants sufficient to ensure thorough discovery and saturation (Malterud et al., 2016).

Non-probability sampling technique comprises of convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Convenience sampling technique involves factors such as stress-free accessibility, geographical proximity, and availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). Etikan et al. (2016) also described a convenient sample as accident sample because the selection criteria might only be because of the geographical location or administrative simplicity; thus may contain biases and without proper representation of the population of interest. Furthermore, the convenience sampling is neither purposive nor strategic and therefore not appropriate for my study that aims at exploring strategies owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian

construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. I thus selected to use purposeful sampling technique. Through a purposeful sampling, the population provides adequate information for the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Yin, 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore strategies owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years.

A sample is a subset or representative of a large population (Flick, 2015). Sampling, therefore, is the process of choosing the research representative in a large population (Flick, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). The sampling design for this study was purposeful sampling. Using purposeful sampling is an opportunity for the researcher to select participants by the objective of the study (Yin, 2014). According to Flick (2015), a purposeful sampling guarantees that the population delivers sufficient information for the study. The purposeful sample of this study entailed four small business owners with the following eligibility criteria; (a) the participants were at least 18 years of age (18 years is the age of majority in Tanzania), (b) the participants were active in the day to day running of the business, (c) the participants lived or worked in Tanzania, (d) the participant owned business in the construction materials industry and located in the North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and (e) the business had been operational for more than 5 years.

### **Ethical Research**

One of the researcher's responsibility is to build a safe and trustworthy research environment. Allen (2015) emphasized the need to maintain ethical codes of conduct

before, during and after the research process. The university IRB enforces guidelines for ethical research (Collins & Cooper, 2014). Researchers and professionals use informed consent form as participant's confirmation of ethical compliance and understanding of the research before signature (Malendo, Vieges, de Souza, & Ceregnato, 2016).

Acquiring informed consent and commitment from participants assist in avoidance of harm, privacy and confidentiality, and protection of participants (Yin, 2014). Wanga (2017) used informed consent as clear evidence of research participants' obligation and accepting of facts, implications and future consequences of research. For adequate understanding and knowledge of the research procedures beforehand, I hand delivered a copy of the informed consent form and asked them to read and ask questions about any concerns or reply through email the words I consent as formal permission to embark on the interview exercise. Nguyen (2015) encouraged participants to withdraw from the study in case of any concerns. In the process, I clarified the fact that participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw without penalty at any time before, during or after the interview by contacting me via phone or email.

While Marshall and Rossman (2015, 2016) considered ethical concerns to include political issues, trust between researcher, participants, and readers, as well as compliance with the proper research processes. Groves et al. (2015) highlighted the prominence of interpersonal trust in a research study. Additionally, Lunnay, Borlagdan, McNaughton, and Ward (2015) discussed on the core principles of traditional human research ethics including respect, integrity, and beneficence and found that privacy and confidentiality as present-day risks related to research using social media. Furthermore, Wallace (2015)

discussed the lack of trust in confidentiality contributing to reluctance in disclosing all applicable information that can have severe concerns.

Zucker (2015) explained the elements of ethical research as described in the Belmont Report to include privacy, anonymity, beneficence or confidentiality of private information as human subjects. The Belmont Report also includes dignity, integrity, respect, justice, and vulnerability in designing of research, data analysis, and presentation as ethical considerations. Given the importance of mitigating any liability to both researcher and participant, I complied with confidentiality rules for research participants on confidential case study research data or information with high confidentiality standards in compliance with the Belmont Report. In the context of this study, participants were the owners of the small business in the Tanzanian construction materials industry who sustained businesses for longer than 5 years identified to participate in the study. I informed the participants on the treatment of the data before the dissemination of the research report. To improve legitimacy and voice within research domains, the protection of participants' privacy and confidentiality by principles of research ethics are of paramount importance (Wallace (2015)).

I complied with the ethical principles including privacy, anonymity, and beneficence with all the participants and addressed all the ethical concerns in the process of data collection, data organization, data analysis, and publication of case study. Thus, for confidentiality, and protection of participants and their organizations, identification of participants I used labels participant P2 through participant P5. Yin (2014) emphasized on the need for utmost care by the researcher during the process of gathering the data,

storing the data and analysis of the data. The Walden University IRB requires that all the data is securely kept for a period of 5 years during which only the researcher can access the data. To protect the rights of the participant, the stored data is on a personal, password-protected, and external hard drive for 5 years after which I can delete the data. I store all the raw data entailing audio recordings and signed consent forms in a locked cabinet drawer for 5 years.

Moreover, I discussed the overview of the research, the need for the study, and the benefits to the society, business community, and the participant's business. As Lunnay et al. (2015) observed on the potential risks intrinsic to the use of social media in research against the ethical principles and conduct, I also discouraged the use of such innovative techniques including Facebook, Blogs, and Tweeter as communication tools in this qualitative study. Marshall and Rossman (2015, 2016) prohibited financial strategy to incentivize participants in research as can jeopardize the participants' freedom to participate or not. However, Resnik (2015) supported appropriate financial incentives to include payments for a time, risk, pain, discomfort, the inconvenience of research procedures, travel costs, recruitment, and population characteristics considerations. From my experience in dealing with small business owners as the CEO of the Property and Business Formalization Program, monetary incentives, jeopardize participants' freedom. Thus, I prompted the participant's convenience regarding both time and location.

Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) posited that researchers should give extensive ethical attention on the protection of the participants during and after data collection. Thus, I used member checking to raise questions on the protection of the

participants. Moreover, I obtained necessary approval from the participants with an emphasis that the participants can withdraw from the study at any point in the process. As an indication of compliance with the ethical considerations and principles, I participated, passed the exam, and certified by the National Institute of Health of the United States of America for the online training course that presents the tenets for ethical considerations about working with human participants. I planned to maintain data in safe custody for 5 years in view to protecting the rights of the participants.

It is the role of the Walden University IRB staff to ensure that all doctoral proposals submitted for approval meet the IRB regulations and professional conduct applicable and appropriate for the study. Before the start of data collection, I obtained the Walden University IRB number 05-25-18-05211801 to evidence my adherence of the ethical procedures and human rights protocols.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data collection is the principal role of the researcher and, hence, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, the open-ended questions act as a guide to the dialogue between the researcher and the participants (Haraldsson, Christenson, Conlon, & Henricson, 2015). Qualities of the primary data collection instrument include among others dedicated interest, motivation, inquisitiveness, commitment, sacrifices and excelling (Yin, 2014). Other qualities include knowledge, recognition, scholarly, approval, integration, and intention to conduct best practice research. In this study, I was the primary data collection instrument and the main interviewer collecting information from the owners of small businesses in the

construction materials industry. According to Yin (2014), the overriding principles for data collection entail development of multiple sources of data, maintaining a chain of evidence, creation of the database, and separating storage for the data in the final analysis from the field data. Yin (2014) further described six origins of data where a case study researcher must collect data from at least two of them; (a) archival records, (b) direct observations, (c) documentation, (d) interviews, (e ) participant observation, or (f) physical artifacts. I thus conducted interviews with open-ended questions to explore strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Also, I studied company documents for knowledge of the business performance.

Bush (2016) successfully used a multiple qualitative case study approach to achieve an analysis and explore the perception and actions of six small businesses owners who succeeded in business for longer than 5 years. Moreover, in conducting a study on the strategies required for small business sustainability in a competitive environment, Akaeze (2016) used qualitative multiple case study design. Thus, I used a multiple qualitative case study approach to achieve the analysis and exploration of the strategies used by these four owners of Tanzania construction materials industry in sustaining business operations for longer than 5 years. Interviews are a standard cross-disciplinary research instrument, which many researchers use either alone or in conjunction with other research methods. Akaeze (2016) combined semi-structured interviews with the observation of body language, nonverbal cues, and gesture to explore strategies small auto-dealership business owners used to sustain business for longer than 5 years. Yin

(2014) propagated the use of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions as appropriate data collection instruments in qualitative studies that also facilitate interpretation of participants' response in line with the research problem and purpose.

Wanga (2017) conducted semistructured, open-ended interviews to explore bank leaders' experience in hedging strategies to mitigate risks of fluctuating exchange rates.

Also, Akaeze (2016) considered the use of interview guide, and a voice recorder, as a means to assure validity and reliability of the data collected by the primary data collection instrument. I thus used a digital voice recorder to ensure appropriate data capture. C. Marshall, Dalyot, and Galloway (2016) advocated the use of interview protocol with interview guide questions coherent with the conceptual framework.

According to Doody and Noonan (2013), the interview protocol comprises of the purpose of the study, objectives, and procedures for the interview process. For consistent management of the interview in qualitative research, the interview protocol also includes interview questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). For this study, the interview protocol included the open-ended questions for providing more profound understanding of strategies owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain operations beyond 5 years. The interview protocol provided for a systematic facilitative approach towards effective data collection mechanisms. To gather data on the strategies used by the owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry who sustained business operations for longer than 5 years, I interviewed all participants following the interview protocol (see the ppendix).

