

EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN THE NORTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper examines the influence of entrepreneurship skills on the activities of SMEs in the north-eastern Nigeria. It identifies the specific entrepreneurship skills and their effects on the performance within the study area. The zone comprises six states but three (Adamawa, Borno & Yobe) were selected for indebt scrutiny. This research work is explorative, primary data were collected via structured questionnaires and regression analysis was by SPSS. The target population is the registered SMEs in the major cities of the sampled states between the years 2008-2018. Out of 18,887 registered companies within the period, 450 questionnaires were administered; 150 per state and 393 were returned and formed the basis of analysis. All the explanatory variables are linearly related to SMEs performance. The coefficient of multiple determinants (R^2) with values: 0. 688 indicate that the repressors in the equation explain 69% of the systematic total variation in the SMEs-skills effect. Thus, findings are that the independent variables, various skills collectively determine SMEs performance. That is, at .000 the model absolutely explains variations in the dependent variable. More so, relative importance of independent variables was established because, all the determinant factors have significance values at the specified percentage levels. The apriori expectations were sustained because of collective influence of entrepreneurial skills on the SMEs performance, and the entire null hypotheses are rejected. Recommendations include introducing new products, new ways of business operations and modern advanced decision-making technique to achieve innovation and better decision-making process. It recommended that adequate efforts be made to improve entrepreneurial skills to achieve better entrepreneurial performance.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship skills, Management skills, Innovation skills, Decision making skills, marketing skills, SMEs.

Introduction

The awareness about entrepreneurial to stimulate entrepreneurial activity and reduce business failure has been increased among stakeholders like industry, business and government of many countries because entrepreneurs could be born

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or made (Abdullah, Osman & Rahim, 2009). According to Nzewi, Onwuka and Onyenu (2017), majority of business enterprises in Nigeria like most other countries consist of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), these enterprises constitutes a vital element in the business life of a nation. In Nigeria however, SMEs are still predominantly in the traditional state with only a few in the better-organised stage. Coincidentally, modern business operating environment has become highly volatile following increased competition and ever changing customer tastes and preferences. Therefore, businesses and in particular, SMEs have to cope with the changes by embracing entrepreneurial skills in order to gain competitive edge against competitors to survive in the competitive environment. (Hayton, 2015), opines that entrepreneurial skills enables an entrepreneur to identify customer needs, technical and market opportunities, generate ideas, develop products or services to meet the needs, and acquire information about the potential opportunity domain and knowledge. It is also a vital source of developing human capital (Ikegwu, 2014).

Extant researches indicate highly skilled entrepreneurs and managers as having the abilities to simultaneously utilise various capabilities to act entrepreneurially, and thinking strategically (Piispanen, Paloniemi, & Simonen, 2017). Hence, the focus on the individual entrepreneur emphasises the human perceptions of the competitive environment, growth motivation, and the growth intentions (Dutta & Thornhill, 2008). However, many research works have been conducted on the influence of entrepreneurial skills on the SMEs performance but many did not capture other surrogates of entrepreneurship skills, such as managerial skills, innovative skills, decisions making skills and marketing skills that have their own unique ways of affecting SMEs. Again, most of the studies werenot based on the NorthEast Nigeria. In essence, this study tend to bridge this gap by identifying.

Those surrogates of entrepreneurship skills and their effects on the performance of SMEs with specific reference to North-East, Nigeria. The adoption of the concept, SMEs is preferable because of lack of definitional consensus, and contradictions of perspectives between the Micro, the Small, and the Medium businesses.

