



## Effect of Entrepreneurial Skills on the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in Niger State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Entrepreneurship stands as a cornerstone in the trajectory of economic development, particularly in the context of rice processors SMEs. This study therefore, examined the effect of Entrepreneurial skill on the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in Niger State, Nigeria. Cross sectional survey research design was adopted with a structured questionnaire for data collection. The sample size of the study is 379 rice processors SMEs owners in Bida local government area. Simple random sampling technique was employed for this study. Descriptive and multiple linear regression analysis techniques were used for data analysis. The result showed  $R^2$  of 0.499%, which indicate the model for the study has a good fit. The findings revealed that managerial skill, communication Skill and leadership skill have a positive and significant effect on Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in the study area. This implies these skills are crucial for making strategic decisions, allocating resources, managing people, and responding to market changes. The study concluded that communication, leadership and managerial skill plays a vital role in fostering the growth and sustainability of SMEs. It is recommended that policy makers should establish a formal enforceable policy framework that will promote entrepreneurial skills development, particularly in management, communication, and leadership in order to better position SMEs to grow, innovate, and sustain long-term success.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial Skills, Small and Medium Enterprises, SMEs Growth, Rice processors,

### 1.0 Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises are widely recognized as the key engine of economic development. As a result, the sector contributes 48% to the national GDP, account for 96% of businesses, and employ over 84% of the country's workforce (National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2024). Furthermore, SMEs are also instrumental in promoting industrial development and enhancing economic diversification. They provide platforms for skills development, entrepreneurship training, and local content creation (Drakaki, 2025). In the agricultural sector, the agro-processing SMEs such as rice processors play a crucial role in value addition, food security, rural employment, and income generation. Interestingly, Niger State being one of Nigeria's largest rice-producing state in North central regions, has witnessed a growing number of small and medium-scale rice processors who add value to raw paddy through milling, packaging, and distribution (Babu *et al.*, 2020; Mugambi and Gatobu, 2024).

However, despite the substantial contribution of rice processing enterprises to the economy, many of them face challenges related to growth, efficiency, and sustainability (Sulandjari, 2023; Nwangwu Jacinta *et al.*, 2020). The challenges also include inadequate access to finance, weak infrastructure (particularly power and transportation), limited access to markets, and inefficient business practices that limit their competitiveness and scalability. Specifically, rice

processing SMEs often suffer from low productivity, outdated processing technology, and shortage of managerial and technical skills (Pattanayak and Padhy, 2020).

In response to these challenges, numerous policy initiatives have sought to promote SMEs growth through interventions such as financial inclusion strategies, tax incentives, infrastructural support, and enterprise development programs (Abidin *et al.*, 2025). Studies have also examined the impact of external support systems, such as government grants and microfinance schemes on SMEs survival and growth (Botella-Carrubi *et al.*, 2024; Babu *et al.*, 2020; Iza, 2020; Drakaki, 2025), while these efforts have yielded some positive outcomes, they often fail to address the internal capacities of SMEs owners particularly their ability to recognize opportunities, innovate, and strategically manage resources which are critical for sustainable enterprise growth (Amrullah, *et al.*, 2023).

It is against this backdrop, that entrepreneurial skills emerged as a vital determinant of SMEs success. The skills include problem-solving skills, communication skills, leadership skills and managerial skills that will enhance entrepreneurs' capacity to improve product quality, optimize production processes, access new markets, and scale their businesses sustainably. However, prior literatures have largely focused on examining the effect of entrepreneurial skills dimensions on technology and manufacturing sector and service sector (universities), while neglecting the agro-processing SMEs (Osahon *et al.* 2023; Hamid *et al.* 2024; Ahmad and Ahmad 2021; Sulandjari, 2023) while neglecting the agro-processing SMEs. This posed a gap that the study seeks to address. Therefore, the study investigates the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the growth of rice processors operating as small and medium enterprises in Niger State.

