

Rural women's level of utilization of entrepreneurial skills for performance in business enterprises in IMO state, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study focused on the rural women's level of utilization of entrepreneurial skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised 5440 registered rural women entrepreneurs in the government owned rural markets in Imo state. The sample of the study consisted of 544 rural women entrepreneurs selected through stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using cronbach alpha with overall reliability coefficient of 0.79, which was highly efficient for the study. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed among others that personal skills are utilized while marketing and managerial skills are not adequately utilized by rural women entrepreneurs for performance in business enterprises in Imo state. Based on these findings, the study recommends among others, that there is need for government to organize workshops and seminars on entrepreneurship education for women to update their skills and knowledge.

Keywords: rural women, utilization, entrepreneurial skills, performance, business enterprises

Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays significant role in the socio-economic development of a society. Economically, entrepreneurship guarantees markets and promotes job creation through the formation of new businesses. History has shown that economic progress has been achieved by pragmatic people who are entrepreneurial and innovative, able to explore opportunities and willing to take risks. Hence, transforming ideas into opportunities, which is the crux of entrepreneurship that aptly empowers citizens (men and women alike), engenders innovation and changes mindsets for better performance in Small and medium business enterprises (United Nation, 2013) [25].

Entrepreneurship is the active process of bringing an idea and transforming it into a business. According to Engelhoff in Metu and Nwokoye (2014), entrepreneurship is derived from the French word "entreprendre" which means to understand. Hence, entrepreneurship is the process of understanding activities concerned with identifying and exploiting business opportunities while assuming its attendant risks. Entrepreneurship as an area of human endeavor, has received increasing interest of researchers, academics and policy makers the world over. It has equally provoked controversies over its concept and definition.

According to Schumpeter in Idam (2014) [8], entrepreneurship is seen as an effective means not only of combating unemployment, poverty and under-development in the developing nations, but also as a strategy for rapid economic development in both developed and developing nations. The author contends that global development is entering a phase, where entrepreneurship will increasingly play a more important role. The author adduced three reasons for global development. The first is that the managed economy of the 1970s – 2000 in the West,

characterized by reliance on big business and mass production, has given way to a so-called entrepreneurial economy, where knowledge-driven goods and services are more flexibly provided by smaller creative class. Secondly, impressive growth in the emerging economies, notably Brazil, Russia, India and China, has been driven by innovative entrepreneurial revolution. Thirdly, in the least developed countries, where dependency is high, donor agencies have been shifting emphasis in development cooperation towards private sector development. In other words, entrepreneurship is the application of energy for initiating and building an enterprise (Mishra, El-Osta & Shaik, 2014) [12]. The term entrepreneurship is used to describe a dynamic process of creating incremental wealth (Shailesh, Gyanendra, & Yadav, 2013).

According to Mishra *et al.* (2014) [12], wealth is created by individuals who take the major risks in terms of equity, time and career commitment of providing value to some product or services, the entrepreneurs. According to the authors, the product or service itself may or may not be new or unique but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by securing and allocating the necessary skill and resources. In other words, an entrepreneur is an innovator who recognizes and seizes opportunities, converts those opportunities into workable ideas, adds value, effort, money, skill and assumes risks of competition to actualize the ideas and takes the reward (United States Department of Agriculture, 2012). According to Naude (2012), entrepreneurs will contribute to growth and employment creation in advanced, emerging and least developed economies alike, if the skills as basic abilities are available and learned.

Skill as basic ability is the means by which man adjusts to life. According to Adeyemo (2009) [1], a person's attitude and work functions are required and necessary antidotes

suggesting the suitable skills performance and acquisition of same by going through a given work sample are also required. In the work place, skill is what the workers give in exchange for remuneration. If the skill (or the cluster of skills popularly referred to as aptitudes) given is satisfactory, the worker gets satisfaction and the employer gets satisfied too. This process, if sustained, culminates in promotion, retaining and prolonged tenure that leads to productivity. The case is not different in the market place and business environment. Therefore, entrepreneurial skills are skills needed to have to succeed in business.