Additionally, I triangulated the data source by comparing the transcribed data and the interview notes. Furthermore, as part of the data triangulation process as recommended by Patton (2015), I also used internal and external documents such as audited financial statements, management information systems report, as well as daily and weekly sales reports.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection techniques commonly available for researchers include interviews, direct observations, local participation, and review of existing documents (Marshall & Rossman, 2015, 2016; Yin, 2014). There are advantages and disadvantages in each data collection techniques (Wanga, 2017). Yin (2014) advocated the use of interviews as the central data collection method for case study research design as it facilitates the researcher in bringing out the participant's experience and perceptions in detail. Open-ended interviews facilitate the participants to stay at ease during the interview and hence describe the concept under study with nuance (Tran, Porcher, Tran, & Ravaud, 2015). Additionally, open-ended interview questions promote more answers from the participant, which allow the participants to provide in-depth and meaningful information on the topic as opposed to closed-ended questions (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Reich, 2015). I chose to use the interview technique to bring out the experience and perception of the owners of small businesses in the building construction materials industry regarding strategies they used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years.

Qualitative researchers are responsible for ensuring the validity of the data and reliability of the study results. Strategies to ensure validity, reliability and achieving data saturation using a small scope, include member checking and transcription review (Akaeze, 2016; Yin, 2014). Member checking is an essential initiative in the data collection process as it assists sharing, verifying, probing, checking, and confirmation of accuracy of the data and interpretation with valid participants (Harvey, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2015, 2016). Member checking is an efficient way of avoiding misrepresentation of data. Member checking is an appropriate method because it involves participants transcription of the interviews to ensure that data was credible and consisted accurate records (Birt et al., 2016). Furthermore, Birt et al. (2016) considered member checking as a participant or respondent validation technique as it assists in exploring the credibility of the results. Member checking involves conducting the initial interview, interpreting what the participants shared and, finally, going over the interpretation with the participants for validation purposes. Despite the weaknesses inherent in member checking strategy including unclear strategy on how to resolve competing interpretation, Fusch and Ness (2015), and Yin (2014) argued that in member checking there are maximum benefits for reliability and validity. Moreover, member checking strengthens credibility and trustworthiness. Thus, I undertook member checking and followup interview through obtaining in-depth information and enhanced academic rigor. The member checking process includes writing each question followed by a one-paragraph succinct synthesis, providing a printed copy of the synthesis to the participant and asking for agreement of the synthesis representing the answer and inquire in case of additional

information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Member checking allows follow-up and probing questions for participants to provide further details (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

The other strategy for validity, reliability, and data saturation assurance is transcript review. With transcript review, the researcher conducts the interview, write a word-for-word of what the participant said and share the transcript with the participant for validation purposes. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the transcript review process involves: (a) writing each question followed by a complete interview transcript (word-for-word); (b) providing a printed copy of the transcript to the participant; (c) asking the participant if the transcript is correct; (d) making edits as applicable, and finally writing up the interview transcription. Fusch and Ness, (2015) reflected that transcript review is not as rigor as the member checking strategy in attaining data saturation. I, therefore, chose to use member checking over the transcript review approach.

Another important aspect of the process of data collection and analysis is a triangulation of data (Patton, 2015). Birt et al. (2016) described triangulation as the application of more than one method to enhance the understanding of a phenomenon and more valid interpretation. According to Marshall and Rossman (2015, 2016), a researcher uses triangulation for guaranteeing validity and reliability by using multiple data sources to bear or validate the same point.

### **Data Organization Technique**

During data collection processes, case study researchers conduct many interviews, and hears voices of participants. Translation of the participants voices is necessary to

make meaning of the voices for the readers; thus data organization becomes inevitable (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Qualitative data organization involves some steps including data checking, maintaining and reviewing interview notes as well as reflective journaling and entering raw data into qualitative data analysis software. Data checking facilitate the researcher's ability to verify data validity and quality (Kornbluh, 2015). While undertaking the interviews, I recorded the participant interviews using a digital voice recorder for backup and transcribed the data immediately. Furthermore, the transcribed data was in the form of a Word-formatted document on the password-protected computer. The word-formatted document reflected no any participant's name. The backup data will remain in safe custody until 5 years after which the researcher destroys the file (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, I scanned all documents and records from the participants, in view to creating manageable files in an electronic file format. Yazan (2015) narrated that data being in manageable pieces allows the case study researcher to deconstruct, reconstruct, and reflect realities of the data.

Buowari (2015) and Wanga (2017) used NVivo software to collect, organize, and analyze the interview scripts. According to Buowari (2015) and Wanga (2017), using NVivo software in organizing and analyzing the data saves time and money by reducing turnaround time. NVivo software helps the researcher to develop codes, identify themes, and pattern during the process of analyzing data (Buowari, 2015; Wanga, 2017; Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015). Thus, in this study, data collection, organization, and analysis of the analyzed interview scripts utilized the support of the NVivo software. The collection and storage of data is in accordance with the IRB that requires only the

researcher to have access to the data. Thus, I stored the electronic data on a personal password-protected and locked the audio recordings in a drawer for 5 years, after that, will destroy the data.

### **Data Analysis**

A clear connection between the research question and the participant responses enables the researcher to analyze the participant's responses (Buowari, 2015; Walizer, 2017; Wanga, 2017). It is, therefore, essential to develop and use interview protocol so that the interview and the questions focus on gathering the data about the process under study. For this study, the process was about strategies small business owners in the construction materials industry used to sustain operations beyond 5 years. As a qualitative case study researcher, I used open-ended questions to gather data, identified themes, and explored the meaning of the study.

According to Forero et al. (2018) and Yin (2014), case study researchers require the use of methodological triangulation in the data analysis process. In view to supporting the data collected from face-to-face interviews, I triangulated the data using company records provided by the participants including daily sales records, and weekly sales reports as well as audited accounts provided by the participants. Forero et al. (2018) described methodological triangulations as the process, which occurs by the researcher's using more than one source to conclude. In articulating the comprehensive view of a phenomenon, Forero et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of the use of multiple methods of data collection in method triangulation. Interview is one of the data collection methods available for qualitative researchers (Forero et al., 2018). Moreover, Yin (2014)

discussed the review of internal and external company documents as amidst the methods available for a qualitative case study researcher. Jenkins (2015) successfully used interviews and review of company records to collect data from managers and employees in three independent restaurants in Philadelphia. In this study, I used semi-structured interviews, review of internal documents as well as external company documents as sources of data from the four owners of small business operating in the construction materials industry.

Yin (2014) described three data collection principles covering; collecting data from multiple sources, creating a database, and documenting all evidence. Yin (2014) placed data analysis as the most crucial step in qualitative research. Data analysis intended to expose themes related to the research question, which is *what strategies owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain operations for longer than 5 years*. Furthermore, Yin (2016) proposed six data sources namely; documents, records, answers to interview questions, direct observations, participant observations, and artifacts. For this study, data for methodological triangulation came from records including book keeping pages and weekly reports; company documents such draft accounts and audited accounts; and answers from the interviews using open-ended interview questions. Data triangulation is useful in supporting the consistency of the findings (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Following the data collection exercise is the data analysis process (Yin, 2014). To begin the data analysis process, I first reviewed the transcribed interview questions and company records and company documents followed by data cleansing to remove

irrelevant data that do not conform with the research criteria (Chu, Llyas, Krishnan, & Wang, 2016). Data cleansing include detecting and repairing of the data for ensuring accuracy and reliability (Chu, et al., 2016). Chu, et al. (2016) emphasized that failure to undertake proper data cleansing may result to inaccurate analytics and unrealistic decisions. Once the data cleansing process is completed, I transfered the folder containing transcribed synthesized interviews to a word document and uploaded the file into the Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for organising and analyzing the data. For this study, I used NVivo 12 to organize the interviews and analyzing responses from the participants. Buowari (2015) and Wanga (2017) as well as Walizer (2017) augmented the use of NVivo in addressing the research question through the responses from the participants. Yin (2014) argued that computer-aided techniques such as NVivo help the researcher to manipulate large amounts of data. In addition to the use of the computer-aided techniques for manipulation of data, Yin (2014) argued, that it is the responsibility of the researcher to study the outputs, define the relevant codes and interpret any emerged patterns, concepts or insights since the computer-aided tool is not an end in itself. Thus, the use of a second cycle of the process that involves the coding with the same NVivo software helped to refine and identify patterns with the data to show themes present in the study. Thereafter, followed the interpretation of the themes to determine the themes' significance to the study and the vast body of knowledge.

### **Reliability and Validity**

One of the critical roles of the researcher is to ensure validity and reliability of the research findings (Baillie, 2015). Forero et al. (2018) suggested that a significant

challenge for qualitative researchers is the achievement of the highest possible quality of conducting and reporting research results. It is therefore essential, that, from the outset, the researcher collects valid and reliable data. A qualitative researcher is responsible for monitoring reliability and validity issues of the study right from the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the findings (Forero et al., 2018; Yin, 2014). Moreover, Forero et al. (2018) emphasized on the importance of a qualitative researcher to pay attention to quality as it leads to a richer understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Marshall and Rossman (2015) described reliability as the degree of consistency that the study method or procedures reflect. Validity is all about the study's accuracy of measuring and evaluating what the researcher intends to study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). From reliable and valid research findings, and with consistent procedures, techniques, operations, and data other researchers can repeat the research inquiry and achieve similar results and conclusions (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), researchers can replicate the case study over again by using case study protocol to document the procedures utilized in the earlier case and develop case study database for similar findings and conclusions.