Apriori Expectations

All the explanatory variables; management skills (mgs), innovation skills (ins), decision making skills (dms), marketing skills (mks) shall determine the performance SMEs (Dependent variable), and that there shall be a direct relationship between explanatory variables and dependent variable. It hypothesised that:

- H₀₁: Managerial skills do not have significant effect on small and medium scale business in the North-East Nigeria
- H₀₂: Innovative skills do not have significant effect on small and medium scale business in the North-East Nigeria
- H₀₃: Decision-making skills do not have significant effect on small and medium scale business in the North-East Nigeria

H₀₄: Marketing skills do not have significant effect on small and medium scale business in the North-East Nigeria

Literature Review

Performance

The term performance is ambiguous, lack agreement of basic terminology, and there is no simple definition or measurement to evaluate the performance of a firm, which further compounds the topic area for management researchers. Firm performance is an important variable in business research since it is a multidimensional construct having several names; including growth, survival, success and competitiveness (Eniola & Harry, 2015). It is described as an action or achievement considered in relation to how successful a firm is (Hornby 2000). More so, it is variously measured and its perspectives are tied together and consistently monitored from the organisation context (Jamil & Moharned, 2012).

Performance is the achieved results in an attempt to meet the targeted goals of an enterprise. Sometimes referred to as growth, encompasses three areas of outcome according to Owen (2006) are: (i). Financial performance; profits, return on assets, return on investment etc. (ii). Product performance; sales, market share etc. (iii). Shareholders return; including total shareholders return, economic value added etc.

Performance therefore is either financial or non-financial. Whereas the financial performance are returns on asset, returns on investment, returns on equity, returns on capital employed, net profit margin, cross profit margin, profit after tax, profit before tax and market share (Zwingina & Opusunju, 2017). Performance is the strategic outcomes that organisations use to realise its goals, success or not (Sefiani & Bown 2013; Eniola & Harry, 2015). Therefore, it is the key interest of each business manager or owner. The general performance of the organisation depends largely on the quality of management and could be measured by market-related items that indicate existing business such as sales growth, market share, and others that determine the future positioning of a firm such as new product development and diversification.

Although many factors combined determine enterprises, performance and that the effectiveness of a particular factor of a business hangs on the support of other determinant factors (Ojuye & Egberi 2018). Performance of small and medium enterprises can be viewed as ability to contribute to job and wealth creation through enterprises start-up, survival and growth (Komppula, 2004). Performance measurement is vital to SMEs because it help an entrepreneur to understand, manage and improve business activities purposefully (Pirich, Knuckey & Campbell, 2001).

Entrepreneurial Skills

Discussions of skills have been said to focus mainly on technical and professional dimensions; manipulation skills and the knowledge associated with the techniques of the work process, developed via training and experience (Rigby

& Sanchis, 2006). Because social processes impact upon the definition of skill in several ways, it is advised that evaluating, identifying and developing skills should not be seen as the primary objective, but the process should be the result of social construction. Skill is one of those social science words in common parlance with many meanings, numerous synonyms such as “ability”, “competence”, “knack”, “aptitude” and “talent”, and varied imprecise translations in other languages (Green & Laura, 2011). The author sees skill is a personal quality with three key features: (i). Productive: using skill for productive value; (ii). Expandable: skills are enhanced by training and development; and, (iii). Social: skills are socially determined. Despite the contradictions about what constitute entrepreneurial skills, and that the skills does not relate to specific occupation, the recent recognition and emphasis to develop entrepreneurship skills has brought some consensus agreement about entrepreneurship abilities and competencies . Accordingly, the OECD (2015) have identified some classes of skills required by entrepreneurs, which include technical skills, business management skills, personal entrepreneurial skills and conceptual skills. The skill assist an entrepreneur to see an entire concept, analyse and diagnose a problem, and find creative solutions and thereby helps the business owners and managers to effectively predict hurdles that their business may face (Doyle, 2019).