The remainder of this paper is organized as such: Section two provides the literature review of the variables considered for this study. Section three provides the methodology adopted for this study. Section four provides results and discussion, while, the last section contains conclusion and recommendations.

## 2.0 Literature Review

In this section, the study's variables will be discussed in detail covering definitions of entrepreneurial skills and their dimensions, SMEs Growth, conceptual framework, theoretical framework and empirical review in order to identify gaps in the literatures.

### Entrepreneurial Skills

Entrepreneurial skills refer to the ability of an entrepreneur to identify opportunity, innovate, mobilize resources and manage risk amicably (Mugambi, and Gatobu, 2024). Sulandjari (2023) also defines entrepreneurial skills as the behaviors, and attributes that enable an individual to identify opportunities, create and manage innovations, as well as deal with uncertainty and complexity. These behaviors are part of a broader set of leadership and management skills that enable individuals to manage a business venture successfully. More so, Botella-Carrubi *et al.* (2024) opined entrepreneurial skill as the ability to recognized opportunities, take calculated risks, innovate, and effectively organize and manage resources in order to grow a business. These skills are essential not only for starting a business but also for driving innovation within existing organizations. Drakaki (2025) also affirmed entrepreneurial skills as creative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, communications skills that improve the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises. Hosseini *et al.* (2020) define entrepreneurial skills as the core abilities needed to start and run a successful business. These skills include leadership, innovation, personal and technical skills that are important for identifying opportunities and managing a business successfully.

This study conceptualized entrepreneurial skills based on managerial skills, communication skills and leadership skills as identified by Sulandjari (2023); Drakaki (2025) and Hosseini *et al.*, (2020). Management skills refer to the ability of an individual to plan, direct, organize, and control organizational resources effectively (Ahmad and Ahmad, 2021). The component of managerial skills includes planning and strategic thinking: setting short- and long-term goals; financial management: budgeting, cash flow and cost control; operational management: process design, inventory, quality control, and supply chain coordination. Communication skills involve the ability to effectively transmit and receive messages, both verbal and non-verbal (Moreno-Pérez *et al.*, 2023). More so, communication skills refer to the ability to transmit and interpret information clearly and persuasively across internal and external stakeholders (Soekardi *et al.*, 2020). The component of communication skills includes interpersonal communication: one to one interaction; team communication: task coordination and knowledge sharing; market and customer communication: value proposition articulation and branding. Leadership skills refer to the ability to influence, inspire, and guide individuals or groups toward achieving objectives (Sulandjari, 2023). Leadership skills are the strength and abilities of an entrepreneur to demonstrate quality of overseeing, processing, guiding initiative and steer their employees towards achieving organizational goals (Osahon *et al.*, 2023). The component include vision and strategic direction: articulating a compelling future and aligning stakeholders; motivation and empowerment: building intrinsic motivations and delegating others; change leadership: guiding organisations through innovations and growth plan.

### Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) Growth

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has been defined by Sulandjari, (2023); Abidin *et al.* (2025); Mibey *et al.* (2023) based on number of employees, annual sales, working capital, gross output, market share and total asset. According to Drakaki, (2025) SMEs refer to business enterprises whose total assets excluding land is not more than Two Hundred Million Naira (N200,000,000.00). The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) also define SMEs as enterprises with a limited number of employees, low levels of capital and assets, and relatively low turnover. These enterprises are often family-owned and operate at the local or regional level. The European Union (EU) also define SMEs as an enterprise which employ fewer than 250 persons and have an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million, or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding €43 million. The Small enterprises as those operating in the formal sector with less than 50 employees; and medium enterprises as those employing less than 250 employees.