Scholars who discussed reliability and validity issues in qualitative studies recommended dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Rahi, 2017) to describe precision in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2014). Additionally, Forero et al. (2018) posited that dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability make the standard criteria for assessing thoroughness. Yazan (2015) mentioned dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability as

trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research. Like other qualitative case studies, in this study, other researchers can judge the level of reliability using the dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability criteria.) Reliability and validity are procedural and contextual based issues related to reliability and validity respectively (Kinh & Ihantola, 2015).

### **Reliability**

Marshall and Rossman (2015) defined reliability as the level of consistency of findings and conclusion that the data collection method and procedures yield in replicating the study. Reliability in research is when a qualitative researcher using research procedures from previous research yielding the same findings (Forero et al., 2018). However, Akaeze (2016) raised a concern about the possible threat to the reliability of the survey at every stage ranging from data collection due to wrong and unsystematic interview question and inaccurate transcription to findings and conclusion. Thus, Wang (2017) posited that consistent use of the same open-ended interview questions asked in the same order to all participants ensures the reliability of the results of the study. Reliability is all about ways of addressing dependability in a qualitative research study (Ballie, 2015). Member checking of data interpretation, transcript review, pilot test, expert validation of the interview questions, interview protocol, focus group protocol, participant observation protocol, are amongst the ways of ensuring reliability in a qualitative study environment (Yin, 2014). In this study, reliability may be realized through the level of consistency in executing the case study through dependability. In the

following subsection, I describe how dependability is a criterion for reliability and how I realized reliability through dependability.

**Dependability.** Dependability is the traditional way of describing a qualitative case study reliability based on replicability and or repeatability (Wanga, 2017).

Researchers use field notes, memo writing, and reflective notes to address dependability issues (Yin, 2014). Marom and Lussier (2015) explained dependability using steadiness and stability of the research process over time while Hays et al. (2016) looked at dependability by consistency of findings across time and researchers. Reliability is mostly procedural and hence the effect of the ever-changing contexts in research endeavors, bring in a measuring challenge (Yin, 2014). Various scholars, therefore, recommended some ways and means of measuring reliability through dependability. Triangulation, member checking, disclosing, monitoring and discrepancies data are criteria for measuring reliability and validity of qualitative cases study (Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking is useful in view to confirming accounts, offer changes, or make additions they perceive are necessary and appropriate (Kornbluh, 2015).

Yin (2014) suggested the use of case study protocol and database as a means to establish the level of dependability, consistency, and integrity in research. Also, Lishner (2015) recommended sharing data with fellow scientists as well as adopting and promoting a truth-seeking mindset during the entire research process as amongst the ways of ensuring dependability of the research work. On the other hand, Morse (2015) posited that audit trail, triangulation, and peer scrutiny might contribute positively towards improved dependability of the research process. Yazan (2015) described audit trail to

include organization and safekeeping of data that enables others to cross-check and verify findings of the study results. Akaeze (2016) emphasized the importance of having a comprehensive research plan, a rational set of field notes on all evidence collected and a documented case study analysis. In this study, I used member-checking and that the participants reviewed the interview transcript for ensuring accuracy and credibility of data. I summarized the information and asked the participants follow up questions that required clarification to govern accuracy of the information. Furthermore, I followed the interview protocol by asking the same questions to all the participants.

### **Validity**

One of the enormous challenges of the qualitative researcher is not only the capture of the lived experience but also to convincingly putting the lived capture in writing to demonstrate a full understanding of the case (Kinh & Ihantola, 2015) since the researcher may be moved by biased knowledge of earlier studies and theories. Thus, it is of paramount importance for the researcher to avoid the observer causes effects, observer bias, researcher bias, data access limitation, and complexities and constraints of the human mind (Kinh & Ihantola, 2015). Qualitative study validity focuses on the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the findings (Rahi, 2017). I therefore, bracketed my experience, opinions, and beliefs such that interpretation of the data conveys the participant's intended meaning. I undertook bracketing through writing memos during data collection and analysis of the data.

**Credibility.** In the context of research, credibility rests on the value and believability of the research findings (Kornbluh, 2015). Credibility as the degree to which

the participants of the study bestow trust on the research findings thus Chawla and Pandey (2016) posited that researchers might focus on credibility by avoiding the risk of reactivity and bias in research. Reactivity risk involves the possibility of the researcher's belief, opinion, and experience to influence the research. As denoted by Noble and Smith (2014), to minimize the reactivity risk and bias, it is of paramount importance that the researcher provides an interpretation that conveys the participant's intended meaning. Likewise, Walizer (2017) posited that conducting interviews in a secure and private environment might result in getting candid and honest feedback from the participants. I also ensured that the interview took place in a secure and private environment to promote frank and authentic feedback.

Strategies for enhancing credibility include the use of purposive sampling techniques, methodological triangulation, member checking, peer scrutiny and refined interview protocols (Birt et al., 2016; Takyi, 2015; Yazan, 2015). While supporting triangulation and member checking as credibility enhancements; Chang (2014) considered prolonged engagement as valuable elements that enhance the credibility of the study. Adams (2016) ensured prolonged engagement by interviewing participants and collecting data until it was empirically evident that no new information or themes emerged. Prolonged engagement in the generation of an audit trail, the process of triangulation, and peer scrutiny are instruments for data credibility (Ballie, 2015; Morse, 2015). Extended engagement entails spending the adequate time of prior visits and using 60 minutes of the interview time in preparing the participant's understanding of the phenomenon (Akaeze, 2016). Thus, I made a prior visit to each participant and spent

adequate time providing details of the study, its importance to the researcher, the nation, the business community and in particular the owners of small business in the Tanzania construction materials seeking to sustain business for longer than 5 years. During such visits, I also informed the participant that participation is voluntary and that she/he can opt to exit at any stage before, during or after the interview. Kornbluh (2015) posited that acceptable conducting research heightens credibility of the research. In this study, methodological triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement formed an essential means towards the credibility of the study.

Yazan (2015) further described the experience of the researcher in a particular area study as two-fold; can minimize the possibility of distorted interpretation and can also introduce bias both during data collection and during data organization and analysis. However, Takyi (2015) considered prior experience as a means to introduce insights into the context of the study. Palinkas et al. (2015) therefore, described prior experience ability to facilitate purposeful sampling strategy which is a source of credibility. Dikko (2016) and Takyi (2015) posited that participants feel comfortable providing honest, thorough and detailed data to a researcher familiar with the study area and surrounding. Thus, I used the previsits time to ensure the participant's understanding of the area of the study in view to drawing comfort of the participant during the interview. Additionally, I ensured availability of a secure environment and a private place for the interview.

**Transferability.** Transferability in the case study is about the ability to transfer results of the study to other contexts appropriately (Morse, 2015). However, appropriate transfer in a qualitative study is subject to the judgment of the reader and the participants

although the researcher can influence the judgment using purposeful sample strategy and thick description (Forero et al., 2018). Thick descriptions mean full, detailed facts about the research population, sample, method, design, and context research experts (Morse, 2015). In the context of this study, transferability are subject to the readers and the small business owners in the construction materials industry who participated in the study.

**Confirmability.** Forero et al. (2018) described the concept of confirmability as to how possible that other researchers confirm the research efforts and the interpretation of findings of a study. Confirmability is the ability to demonstrate that the data represents participants' responses and not the researcher's biases (Forero et al., 2018; Petty et al., 2011). Thus, confirmability lie on the report of the conclusion, interpretation, and illustration that the findings are actually from the study data (Forero et al., 2018). Moreover, a researcher enhances confirmability of the study by collecting data from multiple sources (Baillie, 2015). Activities towards confirmability are not different from those of dependability, and credibility; which include generation of an audit trail, the process of triangulation, and peer scrutiny (Morse, 2015). Tyms (2017) used record keeping of events, personal reflections, and assessments related to the steps, insights, and interests by endorsements of other research experts. The steps continued until the arrival of data saturation where the researcher is no longer able to bring in new data (Castillo-Moutanya, 2016; Yin, 2014). Petty et al. (2011) considered audit trail as a means through which the researcher arrives at the implications, interpretations, and conclusions. Petty et al. (2011) further posited that the create confirmability researcher should reflectively expose the researcher's prior experience, subjectivity, and interpretations. Thus, I used an

audit trail to create confirmability of the study.

### **Transition and Summary**

This section involves the research project covering the purpose statement, roles of the researcher and the participants, research methods and design, population and sampling, data collection instruments, data analysis, and reliability and validity elements of the research. It also involves the ethical considerations of the research. I opted for qualitative multiple case study design in exploring the strategies that owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Section 2 included the methodology and research procedures necessary to conduct qualitative multiple case study research. The main areas in section 2 include the purpose statement, role of the researcher, participants, the research method, and research design. Additionally, Section 2 also included the population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data organization technique, data analysis, as well as reliability and validity. The appended interview guide protocol formed part of the essential elements in interacting with the participants. The use of interview guide protocol enhanced the validity and reliability of the research. Section 3 covers the presentation of the findings and the application of the study outcomes to the professional practice, the implication, and recommendations for future research.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The problem was the lack of sustainability strategies for some owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. The study, guided by the conceptual framework of RBT, entailed one central research question: What strategies do owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years? Both the research question and the conceptual framework connect with the results of the study. The participants for this study consisted of four successful owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry in Tanzania who sustained businesses for longer than 5 years.