Entrepreneurial skills are the basic skills necessary to enable one start, develop, finance and succeed in business enterprise (Adeyemo, 2009) ^[1]. Entrepreneurial skill is the ability of an individual to exploit an idea and create an enterprise (small or big) not only for personal gain but also for social and developmental gain (Olagunju, 2015) ^[15]. These skills include personal skills which are traits inherent in individuals that help them to function effectively in business, for example self-discipline; managerial skills which means the ability to take decisions as well as analyze complex situation and draw conclusions that will make the business succeed; marketing skills which entails the ability to reach out to the audience using the best approach to be able to effectively sell (Sousa & Almeida, 2014) ^[21]. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship skills are associated with innovative and dynamic developments within the small and medium business enterprise (SME) sector (United State Department of Agriculture, USDA, 2012).

According to Taiwo, Ayodeji and Yusuf (2012) ^[23], inherent in the rural areas, are small and medium enterprises. For people living and doing small and medium businesses in the rural areas, especially the rural women, these basic abilities are expected of them to possess in a changing world to be able to stand the pressure of the times, for better performance in their small and medium business enterprises. In the views of Gheorghe (2014) ^[7], A business enterprise is a business organization that is formed and which provides goods and services, creates jobs, contributes to national income, imports, exports, and above all, sustainable economic development. The author gave examples of business enterprises such as large firms, such as industries and multinational companies, and small and medium enterprises, such as lock-up shops, petty-trading, etc.

According to Taiwo, *et al* (2012) ^[23], in the Nigerian context, small and medium business constitute the very foundation upon which the large businesses were built, however, small and medium enterprises have been identified differently by various individuals and organization such that an enterprise that is considered small and medium in one place is seen differently in another. Even within a country, the definition changes over time. Some common indicators employed in the various definitions include total assets, size of labor employed, values of annual turnover and capital investment. The small-scale industries of Federal Ministry of Industries defined small scale as "enterprises having capital (investment in land, building, machinery and equipment and working capital) up to N60,000.00 and employing not more than 50 person". The Central Bank's monetary and credit guidelines, small-scale industries were regarded as establishment whose annual turnover is less than N6 million and capital not exceeding N10 million (Taiwo *et al*, 2012) ^[23]. According to Brwon, Medott and

Hamilton (2014), many small firms are created as a last resort rather than as first choice and have therefore invited growth potential, especially in rural areas by rural women.

According to United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (2003) ^[24], rural women are females living and/or doing business in the rural settlements. People living in the rural peripheries, and especially women, shoulder the burden of the world's poverty, particularly in the least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa. They have been deprived for too long from participating in the opportunities and benefits of economic growth and globalization (UNIDO, 2003) ^[24], but more recently, women have moved a step ahead from just having a corporate career which gave them financial self-determination and growth to express their abilities. This is just the role education plays.

Education is a tool for bridging the gap between ignorance and effective performance in business. The level of education usually determines the rate and extent to which individuals can assimilate the different concepts and apply them (Phungwayo & Mogashoa, 2014) ^[18]. The literacy rate of rural women entrepreneurs in Imo state is found at low level compared to male population; bulk of their activities revolve around them; nothing shows that progress is being recorded, nor things done in line with the nitty-gritty of entrepreneurship. The rural women who are mostly non-literates seem to be ignorant of new technology or unskilled, unable to do research and gain the necessary training to be compared to their graduate counterparts. The non-literate rural women seem to have little or no knowledge of measurement and basic accounting for effective performance in their small and medium enterprises (UNIDO in Mehta & Mehta, 2011) ^[11]. One then wonders if they utilize the inherent skills expected of entrepreneurs for effective performance in their business enterprises. It is worthy of note here, that there is a direct relationship between utilization of entrepreneurial skills and the success of the rural women in their business enterprises. This is borne out of the fact that business knowledge and entrepreneurial skills acquired through organized training/education assist the recipients in acquiring new ideas and methods needed for success in entrepreneurial practice when utilized. This study, therefore, sought to determine the rural women's level of utilization of entrepreneurial skills for performance in their small business enterprises in Imo state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the rural women's level of utilization of entrepreneurial skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the rural women's level of utilization of:

1. Personal skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state.
2. Managerial skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state.
3. Marketing skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state.