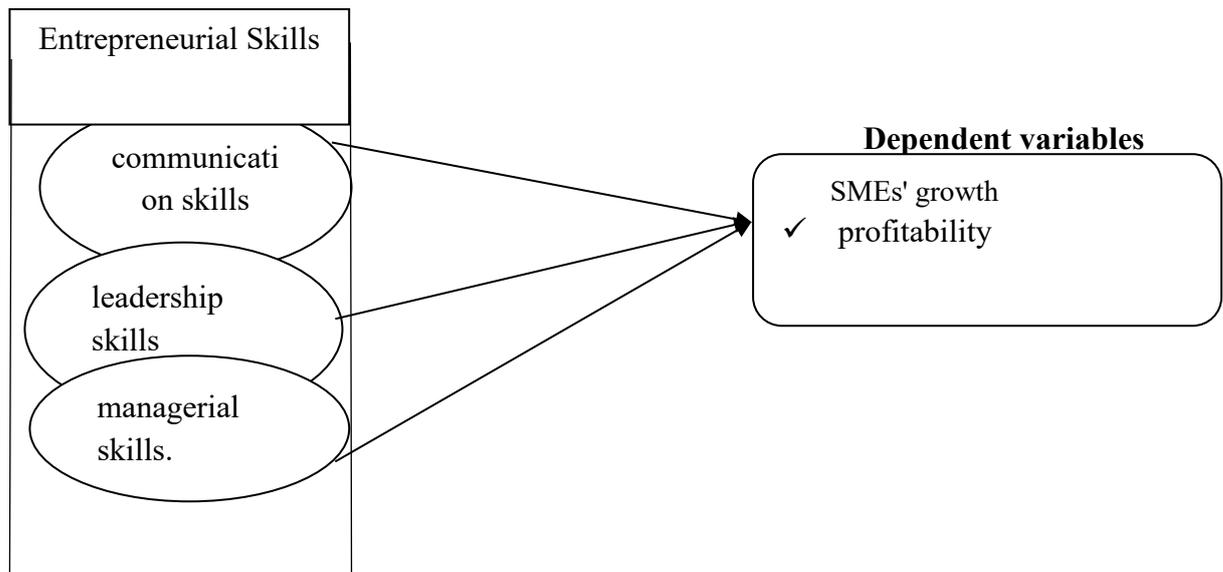
SMEs growth is defined as the increase in the size, profitability and market of small and medium enterprises over time. It involves improvements in revenue, workforce size, production output, market share, or operational (Mugambi and Gatobu, 2024; Amrullah, *et al.*, 2023). Growth is being measured based on financial and non-financial measures with increase in sales, profitability, total asset turnover, change in market share, growth in net profits or gross margins, volume of goods/services produced, increase in the number of employees over time and customer retention rate (Sulandjari, 2023; Abidin *et al.*, 2025; Mibey *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the study adopted the use of financial growth measure with profitability as the proxy for measuring SMEs' growth. According to Mibey *et al.* (2023) measuring growth of SMEs based profitability metrics revealed the financial health of an enterprise.

### Conceptual Framework

The study aims to investigate the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the growth of rice processors operating as small and medium enterprises in Niger State. The independent variable entrepreneurial skills, has three dimensions: communication skills, leadership skills and managerial skills. SMEs' growth is the dependent variable and will be measured with profitability as the proxy. The conceptual framework depicts the relationship between the

independent variables (entrepreneurial skills dimensions) and dependent variables (SMEs' growth) in Figure 1.

### Independent variables



### Theoretical framework

#### Innovation Theory of Entrepreneurship.

The study is anchored on the theory of innovation. The theory was developed by a prominent Australian economist Joseph Alois Schumpeter and his colleagues in 1934 (Smith, 2013). The theory is based on the assumption that economic development is driven by innovation introduced by entrepreneurs and that Growth of SMEs can only occur when entrepreneurs disrupt the status quo and create value through novel approaches (Drakaki, 2025). The theory posits that a manager with strong entrepreneurial vision can optimize resource utilization and introduce novel business models that will improve productivity and profitability of SMEs. Joseph Schumpeter also viewed an entrepreneur as someone who leads economic change that inspire subordinate to innovative products, or render services and business processes that fuel growth (Amrullah *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, Moreno-Pérez, *et al.* (2023) opined that entrepreneurs with strong communication skills can dissemination of innovative practices within the firm and build customer relationships that inform product development.