I conducted semistructured interviews with owners of small businesses who sustained business for 5 years and beyond in Tanzania. I conducted the interview in places of the participants' interest and convenience where, after having signed the consent forms they provided detailed information about their experience. I also reviewed company documents presented to me including daily sales records, weekly sales reports, and audited accounts as and where applicable. I exported the transcribed interviews saved in Word documents to NVivo 12 software for organizing the data for patterns and themes.

In this section, I deliver the findings of the study on strategies that owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operation for longer than 5 years. Section 3 also includes (a) an overview of the study, (b) presentation of the study (c) application of professional practice, and (d) implication for social change. In addition, Section 3 encompasses recommendation for actions and recommendation for further study, reflections, as well as summary and study conclusions.

### **Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Data collection occurred through face-to-face, semistructured interview administered in Swahili to four participants. Most of the owners of small businesses in Tanzania do not speak fluent English, so it was necessary to translate the interview questions from English to Swahili to accommodate participants who were not fluent in English. I used interviews as the main method in addressing the overarching research question: What strategies do owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years? I asked eight questions (see the appendix for the English version) to each participant, which resulted in findings that increased my understanding on what contributed to small business sustainability for longer than 5 years in the construction materials industry.

Through this qualitative multiple case study, I collected data and transcribed the interviews as well as reviewing company documents covering the daily sales records,

weekly reports, and audited accounts where applicable. To capture the meaning of the responses from the participants, I conducted member checking in two levels after each question's response and after completing participants' transcripts. The first level of member checking enhanced my understanding of the participant responses to each question before moving to the next question, and the second level of member checking facilitated confirmation of the participants' agreement to my interpretation of all the responses. Member checking allows the participants to review the interpretation of data, which reduces the possibility of researcher's bias in data collection (Tyms, 2017).

The responses from all participants showed how a customer centric approach played a significant role in the sustenance of small business owners in the construction materials industry business for 5 years and beyond. The findings of this study aligned with previous studies. For example, Buowari (2015) studied factors for small business sustainability in Nigeria and found capital, financial controls, customer focus, and customer relations as key themes. Similar themes emerged from Bush (2016), who identified capital, customer service, and location as key themes in business sustainability. Further, Akindoju (2016) mentioned themes that are similar to the themes of the current study, including networking, customer centric approach, human capital, and high-quality service, and reputation. After completing the interviews, I transcribed the interviews and undertook preliminary content analysis through reading data for themes that emerged from all data relevant to the overarching research questions.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The overarching research question explored in this qualitative study was: What strategies do owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry use to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years? To respond to this question, I managed semistructured interviews with successful owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry located in the North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and reviewed company daily and weekly sales records and some audited accounts. Company Document 1, provided by P2, was comprised of scanned copies of the daily sales register; Company Document 2, provided by P5, was comprised of a weekly sales report in Excel; and Company Document 3, provided by P3 and P4, was comprised of audited accounts.

I adopted the four theme development phases proposed by Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016) in establishing my initial themes. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) proposed initialization, construction, rectification, and finalization as the phases for developing qualitative research themes. Several themes related to sustainability struggles emerged, and I categorized the themes in three groups: (a) business establishment strategies, (b) customer satisfaction and retention strategies, and (c) other sustainability related strategies. All the emergent themes aligned with the conceptual framework of the study. My decision on data saturation was after finding that more coding was no longer feasible and that further analysis was not yielding any additional information (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

### **Emergent Theme Category 1: Business Establishment Strategies**

The first theme category that emerged involved the importance of setting strategies for business establishment to avoid early failure. Many small business owners embark on business without adequate preparations for different reasons (Turner & Endres, 2017). According to Mashenene and Rumanyika (2014), adequate preparations include ensuring availability of business premises, access to adequate finance/capital, business management skills, human capability and other internal resources. Moreover, owners of small business often pursue new businesses without establishing the potentiality of the market in responding to the product (Kautonen et al., 2015; Kohlbacher et al., 2015). Establishment of new businesses goes with assortment of high-pressure decisions and actions, which in many cases are radical, aggressive, proactive and financially risky (Robinson & Marino, 2015). As a result, over 50% of small business owners fail before their fifth anniversaries (NBS, 2016). Participants discussed five main topics related to Theme Category 1 as described in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Nodes Related to Theme Category 1*

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage of total
Choosing appropriate location	4	100%
Access to financial resources	3	75%
Finding your passion	3	75%
Formalizing businesses	2	50%

**Choosing appropriate location.** All four participants discussed the importance of finding the appropriate location as one of the key preparatory strategies for the sustainability of small business in the construction materials industry. According to John et al. (2015), business location is a place where business operators carry out business activities. Coff and Raffiee (2015) also posited that prime location might be a source of competitive advantage. This supports John et al. (2015), who stated that business location might significantly affect business performance and repeated purchases.

P2 noted, “One of the first thing which brought me headache at the beginning was about getting appropriate location for my business.” P2 emphasized, “Appropriate location entailed availability of customers, accessibility, and an easy to see place.” P2 also considered a place as an appropriate business location if there are other sellers of construction materials. In the construction materials industry, owners of small business need to complement each other; thus, the existence of other sellers helps decide on the appropriate location. P3 commented, “One of the key strategies that sustained my first 5 years was getting appropriate business location.” However, P3 also noted, “In the construction materials industry, appropriate location is a temporary strategy that mostly applicable in the first 5 years only.” P3 mentioned Tegeta as a good example in explaining the temporary nature of appropriate location and noted,

Now, Tegeta is well established and the town continues to grow towards Boko, Bunju and Bagamoyo where the construction activities shift. For a business owner starting business in the construction materials today in the North West of Dar es

Salaam, Tanzania would take Boko, Bunju and Bagamoyo as appropriate business location.

For P5 appropriate location also involved considering the closeness to the company engineering projects. P5 responded,

We obtained a location proper for our business as it was close to our engineering business, close to the construction activities going on in Mbezi Beach, Sala sala, and Goba. Knowing the importance of getting proper business location, we paid office rent 6 months in advance just to make sure that the place is secured for our business.

To the contrary, P4, who is running premise-less business, existence of other small businesses around the office has never been an issue. He stated, “With this kind of approach competition is not a threat to me.” From the participants’ responses, it was evident that, unless a person runs a premise-less business, appropriate location is key for a successful small business in the construction materials industry to stay in business for longer than 5 years.

**Access to financial resources.** Out of the four interviewed participants, 75% mentioned access to financial resources as a key strategy for business longevity. Early planning for access to financial resources is another strategy that small business owners in the construction materials used to sustain business over 5 years. This is supported by other research such as Robinson (2017), who posited that small business owners with access to financial resources have a higher likelihood of achieving business success and sustainable business. However, small business owners more often use internal funding

resources while initiating new ventures (Bates & Robb, 2016). In an event that the small business owners cannot generate funding from internal resources, the owner will have to opt for external resources (Bruton, Khavul, Siegel, & Wright, 2015). Inadequate capital to invest is one of the obstacles in the sustainability of many small businesses (Gumel, 2017), and small business owners often lack capital (Bostic & Lee, 2017). This leads to the failure of many small businesses (Mgeni, 2015; Mgeni & Nayaki, 2015).

Another obstacle for small business owners is that they do not easily access funding from formal financial institutions (Fowowe, 2017; Kusi et al., 2015; Magaisa & Matipira, 2017). Small business owners' ability to access financial resources is one of the key factors in ensuring business success and sustainability (Gai & Minniti, 2015). For example, Madu (2016) indicated that lack of financial support contributes to small business failures. Acquiring financial resources decreases the possibility of small business closure and contributes to small business sustainability (Greene et al. 2015; Khelil, 2015). Getting adequate capital is therefore one of the key business preparatory strategies that financial resource availability facilitates access of other resources for business performance (Chicksand, 2015; Robinson, 2017).

P2 noted, "The construction materials requires a huge investment and hence huge capital which most of us cannot afford." Small business owners' inability to access finances aligns with the view of Bates and Robb (2015, 2016), who argued that financial resources from formal financial institutions are not easily available to small business owners because the banks are reluctant to offer financial capital to small business owners, especially those starting up businesses. Participants in Robinson (2017) linked the

financial institutions reluctance to avail credits to small business owners, with the lack of collateral. P2 further said,

The strategy I used in the first 5 years in view to mitigating the problem of limited financial resources was the use of suppliers' credit facility such that I get the products from suppliers which I sell first and agree on repaying back after sale.

We call in our local Swahili language as "Mali Kauli" whose literal translation is "your tongue is your wealth." P3 also mentioned getting adequate capital as an important strategy for small business sustainability for longer than 5 years in the construction materials industry. P3 said, "One of the big challenges in running construction materials business is getting adequate capital because the business requires huge amount of capital if you are to properly satisfy the customers." P3 further shared,

What I did to get the said adequate capital was to source it from commercial banks in a form of individual loan because Individual loans are a bit chip compared to the business loans. Bankers do not issue business loans if the business is yet to take shape.