Research Questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study

1. What is the rural women's level of utilization of personal skills for performance in business enterprises

- in Imo state?
- 2. What is the rural women’s level of utilization of managerial skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state?
- 3. What is the rural women’s level of utilization of marketing skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state?

Materials and Methods

The design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of all the 5440 registered women entrepreneurs in the government owned rural markets in the twenty-seven (27) local government areas of the three (3) senatorial zones in Imo state. The sample consisted of 544 registered rural women entrepreneurs selected through stratified random sampling. A self-structured questionnaire titled ‘Rural Women’s Level of Utilization of Entrepreneurial Skills for Performance in Business Enterprises (RWLUESPBE)’ was used for data collection. The instrument was subjected to validity by three experts, one from the Department of Adult and continuing Education, one from the Department of

Science Education and the other one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Educational Foundations, all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Comments and recommendations of the experts were effected in the final construction of the instrument by the researcher. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach’s alpha and 0.79 was obtained and considered adequate for the study. The data collected was analyzed with mean and standard deviation. Decision rule was based on 4-point numerical values on the response modes assigned; Strongly Agree (SA) – 4 points, Agree (A) – 3 points, Disagree (D) – 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1 point. A criterion mean of 2.5 was adopted. This means that any mean score of 2.5 and above was regarded as Agree and any mean score lower than 2.5 was regarded as Disagree.

Results

Research Question One: What is the rural women’s level of utilization of personal skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state?

Table 1: Respondents’ Mean and standard deviation ratings on rural women’s level of utilization of personal skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state

S/NO	Utilization of Personal skills N= 540	Mean(\bar{X})	SD	Remarks
1.	I take risk in business	2.9	0.68	Agree
2.	I exhibit self-confidence in my business	2.8	0.67	Agree
3.	I select the right business for myself	3.1	0.72	Agree
4.	I come up with new ideas in business	2.6	0.64	Agree
5.	I develop clear business goals	2.9	0.68	Agree
6.	I develop business opportunities	2.2	0.58	Disagree
7.	I have foresight for my business	2.5	0.62	Agree
8.	I identify successful role models to emulate in a chosen business	2.4	0.61	Disagree
	Grand mean	2.7	0.65	Agree

The data in table 1 show that the respondents agreed that they take risk in business, exhibit self-confidence in their business, select the right business for their self, come up with new ideas in business, develop clear business goals and have foresight for their business with the mean scores of 2.9, 2.8, 3.1, 2.6, 2.9 and 2.5 respectively. The analysis also shows that the respondents disagreed that they develop business opportunities and identify successful role models to

emulate in a chosen business with a mean score of 2.2 and 2.4 respectively. The grand mean of 2.7 also shows agreement of the items by the respondents.

Research Question Two: What is the rural women’s level of utilization of managerial skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state?

Table 2: Respondents’ Mean and standard deviation ratings on rural women’s level of utilization of managerial skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state.