#### Empirical Review on Entrepreneurial Skills on the Growth of SMEs

Osahon *et al.* (2023) examined the effect of leadership skills and performance of selected public universities in Delta State. leadership skills were measured based on intuition, self-understanding, and visionary. Performance was measured as shareholder return. The population of the study is 2,048 staff of universities in Delta. Taro Yamane's formula was utilized to determine a sample size of 345 staff of the institutions. Structured questionnaires were administered to 345 staff, out of which 330 were retrieved. Multiple regression and Pearson moment correlation were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that intuition, self-understanding and visionary dimensions of leadership skills have a significant positive impact on organizational performance. The study concluded that leadership skills have an effect on organizational performance. Therefore, it suggests that every organization hire visionary leaders to manage its affairs and guarantee the accomplishment of its objectives and purposes.

Hamid *et al.* (2024) examined the effect of communication skills and emotional intelligence on employees Performance at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari. The population of the study is 125 employees of Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari. Simple random sampling technique was used to determine a sample of 56 respondents. Multiple linear regression was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that communication skills have a positive and significant influence on employee performance. This means that higher communication skills lead to improved employee performance. Conversely, emotional intelligence has a negative and insignificant influence on employee performance. This means that higher job stress leads to decreased employee performance. The study recommended that future researchers can consider other factors that influence employee performance besides communication skills and emotional intelligence.

Ahmad and Ahmad (2021) Examined the mediating effect of strategic planning on managerial skills and the performance of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Punjab, Pakistan. The population of the study is 265 SMEs. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings revealed that managerial skills have a positive on SME performance and that strategic planning significantly mediates the relationship. Moreover, managerial skills strongly influence the effective utilization of company resources when guided by strategic planning. Furthermore, strategic planning plays a positive role in strengthening the link between managerial skills and SME performance in Punjab. The study recommended that SMEs should leverage on managerial skills to enhance resource utilization that can lead to better performance outcomes.

Sulandjari (2023) examined the effect of Entrepreneurial Skills and Business Mentoring on Startup firms Growth and Success in West Java. The Startup firms focused only on technology, manufacturing and service sector. Entrepreneurial Skills was measured as opportunity recognition, resource utilization, risk management, and creativity. Business Mentoring was measured based on the frequency and depth of mentoring relationships, mentor characteristics, and perceived impact of mentoring on entrepreneurial skills. Startup Growth was measured as revenue growth, market expansion, and employee hiring rate, while Startup Success was measured as profitability, customer satisfaction, and sustainable market presence. The study was anchored on Resource-Based View (RBV) to explain the relationship between variables of interest. Quantitative research design with aid to structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. A sample size of 120 startups was selected for the study. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM -PLS) was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that entrepreneurial skills have a positive and significant effect on both startup growth and success. Business mentoring has a positive and significant effect on both startup growth and success. The study concluded that entrepreneurial skills and business mentoring play an important role in the success and growth of startups. The study advocates for the strategic importance of business mentoring, revealing its substantial influence on both entrepreneurial skills enhancement and startup success.

Based on this review, it is empirically proof that the studies reviewed focused on technology, manufacturing sector and service sector(universities), while neglecting the agro-processing SMEs. This posed that industry wise gaps exist.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY.

The study employed quantitative research designed as used in the studies (Sulandjari, 2023; Mibey *et al.*, 2023). The total population of the study is 7,340 SMEs of rice processors in Bida Local Government Area (Niger State Ministry of Agriculture, 2024). Using the Glen's formula (2013), 379 was obtained as the Sample size. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data

from the respondents. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting 379 SMEs owners from the population. More so, in gathering data from the SMEs owners, subjective or objective means is either used (Mugambi and Gatobu, 2024; Mibey *et al.*, 2023; Pattanayak and Padhy, 2020; Kanapathy, 2024). Multiple regression with the aid of SPSS version 24 was used to analyzed the data collected. Descriptive statistics was also used to analyses the respondents' demographic data.