Other small business in the construction materials industry around the business can also help sustainability. Through other businesses, small business owners can satisfy the customers without having the materials in their stores. P2 said,

I have always been seeing my neighbors as helping weapons because in an event that the customer place order of some materials, which I do not have, I just go to my neighbor as if I'm taking the materials from my own store. In this way, I satisfy my customer.

P2 emphasized, “Once you let the customer go to another shop it will be difficult to call him back.” Likewise, P3 linked existence of other small businesses in the construction materials industry with the importance of cooperation with other small business owners in the construction materials industry:

Cooperation with neighboring shop owners is also a strategy of making competition a non-issue. This is especially true for small business owners with very small capital who cannot keep a good range of products. In such a situation, you just become strategic that a customer wants a certain item, which you do not have, instead of telling the customer that you do not have the item you quickly run to your neighbor and get the item.

Thus, to small business owners, existence of other small business owners in the construction materials industry is a means to mitigate the limited access to financial resources.

**Following individual passion.** Three participants mentioned individual passion as part of the fundamental factors for business success and longevity. Small businesses managed by passionate owners are better off than businesses managed by owners without passion (Becker & Knudsen, 2016). The participants’ observations about passion support what Warren (2016) observed in his study about small business strategies for sustainability beyond 10 years, which is the importance of finding individual passion for business success. Entrepreneurs need motivation and passion to be sustainable in business, which improves performance and helps overcome barriers (Ismail, Husin, Rahim, Kamal, & Mat, 2016). Passion for the job and commitments to the business are

key for success (Pepaj, 2018). Furthermore, small business owners who follow their passion have what Robinson and Marino (2015) termed as “mental fortitude” to work hard and hence have a higher possibility of achieving business success. However, more often individuals do not have the needed passion to start their own businesses (Silverstein, 2015).

P2 stated, “Passion is everything in business. Without passion, you miss endurance to implement the sustainability strategies. Without passion, you see more challenges than opportunities. Without seeing opportunities no innovation and hence no growth.” This is in line with the argument made by Robinson (2017) that small business owners should recognize existence of business opportunities before any business formation. According to Davidsson (2015) small business owners, who identified business opportunities managed to convert common places into unique revenue generation sources leading to profitability. P3 experienced this truth when he turned a group of furniture makers to be the main customers of his construction materials. P3 noted further, with pride, “If you are passionate you can build the required skills and knowledge on the job” as propagated by Glaeser, Kerr, and Kerr (2015) that skilled small business owners could save time and money spent in recognizing opportunities. Thus, small business owners should know what they are interested in their business and follow the interest accordingly to realize success in business. P4 also reflected the importance of passion in his first 5 years of business. He said, “My passion was to see low cost housing in place” To follow the passion P4 creatively established a premise less shop that will cut the selling expenses by far and in turn lead to low cost housing.

**Formalization of business.** Another strategy shared from the participants' responses as part of the business establishment strategies was that of formalizing businesses. Business formalization as a strategy for business longevity came from 50% of the participants. Boly (2017), Demenet, Razafindrakoto, and Rouband (2016), and McCaig and Nanowski (2017) discussed some advantages of running formal businesses which include improvement of firm's profit and customer base. According to Boly (2017) formal businesses are highly valuable and run profitably. Furthermore, owners of formalized businesses are able to run their businesses more competitively than the informal businesses (Demenet et al., 2016). While Demenet et al. (2016) reported a growth rate of 20% on value addition, Boly (2017) recorded increase in profit and value addition of 9 to 11 percent in Vietnam due to formalization of businesses. Another area that formalization is beneficial to business owners is the reduction of corruption from the tax authority officials as discussed by Giang, Xuan, and Hai (2016).

P4 noted, "Business formalization provided a leeway for business to sustain itself for over 5 years. Before formalizing my business on construction materials industry, I was unable to separate revenue from the sale of construction materials and that of consulting engineering, as I could not properly keep books of account. After formalization, I managed even to have my books of account audited by professional auditors. I paid proper taxes and could not avoid the tax authority officers anymore." P4 further noted, "There are strategies that were implemented out of being a formal entity of business. These strategies included keeping books of account, assets partitioning, and paying proper taxes. By keeping proper books of account for the construction materials

business I transformed myself and the employees on how to work efficiently because I could easily see if I was moving in the right direction.” P5 linked formalization strategy with the financial management practices, which worked well in sustaining business operations in the first 5 years of the business. P5 noted, “Financial management practices include keeping proper books of accounts, ensure assets partitioning, establishing weekly reporting procedures, as well as following proper recruitment procedures for getting the right sales personnel.”

### **Emerg ed Theme Category 2: Customer Satisfaction and Retention Strategies**

The second emerged group of themes related to customer satisfaction and retention strategies. Mandal (2016) opined that customers are the firm’s relationship capital. Mandal described the importance of customers on any business in relation to the sale of the business. The value of business at the time of selling the business include not only the plant, machinery and brand name but also the customer base, along with the number and value of the customers who will do business with the firm (Mandal, 2016). Finding new customers is an expensive investment requiring a lot of time, energy, money and resources (Mandal, 2016). The more you spend in search of new customers the more you eat your profit. Thus, it is worthy investing more in satisfying and retaining the existing customers once they are in. I branched customer satisfaction and retention strategies as reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

*Participants' Responses on Customer Satisfaction and Retention Strategies*

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total
Word of mouth	3	75%
Full time availability of products	4	100%
Meeting customers' specific needs	3	75%
Regular price check	3	75%
Friendship and networking	3	75%
Building confidence, trust, and loyalty	3	75%

**Word of mouth.** Three out of the four participants, which is 75% of all participants, indicated the importance of display of products coupled with a proper word of mouth from the business owners on customer satisfaction and retention. A proper word of mouth promote positive interaction between the business owner and the customers by which Izogo and Ogba (2015) described it as a tool for promoting customer satisfaction and retention. Thus, business owners should learn to listen more from the customers and talk less (Izogo & Ogba, 2015).

P2 noted, "In small construction materials businesses, advertisement has never been a big deal because most of the customers start knowing the business from their neighbors and friends. Neighbors tend to ask each other as to who is the right supplier of the construction materials." P3 added, "During my early days of business, I used displays and a word of mouth to inform customers that there was a new building materials

business in the area. There was no advertisement used through official channels instead I used word of mouth and using friends to inform the community about the business.” P5 also stated, “We did not do any advertisement because it could be very expensive to advertise. We just displayed and used a word of mouth to tell people in the network that there is a construction materials sales point.”

**Full-time availability of products for sale.** Overall, all participants mentioned about ensuring full time availability of products for sale as amongst the strategies used for attraction, satisfying and retaining customers. A customer centric owner ensures full time availability of stock for sale, which enhances reliability from the customers’ point of view (Alanazi & Bach, 2016). P2 noted, “Keeping good stock is as important as other strategies in attracting, satisfying and retaining customers.” P2 said further, “Many customers want to see all their requirements in one place instead of moving one store after the other which they consider it wasting of time.” P3 and P5 stated,

One of the strategies is ensuring full time availability of stock items for sale.

Customers of construction materials use to communicate and advise each other on how and where to get what ones want. The message for full time availability of stock items usually gets across the customers and new ones get attracted while the existing ones keep their loyalty. (P3) said “I used the old men wise words that a customer is a King/ Queen I, therefore, must treat him/her with respect and care”.

P5 also reflected on the importance of maintaining adequate stock level at all times. He noted, “It is difficult to get a customer but once lost getting him back is a hell.” P5 shared further, that, “Customers hate going to the shop and miss some of the items for whatever

reason, so we said no from the beginning that it is a grand mistake for the customer to miss some items in our shop.” P5 stated,

For the purpose of competition, we make sure that there is always adequate stock in the shop as well as good customer language. Customers do hate missing items in the shop. It is common that once the customer misses what he/she wants will find another shop and start getting used to that new shop.

P4 ensures full-time availability of products right from the project design stage.

**Meeting customers’ specific needs.** Many business owners struggle to fulfill specific customers’ needs through which according to Zancul, Takey, Barquet, Kuwabara, Miguel, and Rozenfeld (2016), small business owners could achieve their sustainability objectives. Akaeze (2016), Arroyo-Lopez, Carcamo-Solis, Alvarez-Castanon, and Guzman-Lopez. (2017), Koyagialo (2016) and Seilov (2015) also supported the fact that small business owners and managers implement customer-centric strategy to meet customer needs resulting to business sustainability. In this study, 75% of the interviewed participants considered meeting specific customers’ specific needs as fundamental in ensuring business sustainability as it result to customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is a kind of judgement as to whether a particular good or service provide a gratifying amount of usage related to fulfillment (Alanaz, & Bach, 2016). It is a measure of how products and or services offered by a company meet or exceed customers’ expectation. From the participants’ point of view, the best way to satisfy and retain customers is to drive the business on a customer centric basis. The need for customer satisfaction is in line with Akaeze (2016), and Pattanayak, Koilkuntla and

Punyatoya (2017) who considered customer satisfaction as one of the important and pre-requisite items for business performance. Pattanayak et al. (2017) placed emphasis on the importance for the owners' concentration on customers' acquisition but also on customer satisfaction to improve performance. Pattanayak et al. (2017) shared six factors that affect customer satisfaction namely; market place, product quality, price quality, service quality, customer loyalty, and customer expectations. To ensure business performance, Koyagalo (2016) as well as Paoloni and Dumay (2017) proposed a good investment on human capital and customer services. All participants shared some information about customer satisfaction. From the participants responses emerged six factors that can affect customer satisfaction in the construction materials industry.