Managerial Skills

According to (Katz, 2019), Management skills can be defined as certain attributes or abilities that an executive should possess in order to fulfill specific tasks in an organisation. Because it help to prepare for the future leadership role, and manager always seeks to improve abilities in making decisions; to relate with their fellow co-workers and know how to deal with their subordinates, which allows for the easy coordination of activities in the organisation. These skills include the capacity to perform executive duties, avoiding crisis situations, and promptly solving problems when they occur. Management skills can be developed through learning and practical experience. Some types of skills have been identified to include technical and hard skills, soft skills, human skills, conceptual skills, and design skills (Koonts & Weihrich, 2007; Katz, 2019). Hard skills which are technical; teachable abilities that one learn through school, or training and/or on the job while soft skills are applicable in any role or industry and are most often more important for management than technical proficiencies. More so, hard skills are keys when completing specific tasks, soft skills are essential when directing people, overseeing projects and making informed decisions. Soft skills generally are developed over time through managing your responsibilities and interacting with others.

At the growing stage of a venture, entrepreneur requires some important management skills to guide against business failures. Management skills and strategies in areas of record keeping and financial control, inventory control, human resources, marketing and planning are critical areas toward achieving long-term success for a firm (Histrich & Peters, 2002). Developing a set of managerial skills can help to build successful performances. Management jobs

are all about people and being able to build successful relationships is integral. Entrepreneur must demonstrate managerial qualities and authority while maintaining the ability to play good part as a member of a team (Smith, 2019).

Effect of Managerial Skills on Small Scale Business

While SMEs are important in terms of their overall share of GDP, it is also clear that many SMEs because of lack of managerial or technical skills have their progress hampered. Nieman, Hough & Nieuwenhuizen (2003) conclude that there is generally a deficiency of management and leadership in many SMEs. Many SMEs in African countries experience lack of managerial skills, such as financial, marketing and human skills in order to operate their businesses successfully to achieving socio-economic development. Therefore, the challenge of managerial skill can become the decisive factor that affects the development of SMEs in Africa (Lyles, Saxton & Watson, 2004).

Authorities have evaluated managerial competencies as measured by the education of the founder; managerial experience, entrepreneurial experience, start-up experience and functional area experience versus new venture growth. Consequently, relative profits tend to be high when an entrepreneur has more education and experience in the line of business. On the other hand, profitability tends to be low when the entrepreneur lacks relevant education and experience. Smallbone and Welter (2001) found that managerial competencies as measured by education, managerial experience, start-up experience and knowledge of the industry positively affect the growth of new SMEs.

Innovative Skills

In terms of personal qualities, successful innovators, to a large extent, exhibit entrepreneurship, leadership, self-confidence, and creativity, and despite that unsuccessful innovators have similar psychographic profiles, the skill (in the later) is more restricted. Impliedly, the innovative potential of an individual is not an instinctive feature but, essentially, are skills that can be learnt for innovation. The same is true for personal qualities or 'soft' skills (Shastri & Sinha, 2010). As Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004) maintain, innovation is the creation of new wealth or the change and enhancement of prevailing resources to generate new wealth. Thus, innovation skills are described as those skills that allow room for the introduction of new or improved processes, products or services based on new scientific or technology knowledge and/or organisational knowledge (OECD 2015). Innovative skills are characterisations of changes in product or process but, all yields desirable impacts and Fagerberg (2017) stressed that while the introduction of new products is commonly assumed to have a clear, positive effect on the growth of income and employment, process innovation resulting from cost-cutting competencies can have a more hazy effect on performance.

Effect of Innovative Skills on Small Scale Business

Schumpeter's innovation theory characterises an entrepreneur with abilities to innovative or creative and foresight. This argument denotes that entrepreneurship takes bold step in the production of a new product, and finds market for existing or new product. The Schumpeter theory of entrepreneurship

focus more on profit of innovators and ignores the aspect of organisational skills or what it takes for entrepreneurs to carry out a successful task (Nichter & Goldmark, 2009; Hayton, 2015). Therefore, the characteristic of an entrepreneur should include; foresight, understanding of the market, and ability to identify opportunities. Similarly, the study of (Coric, Katavic, & Kopecki, 2011) review that successful SMEs gather information relating to the business environment than those who are less successful. This unique skill gives the entrepreneur an overview of the business climate and helps to formulate a larger picture of the business activities.