S/NO	Utilization of managerial skills N=540	Mean(\bar{X})	SD	Remarks
9.	I am knowledgeable in business management	2.4	0.61	Disagree
10.	I identify my customers’ needs and supply them	2.4	0.61	Disagree
11.	I develop clear business goals and implement them	2.1	0.56	Disagree
12.	I take proper action in business to get results	2.3	0.59	Disagree
13.	I registered my business enterprise	2.1	0.56	Disagree
14.	I make appropriate use of feedback	2.4	0.61	Disagree
15.	I analyze properly in managing my business	2.2	0.58	Disagree
16.	I identify business strategies and use them	2.0	0.54	Disagree
17.	I organize human and material resources to achieve business goal	2.0	0.54	Disagree
18.	I attend managerial trainings	2.3	0.59	Disagree
19.	I manage time and meet business schedule	2.2	0.58	Disagree
20.	I obey existing laws and policies regulating business enterprises	2.0	0.54	Disagree
21.	I make proper decision in my business	2.4	0.61	Disagree
22.	I evaluate business transactions	2.3	0.59	Disagree
	Grand mean	2.22	0.57	Disagree

From table 2 above, the respondents disagreed that they are knowledgeable in business management, identify customers' needs and supply them, develop clear business goals and implement them, take proper action in business to get results, identify business strategies and use them, organize human and material resources to achieve business goal, manage time and meet business schedule, obey existing laws and policies regulating business enterprises, make proper decision in their business, evaluate business transactions, they are knowledgeable in business

management, registered their business enterprise, make appropriate use of feedback, analyze properly in managing their business and attend managerial trainings with a mean score of 2.4, 2.4, 2.1, 2.3, 2.1, 2.4, 2.2, 2.0, 2.0, 2.3, 2.2, 2.0, 2.4 and 2.3 respectively.

Research Question Three

What is the rural women's level of utilization of marketing skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state?

Table 3: Respondents' Mean and standard deviation ratings on rural women's level of utilization of marketing skills for performance in business enterprises in Imo state.

S/NO	Utilization of marketing skills N=540	Mean(\bar{x})	SD	Remarks
23.	I identify and meet customers' needs	2.3	0.59	Disagree
24.	I carry out product advertisements	2.1	0.56	Disagree
25.	I maintain customer relationship	2.4	0.61	Disagree
26.	I make use of effective marketing strategies to sell	2.2	0.58	Disagree
27.	I control my customers when prices go up or down	2.0	0.54	Disagree
28.	I communicate effectively/relate well with my customers	2.0	0.54	Disagree
29.	I satisfy my customers by identifying their needs and supplying them	2.3	0.59	Disagree
30.	I identify market opportunities and utilize them	2.2	0.58	Disagree
	Grand mean	2.16	0.57	Disagree

Data in table 3 show that the respondents disagreed that they identify and meet customers' needs, carry out product advertisements, maintain customer relationship, make use of effective marketing strategies to sell, communicate effectively/relate well with their customers, satisfy their customers by identifying their needs and supplying them, identify market opportunities and utilize and control customers when prices go up or down with a mean score of 2.3, 2.1, 2.4, 2.2, 2.0, 2.0, 2.3 and 2.2 respectively. The grand mean of 2.16 shows disagreement of the respondents on the items.

Discussion

The result in research question revealed that the respondents agreed that they take risk in business, exhibit self-confidence in their business, select the right business for themselves, come up with new ideas in business, develop clear business goals and have foresight for their business. The analysis also shows that the respondents disagree that they develop business opportunities and identify successful role models to emulate in a chosen business. This is in line with the study carried out by Akpotohwo and Amati (2006) that personal skills help rural entrepreneurship women to select the right business for themselves. The finding is also in accordance with the study carried out by Fashoba (2007)^[6], who states that personal skills help women entrepreneurship to develop clear business goals and have foresight for their business. This is in line with the observation of Hisrich and Peters (2002) who introduced the concept of personal skills as interacting influences that contribute to the success of a business. Hence, they are inherent inert attributes of a person for business success. These findings also corroborate with the views of Osagbemi (2009)^[16] and Ojukwu (2000), who noted that personal skills required are; experience in the intended business, perception of probability of success, hard work, self-confidence, right social connections and ability to engage in risks. The result in research question two revealed that the respondents disagree that they identify customers' needs and