P2 noted, "Extending credit facilities to customers contributed to retaining my customers. By extending credit facility, I made friendship such that they felt loyal to my business." However, P2 cautioned, "Great care must be exercised because, it is possible for defaulting customers to completely go away." However, P3 argued, "Avoiding selling on credit was also a strategy I used to maintain customers because if you sell on credit and in case of default this customer shies away from you. Even in an event that he/she wants other materials and has cash on hand, he/she will go to another customer to avoid you reminding him/ her about the previous debt." It is therefore important to know your customer before making the decision to offer credit facility or not to a customer. Knowing your customer is a good area of focus for the purpose of attracting, satisfying and retaining."

About service delivery, P2 noted, “In some cases, I embed the transportation service for a person requiring delivery in my prices. Some people just send their children with a piece of paper that reflect what they want, and I arrange delivery of the items to their places.” P3 went ahead by complementing the delivery service with allowing advance receipting of money and or short-term credit facilities to customers. P3 stated, “People could make payments in advance using mobile money transfers and come for the products later.”

Use of good customer language contribute to satisfying and retaining customers. P2 stated, “Another element that builds on the humbleness of the seller of the construction materials include good customer language.” P3 said, “Through the use of good customer language, I retained many customers. The good thing in the construction materials industry, users do communicate each other through asking one another before making their first purchase. The early customers acted as advertisers of the business without them knowing.” P5 responded, “One of our moto is the use of good customer language to customers in order to retain them. There is myth in using good customers’ language in relation to the sustainability of the construction materials industry in the first 5 years.”

**Regular price check.** Product pricing is one of the key factors that influences both company profitability and customer satisfaction (Pauwels & D’Aveni, 2016). According to Wolf, Albinsson, and Becker (2015) there is a negative relationship between price tolerance level and the level of customer satisfaction. Participants (75%)

mentioned regular price check as a checkpoint for managing competition and ensuring sustainability for longer than 5 years.

P2 said, “I kept on regularly checking my prices so that I do not make exorbitant prices that might take my customers away.” P3 also mentioned about being sensitive in pricing the products. He stated,

“One of the strategies I used to continue selling despite the existence of many competitors in the place was that of sensitivity pricing resulting to regular price check. In business, a tiny reduction of the price of a product can mean a lot to customers’ flow to the business because customers are also highly price sensitive in planning their purchases. I have been extra sensitive in pricing my products by checking prices charged by my neighbors before I charge mine. Of course, the bottom line is the cost of acquisition because you cannot sell using a price that is below your acquisition cost with at least a small margin of profit for the purpose of sustainability”

P5 stated,

“Another important element in competition is the pricing strategy. From the beginning one of our good strategy was not to fight for high profit but instead aim for small profits but from many customers. We have always kept our price ranges at a reasonable point that becomes a welcome again sign to our customers. We make sure that we do not sale at a loss but not necessarily a very high margin that will ultimately leave the products unsold at all. Instead, we planned for a small margin but in absolute terms attract many customers means high turnover that will

result to big overall profit. However, we always tried our best to get the feel of our neighborhood by checking our prices with those of our neighbors. Regular price check had always been necessary.”

**Friendship and networking.** Ability to network with customers and stakeholders may result to great positive impact on the sustainability of the business (Robinson, 2017). Networking and relationship with customers is similar to relationship marketing which according to Šonková and Grabowska, (2015) is an ideal tool to target and personalize customers. Nwachukwu (2018) and Robinson (2017) recognized the importance of networking and relationship building in business sustainability. According to Robinson (2017) there are great advantages to raise the small business owners’ ability to build relationship and networking for raising the number of customers. Moreover, Gretzinger, Fretze, Brem and Ogbonna (2018) and Gretzinger and Leik (2017) posited that small business owners’ networking ability have impact in the survival of small businesses. In addition, Gai and Minniti (2015) asserted that out of the business relationship and networking, small business owners might improve the process of organizing collaboration. Respondents mentioned networking and building relationship with masons, building contractors, plumber, and electricians as a strategy for sustainability of the small businesses in the construction materials industry for longer than 5 years. From the participants’ point of view, networking with many building contractors, artisans, plumbers, and masonry was one of the item participants mentioned as a strategy for managing competition and hence sustainability of the business. The participants’ views are in line with Izogo and Ogbo (2015) who commented that ability to network with

customers promote positive feedback between customers. Results of the study by Omrane (2015) also validated how vital networking is in achieving business success and sustainability. Seventy five percent (75%) of the participants in this study confirmed the importance of networking in the sustainability of small business in the construction materials industry.

P2 observed, “Friendship with masons, artisans, plumbers, carpenters and all such people was very important in the first 5 years because many people depend on the services of the contractors in deciding what to buy and where to buy construction materials.” P2 further noted’ “Friendship with contractors helped me to keep on moving with the business sustainably in the first 5 years and to date.” P3 noted, “Customers come all the way from Boko and Bunju to buy from my shop because I made friends out of doing business and I kept communicating to them asking them in case there would be anything I could deliver to them.” Warren (2016), in his study to explore small business strategies for sustainability beyond 10 years, also revealed building relationship as amongst the emerged themes. P3 stated, “Another but yet important strategy for competition is getting to know many building contractors and masons. I noted that large percentage of customers are either building contractors or masons. Therefore, I decided to team with the building contractors, masons, electrical contractors, engineers and quantity surveyors”. P5 used the sister engineering company in knowing the contractors. P5 said, “Our involvement in the construction industry is also a strategy for competition because we tend to know many stakeholders who can also act as our marketing windows.”

**Building a sense of confidence, trust, and loyalty.** Keeping the customers loyal to a company is a function of relationship spiced by trust, confidence and commitment (Šonková, Grabowska 2015). According to Šonková and Grabowska, (2015), from networking and relationship the business owner create a satisfied customer who create strong bond that prevent the customer from changing preferences in favor of the competitors. Like in most of the emerged strategies, 75% of participants reflected that building a sense of confidence, trust and loyalty is fundamental for ensuring business sustainability.

Building loyalty through confidence and trust was one of the important items participants' mentioned as a sustainability strategy for small business owners in the construction materials industry particularly in the first 5 years. P2 considered it as building a name. He responded, "Another strategy that regularly crossed my mind was about building a name." In emphasizing on how to build a business name P2 shared,

"Building a name is not an end by itself but subjective to some other aspects. If you build a name of your business, you are sure of making customers loyal to your business and trustworthy and sure of getting people who advertise on your behalf. Therefore, building a name as a strategy resulted to me being here today".

P2 explained, "I worked on this aspect of building my name for about six months by ensuring that most of the products are available and that the language to my customers are pleasant and appealing. I basically ensured existence of good customer services always." According to P3, "Many customers build confidence, trust and loyalty to a service. For this reason, they come all the way from Boko and Bungu to buy from my

shop because I made friends out of doing business and I kept communicating to them asking them in case there is anything I could deliver to them. P3 further note,

“In my first 5 years and to date, I considered trust as one of the key strategy for home delivery service competition and sustainability. With this busy world, people would like to deal with trustworthy business owners. By being trustworthy people could make payments in advance using mobile money transfers and come for the products later on or ask for a help to outweigh my competitors.”

### **Emergent Theme Category 3: Other Business Sustainability Related Strategies**

The third category of the emerged themes was that of sustainability strategies other than those related to establishment, and customer satisfaction and retention strategies. The principal goal of many business owners is about maximizing profit and minimizing costs (Alanazi & Bach 2016). Along with minimizing costs, Alanazi and Bach (2016) argued that increased sales is also a contributing factor for business profit maximization. Business owners can achieve increased sales by enabling repeated buying and loyalty from customers (Viswanathan, & Venugopal, 2015). Participants mentioned items in Table 4 as other subthemes in this theme category.

Table 4

#### *Participants' Responses on Other Business Sustainability Related Strategies*

Code	Number of participants	Percentage of total
Keeping business records	4	100%
Creativity and innovation	2	50%

Doing business experience and support 1 25%  
 from family members

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**Bookkeeping practices.** Keeping business records is synonym with bookkeeping practices in business. According to Ekpo, Etukafia and Udofot (2017) bookkeeping is all about keeping track of records of all monetary transactions of the business. Zimmerman (2016), in his study of the way bookkeeping strategies helped small business owners to sustain business for longer than 5 years revealed that proper business record keeping helped the small business owners in making proper and timely business decisions. Zimmerman (2016) further revealed the existence of a relationship between bookkeeping and the business sustainability. Moreover, Modilim and Land (2017) noted that proper record keeping of all business activities is key to the success of business enterprises. According to Modilim (2016), proper record keeping is instrumental in searching for external financial funding as a means of reflecting trend of the business in a certain period of time. This trend shows the potential funder that the business is able to repay the debt. From my study, all participants, making 100%, reflected the importance of keeping records as a tool for business sustainability. From the participants' interviews, it was evident that some small business owners employ accountants to do the bookkeeping and some, hire them from external sources.