Hayton (2015), conclude that entrepreneur needs an innovative skill, which comprises of the cognitive skills such as creative and behavioural skills, including problem-solving skills. He further maintains that the main reason entrepreneurs are successful is their abilities to imagine, innovates and work around challenges within their environment.

Decision Making Skills

Managers make numerous decisions, whether knowingly or not, and making decisions is a key component in entrepreneurial success. Making proper and right decisions results to the success of an enterprise, poor decisions result to failure and poor performance. For the organisation to run effectively, clear and right decisions should be made. Managers must be accountable for every decision that they make and take responsibility for their actions. A good manager needs to possess great decision-making skills, as it often dictates his/her success in achieving organisational objectives (Colakkadioglu & Celik, 2016; Katz, 2019).

Decision making skills is critical in the process of everyday human engagement and particularly the managing of SMEs because the skill play active role in different functional areas toward achieving desired outputs (Colakkadioglu & Celik, 2016). Entrepreneur decision making is the choice of the best alternative for reaching the set goals, based on skilful understanding, estimation, analysis and prognosis of internal and external environment of enterprise (Moore, 2009). Entrepreneur decision-making skill is not only seeing as the system as it is, but as it might be. Different kinds of entrepreneurs use different kinds of decision-making skills in different situations (Charles, Ojera & David, 2015). Emotional, rational or intuitional decision-making approach as used by entrepreneur determines the directions of strategic decisions taken by entrepreneur (Gibcus, Vermeulen & De Jong, 2006).

Effect of Decision Making Skills on Small Scale Business

Strategic decision-making processes in small firms differ from large firms based on three reasons (Busenitz & Barney, 2014). Entrepreneurs in small businesses face environment, which is more uncertain as compared to large businesses. Managers and entrepreneurs in SMEs do not have access to information, which is accessible to large firms. Large firms are supported with adequate skilful staff and managers, which make room for better understanding of the environment. Complexity and dynamism in environment is greater for SMEs as compared to large firms. In large firms, managers have schedules for

making decisions but the case defer for SMEs where decision-making is mostly based on opportunities, which make SMEs entrepreneurs require adequate skillful knowledge to determine good direction for business (Busenitz & Barney, 2014).

Entrepreneurship is disposed to a person's ability and willingness to accept and create new economic opportunities (new products, new production methods, new organisational schemes, new market combinations), and to implement their ideas in the market uncertainties (Carree & Thurik, 2003; Bowe, 2011). The study established business model of decision-making and creating activities for young entrepreneur's decision-making skills development. That is, the analysis of internal and external business environment for possible solution for target opportunities as alternative analysis for decision-making as influenced by host personality; knowledge, experience, values, properties, preparation for the implementation and operations - activities decision.

Therefore, decision-making skills result to the choice of the best alternative for reaching the set goals, based on the correct understanding, estimation, analysis and prognosis of internal and external environment of enterprise (Mohammed & Obeleagu-nzelibe, 2014). It is necessary to increase the formalised methods and analytical tools in decision making process for SMEs because relying on their own knowledge and experience of few others could be catastrophic (Rozenbergs, Gaile & Sarkane, 2012). Researchers recognise that intuitive synthesis is more pronounced in a precarious state, and in this situation, it is more positively related to performance. Rationality is a lower priority than instinct host behavioural development (La Pira, 2011).

Marketing Skills

Marketing capabilities are skills and knowledge of marketing officials of marketing policies and strategies (Nwali, 2010). Marketing capabilities of an enterprise are influenced by many related factors; products, price, place, promotion and integrative and systematic factors. According to (Soko, 2010), marketing in SMEs need complete knowledge on total costing of any product to ensure that product is neither under-priced nor overpriced. While underpricing of product leads to loss of profits, overpricing result in low demand for a product and consequently loss of sales.