The study adapts the model of Mutuku *et al.* (2020) with personal skills, managerial skills and technical skills as independent variables and performance of Small and Medium Enterprises as dependent variable.

This Model is stated as follows:

$$PSME = F(ES) \quad 1$$

$$\text{With } PSME = GP$$

2

$$\text{and } ES = F(EL, CS)$$

3

Where: PSME = performance of Small and Medium Enterprises

ES = Entrepreneurial Skills

Substitute equation 2 and 3 into equation 1, equation 1 becomes

$$GP = F(EL, CS)$$

4

Equation 3 can be rewritten as follows:

$$GP = F(EL, CS) \quad 5$$

Transforming equation 4 into linear regression, equation 4 then becomes

$$P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EL + \beta_2 CS + \epsilon$$

Where:

GP= Growth in Profit

EL= Entrepreneurship literacy

CS = Communication Skill

$\beta_0$  = Intercept

$\epsilon$  = Error term

Mutuku *et al.* (2020) model was modified in this study as follow

$$GSMEs = F(ES) \quad I \quad 1$$

$$\text{With } GSMEs = P \quad 2$$

$$\text{and } ES = f(MS, CS, LS) \quad 3$$

Where: GSMEs = Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises

ES = Entrepreneurial Skills

P = Profitability

Substitute equation 2 and 3 into equation 1, equation 1 becomes

$$P = F(CS, LS, MS) \quad 4$$

Equation 3 can be rewritten as follows:

$$P = F(CS, LS, MS) \quad 5$$

Transforming equation 4 into linear regression, equation 4 then becomes

$$P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CS + \beta_2 LS + \beta_3 MS + \epsilon$$

Where:

P= Profitability

CS = Communication Skills

LS = Leadership Skills

MS= Managerial Skills

$\beta_0$  = Intercept

$\epsilon$  =Error term

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion

Table 4.1 seek to determine the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age, level of education and marital status.

**Table 4.1: Socio-Economic Demographic of Respondents**

Demographic factor		Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	66.8%
	Female	33.2%
<b>Age</b>	20-25	22.5%
	26-30	36.8%
	31-35	9.6%
	36-40	11.8%
	41 years above	18.6%
<b>Level of Education</b>	Informal	7%
	Primary certificate	11%
	SSCE	39%
	Vocational certificate	9%
	Tertiary certificate	33%
<b>Marial Status</b>	Single	24%
	Married	66%
	Divorce	7%
	Widow	3%

Sources: field survey, 2025

Table 4.1 illustrated the gender distribution of Small and Medium Enterprises sampled showed that 66.8% were male and 33.2% were female in the study area. The reason might be due to culture and religion inclination of northern part of this country, as women are not encouraged to engage in occupation that will make them interact with different people freely and thus limit their participation in Small and Medium Enterprises. The result indicated that majority of respondents age is largely 26-30 years, which indicates that the respondents are still young, active and in their productive years with mental and technical know- how to carryout day to day activities of SMEs. Table 4.1 indicates that a vast majority of the respondents (39%) had SSCE as their qualifications, which indicate that most respondent have the basic educational and technical skills needed to carryout SMEs activities. The result shown that 66% of the respondents are married. This implied that majority of the SMEs respondents were married and had responsibilities to take care of.

#### Regression Results

Table 4. 2 presents the regression result of the effect of entrepreneurial skills dimensions on growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in the study area.