P2 emphasized on the importance of keeping daily sales records and expenditure records to be able to evaluate the daily sales and expenditure. If expenditure are more than sales it raises an alarm, but if sales are more than expenditure means that the

business can grow.” P2 maintained a register that reflect the daily sales in terms of quantity sold and the selling prices. P2 further said, “Though I have not gone to school other than my primary education, I understand the importance of keeping records on daily basis, and this is the reason I’m keeping my sales register on daily basis.” In support of the point raised by P2 on education, P3 said, “In principle, there is no specific educational requirement for a person to run a business in the construction materials industry because; the business itself becomes a good teacher to the operator. Of course, what I did from the very beginning was to inquire from the people who managed construction materials business for a long time to share experience with me.”

P4 used accounting, auditing and tax management services in the implementation of his strategies. P4 said, “Some of the external services that contributed to my sustainability for longer than 5 years include the accounting services, auditing of the financial statements, taxation assessment, and site engineers. Auditing of the financial statements has provided me confidence to win more consulting engineering projects and hence sustainability of the materials supplies business. It also enhanced my timely knowledge of operating problems if any, before it would be too late.” P5 stated, “We as owners do not have specific skills for handling construction materials but we have management skills coupled with the skills of the shop keeper, and the accountant we effectively managed the strategies for sustainability for longer than 5 years.” P5 agreed on the importance of external services especially the accounting, auditing, tax management services, and the engineering services. He said, “Thank God that we have employed an experienced accountant who managed the accounting function and a small

part of taxation activities. However, we always used the auditing and a large part of tax consultation from external sources.”

**Creativity and innovation.** Two participants, which is 50%, talked about creativity and innovation as a strategy for sustaining small business operations for longer than 5 years. Many researchers also discuss the importance of innovation in business sustainability, whereby according to Asad, Sharif, and ALekam. (2016) is an individual’s ability to identify new ways of producing a product or service. Enoch and Shuaib (2015) linked innovation with business economic growth such that they called upon small business owners to invest more, time and efforts on innovative ideas that can result to sustainable competitive advantage. According to Lee, Hallak and Sardeshmukh (2016) innovation can improve product quality and business reputation, cut costs, and increase sales and more profitability. In the construction materials business, innovation is also key to success.

P4 mentioned, “I consider constant innovation as a necessity in keeping a construction materials business sustainable for over 5 years. The innovation that kept me sustainable was this of selling without having a sales store and that of selling to own projects.” P4 further responded, “Basically the market of construction materials is saturated in some places but with the innovation of selling through selected projects the market is never saturated.” P5 also responded, “Selling construction materials to our own construction projects is an innovation that kept the business sustainable in the first 5 years. In the event that we get construction projects, we do not buy the materials from

outside; instead, we buy from our shop. This has assured us of the quality of the products and pricing of the projects.

**Doing business experience and support from family members.** Doing business experience has a lot to do with small business sustainability. Rauf (2016) placed emphasis on experience in managing finances and experience in market operations as amongst the key points in ensuring small business sustainability. In line with experience in managing finances and markets, P2 mentioned the experience of doing business from young ages as enough skill to run a small business in the construction materials industry. P2 noted, “A person coming from a family that is used to business do not need any formal skills to run a small business in the construction materials industry. For example, my wife use to come here and give me a helping hand and sometimes my young brother, later on will be my own sons and daughters. Such people raised while seeing business undertaking do not need any skills.” P2 emphasized “Experience from family members coupled with some coaching from friends make a good business teacher. For example, my friend used a handful amount of time to explain to me on how to do a growing business.

### **Analysis of the RBT Related to the Findings**

Penrose (1959) provided explanation as to how business practitioners use internal tangible and intangible resources to improve profitability (Greene et al., 2015) leading to business sustainability. This is in support of Grant (2001) argument that business resources and capabilities build up a foundation for formulating strategies that provide direction for the business. Looking at the themes that emerged from the study ranging

from the business establishment strategies, customer satisfaction and retention strategies and the third component of strategies named as other sustainability strategies, the sub-themes identified in each theme validate the argument by Barney (1991, 2014); Grant (2001) that the RBT is an inside out process in formulating business sustainability strategies. Each participant reflected a unique way of formulating the strategies that kept the respective businesses for longer than 5 years.

The RBT focuses on the use of intangible and tangible resources in attaining sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, 2014; Barney et al., 2011; Grant, 2001). Therefore, by exploring the research topic using the RBT as the conceptual framework, I managed to identify strategies that owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. From the participants responses, it was imperative that financial resources and the relationship between the firm and the customers are a major source of sustainable competitive advantage leading to profitability and hence business longevity. The themes emerged from the study and the key concepts of the RBT acknowledged, provided comprehension into the professional application for the owners of small business in the construction materials industry to access financial resources and to manage the relationship between the businesses and the customers.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The findings of the study reflected the fundamental aspect of identifying business success strategies right from the business establishment stage for the purpose of small business survival, growth and sustainability. Likewise, it was evident that both intangible

and tangible resources of the firms were fundamental for small business owners' ability to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Intangible resources included the reputation and loyalty building as consistently mentioned by P2 as building a name. P2 admitted to have spent over six months in building a name that had become a source of sustainable competitive advantage and hence business longevity for longer than 5 years. Internal ability to create repeated buying from customers has been a source of competitive advantage as validated by Barney (2014) who defined the relationship between the firm and its customers as a source of sustained competitive advantage.

This qualitative multiple case study consisted of interviewing four owners of small businesses operating in the construction materials industry who successfully remained in business for longer than 5 years. I also reviewed business daily sales records, weekly reports and audited accounts for those who made them available. The goal of the study was to explore the strategies that small business owners in the construction materials used to sustain business for longer than 5 years.

Results from this study may be of assistance for owners of small businesses both new and existing ones who would like to develop and implement strategies for business longevity. The participants who shared their experience in this study had been in business for over 5 years. The findings are pertinent and demonstrated relevance to the success of the four participants in this study. Thus, new or existing businesspersons may consider the information useful in their need to sustain businesses for longer than 5 years. During the years in business operation, the participants have contributed to the local economy in many terms including creation of employment to the citizens of Tanzania.

The small business owners' decisions may have substantial positive implications for sustainability of small businesses in the URT. Additional evidence and strategies can help strengthen small businesses. By using these findings, other small business owners can improve upon their business performance. Small business owners may desire to remember the prominence of identifying success strategies before embarking on businesses as well as good customer relationship strategies that ensured customer satisfaction and retention.

The analysis of data revealed themes in three strategic group with a total of thirteen subthemes that contributed to small business sustainability in the construction materials industry. The first category of the themes related to business establishment strategies that entailed (a) choosing appropriate location, (b) access to financial resources, (c) finding individual passion, and (d) formalization of business. The second category of themes related to strategies necessary for satisfying and retaining customer namely; (a) a word of mouth, (b) full time availability of products for sale, (c) meeting customers' needs, (d) regular price check, (e) friendship and networking, as well as (f) building a sense of confidence, trust and loyalty for customers. The third category named as other sustainability strategies, consisted of (a) keeping business records, (b) creativity and innovation, and (c) experience from young age. Successful small business owners who identified sustainability strategies prior to business establishment prevented failure before they started the business and those who developed and implemented strategies for ensuring customer satisfaction and retention, were sure of repeated sales and hence profitability and sustainability. Moreover, owners of small businesses who went further

to develop and implement other sustainability strategies created assurance of business growth and sustainability.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings in the NBS (2016) that out of 154,618 surveyed enterprises, 82,238 (53.19%) did not reach 5 years of operations from startups validated findings by many researchers that many small business fail before reaching 5 years (Johnson, 2015). Business failure goes together with disappearance of jobs (Robinson, 2015). Khelil (2015) validated Robinson's concern by explaining how extensive the effect of small business failure to the business owners, employees the local community and the state economy at large.

The goal of the study was to explore the strategies that small business owners in the construction materials industry in Tanzania used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Strategies that owners of successful small businesses in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years are open to other small business owners interested in sustaining their businesses for longer than 5 years. The study results contribute to the growing body of literature concerning success of small businesses in the construction materials industry. Strategies resulted from the study could help businesses endurance for longer than 5 years. Owners of successful small businesses in the construction materials industry have strategies and information to share for the benefit of other small business owners' sustainability. Thus, ensuring continued ability to survive and hence positive outcome on local economies in the country.

Furthermore, the owners of small businesses may apply the information and strategies reaped from the study, and hence contribute for social change. The results of the study are an empowerment tool for the small business owners' enhanced ability to sustain their businesses and hence helping the local communities. In addition, the study could help small business owners upsurge in decision-making and timely overcome possible hurdles. The study provides understanding that supports progress and preservation for small businesses. The small business is an essential part of each community and the benefits of sustainability have far-accomplishment effects to the economy. Thus, Gandy (2015), Ganthier (2017) and Hyer and Lussier (2017) urged the small business owners to adopt effective business strategies. The primary focus of the study was on strategies, which permitted a unique indulgence of business sustainability in a retail setting of the construction materials industry.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Owners of small businesses have a tendency of learning from each other (Emrich, 2015). Thus, owners of small business aspiring to venture into the construction material industry who review the information and findings of the study may adapt the successful strategies identified in this study more confidently. Owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry can therefore take a hands-on action to support their businesses' longevity. Owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry who successful operated business for longer than 5 years have capability and knowledge to share with other owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry and for the business community at large. Thus, recommendations from this study should be

beneficial to existing and future owners of small business in the construction materials industry.