Marketing skills could be seen as constituting a major function of entrepreneur, because (Hayton, 2015) proposed that key entrepreneurial skills are recognising consumer needs and identifying technical prospects and market opportunities, and Hunter (2013) opines that recognising social and market needs are most critical skills required for entrepreneurs (Ebitu, Basil, & Ufot, 2016). With the growing firms, entrepreneurs need marketing skills for the purpose of developing new products and services so as to maintain distinctive competences critical to ventures continued success (Histrich & Peters, 2002).

The UK Chartered Institute of Marketing sees marketing as the management skills for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably (Wilson and Gilligan, 1999; Brassington & Pettitt, 2003). It is also, the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing,

promotion and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives. Marketing is an organisational skill relating to some set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders (American Marketing Association, 2006; McDaniel et al., 2006). These definitions suggest a strategic and operational approach to marketing that has been interpreted in terms of the activities that larger organisations undertake when doing “marketing”.

Effect of Marketing Skills on Small Scale Business

The marketing skills literature reveals that activities within firms in the SME sector revolve around the activities of the owners and managers (Verhees & Meulenbergh, 2004). This suggests that SME operations are directly influenced by the owners’/managers’ background, experience and knowledge (Jones, Kalmi & Kauhanen, 2012). The study of marketing in SMEs has been recognised as a problematic area for researchers for over 20 years (House & Awang, 2016). It is generally accepted that the basic principles of marketing are universally applicable to both large and small businesses (Reynolds, 2002). SME marketing in practice is thought to be largely done through networking (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001) or a combination of transaction, relationship, interaction and network marketing (Chaston & Mangles, 2002). More recently, the use of Internet marketing has become popular in all types of businesses including SMEs (Chaffey, Mayer, Johnston & Ellis-Chadwick, 2000). However, academic research appears unable to resolve a number of questions about SMEs and their relationship with the use of marketing. More so, empirical evidence has been generated in an ad hoc manner because of a general absence of a systematic approach to the subject.

Insufficient knowledge about marketing in SMEs remains a very big challenge; marketing skills requirement for SMEs performance is specifically related to the understanding and knowledge of strategic marketing. Similarly, the adoption of the Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) concept is essential for the survival of SMEs in the competitive environment (Hoque & Awang, 2016). Despite the importance of EM in the modern business world, the need for investigation of EM’s impact on firm’s performance is still ignored by researchers in the developing countries (Hoque & Awang, 2016). Marketing in practice in SMEs seems to rely on personal contact networks and is often driven by the particular way in which the owner and manager does business. Marketing in SMEs is therefore, likely to be haphazard, informal, loose, unstructured, spontaneous and reactive and conform to industry norms (Hill & Wright; Gilmore & Grant 2011). Hence, SMEs owner-managers recognised that building relationships was vital to a company’s success and they invested considerable time and effort in maintaining good relations with regular clients. The creation and existence of effective networking is concerned with maximising marketing opportunities and ensuring the enterprise’s survival and development (Gilmore Carson & Grant, 2001).

Methodology

The research is limited to the influence of entrepreneurial skills on SMEs in the North East geographical zone of Nigeria. Though the zone comprises six states; Adamawa, Taraba, Yobe, Borno, Bauchi and Gombe, three states have been selected as typical representation of the area because of common similarities and that they constitute major areas of recent volatility in terms of crises and attention. For ease of research, the focus is on the registered SMEs within a timeframe (2008-2018) because the period is a time of monumental changes; business enterprises registration on line, a time of economic challenges that required proactive changes for SMEs and a time of security challenges in the region. More so, major cities of each of the three states were selected to have fair representation.