supply them, develop clear business goals and implement them, take proper action in business to get results, identify business strategies and use them, organize human and material resources to achieve business goal, manage time and meet business schedule, obey existing laws and policies regulating business enterprises, make proper decision in their business and evaluate business transactions. The analysis also shows that the respondents disagreed that they are knowledgeable in business management, registered their business enterprise, make appropriate use of feedback, analyze properly in managing their business and attend managerial trainings. These findings are in consonance with the views of Kotler (2003) that managerial skills help women entrepreneurs to organize human and material resources to achieve business goal. The author viewed management as the act of getting things done through people. The author noted that management is the process of harnessing the diverse resources (material, finance, people and time), in a manner targeted at achieving what the entrepreneur sets out to achieve, and is necessary for the success of the business enterprise. Managerial skills are needed by rural women entrepreneurs because it involves good planning, organizing, directing and controlling of workers and materials so as to effectively and efficiently meet set objectives of their enterprises.

The result in research question three shows that the respondents disagreed that they identify and meet customers' needs, carry out product advertisements, maintain customer relationship, make use of effective marketing strategies to sell, communicate effectively/relate well with their customers, satisfy their customers by identifying their needs and supplying them, and identify market opportunities and utilize them. The respondents also disagreed that they control their customers when prices go up or down. This is in consonance with the study carried out by Ikeanyionwu (2006)^[9] which states that marketing skills help women entrepreneurs to carry out product advertisements. The author also opined that marketing and management competencies are the two major important

competencies the rural entrepreneur should have when she plans to establish her own business. This is in accordance with Sten (2008) who states that marketing skills help women entrepreneurs to identify their customers' needs and supply them. It also agreed with Stanton cited in Okafor (2002) who saw the marketing concept as a philosophy of business that states that the customer's want for satisfaction is the economic and social justification for a firm's existence. Consequently, all company or enterprise activities must be devoted to finding out what the customers want and then satisfying those wants, while still making a profit in the long term. Marketing is an essential part of a nation's economic and cultural heritage (Osuala, 2004) [17]. Therefore, the ability to engage in the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services, is marketing skill. That is why business people all over the world have recognized that marketing skill is very important to the success of businesses. These findings are also in line with the observations of Egbune (2009) [5] who identified important marketing skills which the entrepreneur should possess as; knowledge of seasonal fluctuation of goods, ability to determine the extent to which products will sell, familiarity with various aspects of sales and salesmanship, ability to budget and forecast, ability to determine current and future trends in sales of products, knowledge of advertising, among others.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, the researcher observed that there is a low level of utilization of entrepreneurial skills by rural women entrepreneurs for performance in small and medium enterprises in Imo state. Developing entrepreneurship skills among rural market women is very crucial, because women are known as change makers both in family and societal development. The women should be exposed to entrepreneurship skills because they are geared towards producing a self-employed and self-reliant people. From the foregoing, it is evident that entrepreneurship skills provide and direct the energies of rural women entrepreneurs for more fruitful economic endeavors. The skills will enable them work towards the realization of noble and desired successes in their business enterprises. These personal, marketing, and managerial skills help the market women to boost their productivity in their small medium enterprises. For rural women entrepreneurs to be equipped with skills, trading centres should be established by the government so that such knowledge will be imparted in them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Government should give women free education on entrepreneurship at all levels of education, so as to improve their entrepreneurial skills for better performance in business enterprises.
2. Free ICT training and seminar should be provided for the rural women so as to improve their use of ICT skills in business enterprises.
3. The government should encourage, support, and provide, facilities and infrastructures to promote adult literacy education for entrepreneurship development.

4. There is need for government to organize workshops and seminars on entrepreneurship education for rural market women in Imo state to update their skills and knowledge.
5. Training centres should also be established in rural areas to enable the market women acquire basic functional education.
6. Efforts should be made by the government to create awareness through media education on the benefits of economic and entrepreneurship skill development of women in the nation and family.

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