It is critical that Small business owners make a start heading to developing and implementing strategies that make business more robust and resistant. Thus, developing and implementing survival and sustainability strategies (Ifekwem & Adedamola, 2016) is crucial in ensuring small business longevity beyond 5 years. Small businesses in many countries create more than half of the workforce in the private sector (Bishop, 2018). Owners of small businesses therefore, are duty bound to sustain businesses operations in a sustainable competitive advantage manner.

My plan is to disseminate the study results through contacting various professional journals to publish the findings. Furthermore, I will request opportunities to make presentations to local and national audiences organized by research institutions such as the Economic and Social Research Foundation, the Research on Poverty Alleviation and the research wing of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). I will also ask audience from the Tanzania Private Sector Foundation, which is an umbrella institution for the private sector in the country for making presentation to a wider audience. The objective is to share knowledge and insights to business and academic community for enhancing opportunity to many owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry learning on the strategies that successful owners used to sustain business operations beyond 5 years.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

I recommend that future research should aim at paying attention to a larger population sample and geographic base for cross-validation. The primary limitation of this research study was the sample size limited to 4 owners of small business in the Tanzanian construction materials industry. The researcher was also constrained with time such that the researcher had to confine herself to only one geographical location of North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The third and final limitation was the population for the study which was limited to the construction materials industry rather than the entire sector of small businesses.

The sample size of 4 small business owners limited the study and hampered the quality of the outcomes. As a result, the comments are not typical of small business owners universally. In this case, therefore, future researches should involve a wider sample size to enhance the quality of the findings. Additionally, the researcher used the North Western part of Dar es Salaam as the only geographic location. Moreover, using only owners of small businesses located in the North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania restricted the quality of the response because strategies used by the small business owners located in the North West of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania may not be the same with those operating in other areas of the city. Future researches therefore should consider other geographical locations. Furthermore, the researcher confined herself with the construction materials industry rather than the entire sector of small businesses. Responses from the owners of small business operating in the construction materials industry may not assist small business owners operating in other industries. Other

researchers may also consider the service industry which also face the problem of inability to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Thus, I recommend future research to consider industries other than the construction materials industry including the service industry. For comparison, further researches could include cities other than Dar es Salaam. Tanzania has six cities: Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, Mbeya, Tanga, and Dodoma.

### **Reflections**

I used a multiple case study approach to explore the strategies owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. During the process of recruiting participants and while undertaking the interview, I well read about owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry and the strategies responsible for sustaining businesses for longer than 5 years. While I thank the Trade officer from Kinondoni Municipal Council for his contribution in the process of recruiting participants, I learned that researchers should not underrate the participants' recruitment process, as it is so much involving with a lot of to and from. Finding owners of small business who had time to participate in the study was a real struggle. I managed to contact eight potential business owners by phone but three of them outright denied from participating remaining with five potential participants. Another area of struggle was getting the participants' readiness to provide company documents. One participant withdrew from the study just because I requested some company document for my triangulation. Ultimately, four participants provided their consent by

signing the consent form, and provided unbelievable insights to each question according to their skills and experiences.

From the study findings, I revealed that small business owners who sustained businesses over 5 years are committed and with great patience about their business. Above all, the four successful owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry developed success strategies right from the beginning and were committed to walk over the strategies by implementing them. One great thing I learned is the meaning of competition. Owners of small businesses with inadequate capital like to be in the same area in order to support each other. Similar to the service industry, the construction materials industry calls for long-term relationship with the customers. Small business owners in the construction materials industry therefore, should be open minded to allow learning from peers, building contractors, experienced business operators and the business community members in general.

My last reflections is on the great job by the Walden university faculty members and the DBA program staff who offered insights that amplified my critical thinking with the improvement of my research skills. With a close guidance of the chair and committee members, I managed to create an interview protocol, ethically administered the interview, and analyzed the data that produced the outcome on the strategies that owners of small business in the construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. Despite the difficult moments experienced during the journey, the design of the doctoral process was a self-teacher that trained endurance, time

management for organizing daily tasks such that I achieved a health work-school-life balance throughout my journey.

### **Study Conclusions**

Micro and small business in Tanzania takes 99% of business segment (NBS, 2016; URT, 2012) leaving only 1% for medium and large businesses. Despite its significance, over 50% of businesses in Tanzania fail before reaching 5 years (NBS, 2016; URT, 2012). Sustaining a small business for longer than 5 years is not a one-time activity but rather a long-term determination calling for a great desire to move forward. Owner of small businesses need a strategy that links resources and capabilities for sustainable competitive advantage. Owning resources alone is not enough; owners of small business should be able to strategize the access and use of the resources for competitive advantage. Knowledge and insights from the owners of small businesses who sustained small businesses in the construction materials industry should be available for other owners of small businesses in other industries. However, many studies focused on reasons for failure of small businesses than the success factors. Thus, I found it imperative that I undertook a study on the strategies that owners of small businesses used to sustain businesses for longer than 5 years from their startups. This was also in support of what Robinson (2017) said in his study on African American business strategies for financial stability and profitability that any study that involves successful business strategies is beneficial to the business community as it contributes in lessening failure rate of similar businesses. Furthermore, such researches add to the body of knowledge and domain expertise on the subject. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study

was to explore the strategies that owners of small businesses in the construction materials in Tanzania used to sustain businesses for longer than 5 years.

The unique ways that owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry in the North Western area of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania used to identify, develop and operationalize the success strategies, may assist the aspiring owners of small businesses to assimilate the strategies in their own business endeavors. The participants for the study were four owners of small business in the construction materials industry who successfully operated their businesses for longer than 5 years. The overarching research question for the study was; What strategies do owners of small business in the construction materials industry use to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years?

To address the research question, each participant responded to eight interview questions relating to the owner's respective experiences in developing and operationalizing the success strategies that resulted to going beyond 5 years. I coded the data assembled through interview and review of company documents leading to a number of themes. To make the subthemes more focused and reader friendly, I categorized the themes into three broad categories namely: (a) themes related to business establishment strategies, (b) themes related to customer satisfaction and retention strategies, and (c) other sustainability related strategies.

The findings in this study, identifying business success strategies right from the business establishment stage is fundamental for small business survival, growth and sustainability. The findings align with Modilim and Land (2017) conclusion in their study on the strategies for growing and sustaining small business. Modilim and Land called

upon small business leaders to embark on strategic planning and preparation before implementing any business idea. It is therefore essential for the owners of small businesses in the construction materials industry to develop and implement strategies that make business more robust, resistant and hence sustainable for longer than 5 years. The findings aligned with Ifekwem and Adedamola (2016) who posited that developing and implementing survival and sustainability strategies is crucial in ensuring small business longevity beyond 5 years. Many owners of small businesses embark on businesses unprepared (Turner & Endres, 2017). Adequate preparations include among others the availability of appropriate business location, access to adequate finances, human capability and other internal resources (Mashenen & Rumanyika, 2014). Van Gelderen et al. (2015) argued that starting a business is a result of translating and putting in action an intention to do business. In translating, the intention is where strategy identification becomes imperative. There are those who translated their intention to start a business and made difficult decision of leaving paid up jobs and start a business (Rocha et al., 2015). According to Rocha et al., such individuals with such bold decisions achieved business longevity.

H.E Dr. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli, phase 5 president of the URT, identified industrialization as a means of getting a sustainable solution for the unemployment problem in Tanzania (Halmashauri Kuu ya CCM, 2015). Through the CCM party manifesto, the president urged all government leaders to encourage small practitioners to establish small businesses in view to implementing the industrialization agenda

(Halmashauri Kuu ya CCM, 2015). Findings of this study therefore, will also be beneficial for the implementation of efforts of the government currently in power.

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### Appendix: Interview Protocol

The purpose of the interview is to explore the strategies that owners of small businesses in the Tanzanian construction materials industry used to sustain business operations for longer than 5 years. I will conduct the interview to four participants using the same questions for all participants as narrated in the protocol below:

1. I will introduce myself to the participant as a doctoral student at Walden University and explain the purpose and time of the interview.
2. I will give a copy of the consent form to the participant to read and sign before the interview process. Once signed the participant retained a copy of the consent form
3. I will remind the participant on my intention to audio-record the interview and will; start the interview with the following background information request:
  - a. Education background of the owner.
  - b. Background of the business including the initial period of the business, source of capital and number of employees.

After that, the interview questions will follow the following flow:

1. What are the strategies you developed and implemented that contributed to your business sustainability in the first 5 years?
2. What are the associated skills and practices that you employed to implement the strategies towards operating a sustainable business for longer than 5 years?

3. What strategies did you use in managing business competition during the first 5 years?
4. What strategies did you use to attract, satisfy, and retain your customers during your first 5 years?
5. What external support services contributed to the sustainability of your business operations for longer than 5 years?
6. What were the key barriers you encountered in implementing your strategies for sustaining your business operations for longer than 5 years and how did you mitigate the barriers?
7. How have you assessed the effectiveness of your strategies for sustaining your business operations for longer than 5 years?
8. What additional information, if any, do you consider relevant to this study that we might not have covered in this interview?

I will conclude by thanking the interviewee for participating in the interview and stop the audio recording.