The population comprises the register total: Yobe 3005, Borno 10,631 and Adamawa 5251 totaling 18,887 (CAC record/ offices in the 3 states) as at 1st quarter, 2019. In determination of the sample size, the researcher adopted the use of Yamani (1964).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \qquad n = \frac{18,887}{1 + 18,887(0.05)^2} \qquad n = 18,887$$

$$= \frac{18,887}{48.217} \qquad n = \frac{4500}{1 + 4500(0.0025)} \qquad = 391.7$$

A total of 150 questionnaires were administered to each state totaling 450 out of which 393 were returned. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Regression analysis was used to analyse the relationships between Entrepreneurship skills and performance of Small and Medium Businesses. *Model specification: SMEs = a₀+mgs₁+ins₂+dms₃+mks₄ + u₁..... (1)*

Results of Regression Analysis

Predictors	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-values	Probability
Constant	-.030	.189	-.156	.876
MANAGEMENT SKILLS	.128	.040	3.237	.001***
INNOVATION SKILLS	.638	.033	19.120	.000***
DECISION MAKING SKILLS	.158	.031	5.092	.000***
MARKETING SKILLS	.083	.030	2.785	.006***
R-SQUARE	.688 (69%)			
F-VALUE	214.12 (21%)			
DW STATISTICS	2.077			

*** = Significant Predictors

Source: Field Survey 2020

Discussion Findings

The coefficient of multiple determinations (R²) with values: 0. 688 indicate that the regressors in the equation explain 69% of the systematic total variation in the SMEs-skills effect. In addition, all the four (4) explanatory

variables used in the regression model, were significant at different percentage level. They are management skills, innovative skills, decision-making skills and the marketing skills. This is because .001 for management skills, .000 for innovative skills, .000 for decision making skills and .006 for marketing skills were significant value; lesser than 0.05 alpha standards. More so, the result shows that there is a positive relationship between all the skills and impacts on the SMEs performance because; the t values are all positives at values well above +2 indicating relative importance of all the explanatory variables. A closer analysis reveals management skills probability at .001 and marketing skills at .006 against .000s in the case of innovation and decision-making skills indicating some need for reorientation in the management and marketing skills for improved performance.

The Durbin Watson statistic of 2.077 further proofs absence of autocorrelation because a value approximately equal to 2 indicate that there is no autocorrelation. Therefore, the result of analysis has not contradicted apriori expectations because there are positive relationship between all the explanatory variables and SMEs performance, and all the skills; management, innovation, decision making, and marketing collectively determines SMEs performance. Interpretation, hypothesis I, II, III & IV which states management, innovative, decision making and marketing skills has no significant relationship are hereby rejected. From regression analysis, the following summary of findings were put forth:

- i. All the explanatory variables, management, innovation, decision-making and marketing are linearly related to SMEs performance. All the determinant factors have significance values at the specified percentage levels.
- ii. The independent variables, various skills collectively determine variations in the dependent variable, SMEs performance. That is, at .000 the model absolutely explains variations in the dependent variable. Also, relative importance of independent variables was established.
- iii. The entire null hypotheses are rejected.
- iv. This is because entrepreneurial skills determine the performance of SMEs in the study area.

Conclusions

The imperative of entrepreneurship and SMEs developments is informed by the new world order of private driven economy vis-a-vis inefficiencies of government and pressures on available resources among conflicting ends. Effective practice of private-entrepreneurship cannot be on a platter of gold because of the volatile competitive environment which require that entrepreneurs must be equip with adequate skills to cope with multiple challenges ahead. The SMEs, their owners and employees suffers a lot trying to changing problems to opportunities, and making things happens with limited resources.

Despite the numerous challenges, the realisation of our present predicament; global economy downturn and dwindling government resources

coupled with the government inefficiencies, empowering through skills acquisition of our entrepreneurs would enable the private sector to deliver effectively.

Recommendations

It is advised that entrepreneurs in the NE be encouraged to make more efforts both at introducing new products and in ways of business operations in order to achieve additional innovation toward improved performance in the areas of increased product range, improved quality standard, new operation systems, Job opportunity, customer loyalty and market growth, and profitability performance. Modern advanced technique is recommended for good decision-makings to achieve the desirable results by the entrepreneurs in the area.

Entrepreneurial skills has positive correlation with business performance as indicated in the above analysis, it is recommended that adequate efforts is made to improve the various skills that enable the entrepreneurs towards better performance.

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