**Table 4.2:** Regression Analysis Results

Explanatory variables	Coefficient	Standard error	P> t
Managerial Skill	0.263	0.60	0.005
Communication Skill	0.193	0.63	0.034
Leadership Skill	0.368	0.55	0.004
Constant	1.213	0.306	0.002
R-square	0.499		
Adj R-square	0.492		

p < 0.05

Source: Author's Field Survey (2025)

The result from Table 4.2 showed  $R^2$  of 0.499, implying that about 49.9 % of variations that occur in Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises were explained by the independent variables included in the model, while the remaining 50.1% were due to other extraneous variables not included in the model and error in measurement of some variables.

**Objective 1: Examine the effect of communication skills on the growth of rice processors operating as small and medium enterprises in Niger State.**

Table 4.2 indicates that, communication skill regression coefficient of 0.193 shows a positive relationship between communication skill and growth of Small and Medium Enterprises. Therefore, a unit increase in communication skill will yield to 19.3% units increase on the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises. The regression result also indicates that communication skill has a significant effect on the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises with a p-value of 0.034 at < 0.05. This implies that effective communication skill strengthens customer relationships and internal management processes that will drive growth among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The result of study is in line with the submission of Hamid *et al.* (2024) The findings revealed that communication skills have a positive and significant influence on employee performance.

**Objective II: Assess the effect of managerial skills on the growth of rice processors operating as small and medium enterprises in Niger State.**

Table 4.2 indicates that, managerial skills regression coefficient of 0.263 shows a positive relationship between managerial skills and growth of Small and Medium Enterprises. This implies that a unit increase in managerial skills will yield to 26.3% units increase on the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises. The regression result revealed that managerial skills have a significant effect on the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises with a p-value of 0.005 at < 0.05. The findings implies that managerial skills enable rice processors to set clear business goals, plan effectively, and make informed decision about production, pricing, sourcing and market expansion that will lead to sustainable growth. The result of the study is in line with the submission of Ahmad and Ahmad (2021) who found that that managerial skills have a positive on SME performance and that strategic planning significantly mediates the relationship.

**Objective III: examine the effect of leadership skill on the growth of rice processors operating as small and medium enterprises in Niger State.**

Table 4.2 indicates that, leadership skill regression coefficient of 0.368 shows a positive relationship between leadership skill and growth of Small and Medium Enterprises. Therefore, a unit increase in leadership skill will yield to 36.8% units increase on the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises. The regression result also indicates that leadership skill has a significant effect on the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises with a p-value of 0.004 at < 0.05. This implies that a good leadership skill enables a leader to set direction, align subordinate and motivate them to perform task optimally in order to achieved organisational growth. The result

of study is in line with the submission of Osahon *et al.* (2023) who found that intuition, self-understanding and visionary dimensions of leadership skills have a significant positive impact on organizational performance

## 5.0 Conclusion and recommendation

The study investigates the Effect of Entrepreneurial Skill on the Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in Niger State. A quantitative research design and structured questionnaires was used to collect data from respondents. The study concluded that management skill, communication Skill and leadership skill have a positive and significant effect on Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in the study area. This implies these skills are crucial for making strategic decisions, allocating resources, managing people, and responding to market changes.

### Recommendations s

- i. It is recommended that SMEs owners should improve their communication skills through regular training and capacity-building programmes that promote effective communications skills when interacting with their customers in order to strengthen good customer relationships and internal management processes that will drive growth among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Government agencies should organize workshops and seminars focused on business communication to help rice processors leverage communication as a tool for growth.
- ii. The study recommended that SMEs owners should prioritize leadership development training that will promote good leadership practice that inspire, guide and motivate subordinate to work together in achieving organizational growth.
- iii. It is recommended that SMEs owners should promote strong managerial capabilities that will enable rice processors to set clear business goals, plan effectively, and make informed decision about production, pricing, sourcing and market expansion that will lead to sustainable growth. Policymakers and development partners should facilitate access to managerial training and mentorship that enable SMEs manage resources efficiently for sustainable business growth.

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