



**EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS ACQUISITION ON GROWTH OF
SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN FCT ABUJA**

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Specifically, it investigated the effect of intellectual skills and vocational skills on SME growth. Survey research design was adopted, the population of the study consists of two hundred and fifty four thousand six hundred and sixty eight (38,003) SMEs registered with Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) as at (2021) operating in FCT Abuja. Primary data was used and it was collected through the use of five-point likert scale questionnaire on a sample size of four hundred and forty (440) owners/ managers of the SMEs. The hypothesis of the study was tested using multiple regression analysis. The result revealed that intellectual skills and vocational skills have a significant positive effect on the growth of small and medium enterprises in FCT Abuja. The study recommended that owners and managers of SMEs in FCT Abuja should prioritize continuous intellectual development through targeted training and capacity-building programs. This can be achieved by organizing regular workshops, enrolling in entrepreneurship and business management courses, and participating in mentorship or knowledge-sharing platforms. They should actively pursue vocational training relevant to their trade, also government agencies such as the (SMEDAN) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should expand and promote vocational training centers that offer practical, hands-on skills development in areas such as tailoring, carpentry, catering, digital services, and manufacturing.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition, Intellectual Skills, SMEs growth, Vocational Skills

Introduction

Globally, the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is a critical sector because of their central role in economic development, employment generation and poverty reduction. SMEs growth entails the expansion and improvement in the performance, capacity, and competitiveness of business over time (Bodlaj et al., 2023). This growth can be measured through various indicators such as increases in sales revenue, profit margins, number of

employees, market share, assets, and geographic coverage (Pinto & Sardo, 2023). SME growth is not only a sign of business success but also a key contributor to national economic development, as growing SMEs tend to generate more employment opportunities, foster innovation, and contribute to the diversification of the economy (Akaba, 2022). According to the World Bank (2023), SMEs represent about 90% of businesses and more than 50% of

employment worldwide. Their ability to adapt quickly to market changes and provide localized solutions to economic challenges makes them vital to sustainable development.

Similarly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are pivotal to Nigeria's economic development, contributing significantly to employment generation, poverty alleviation, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, SMEs play a crucial role in driving economic activities and fostering innovation. However, many SMEs in Abuja face challenges such as limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of essential entrepreneurial skills, which hinder their growth (Emmanuel et al., 2024). Entrepreneurial skills acquisition is increasingly seen as a strategic solution to these challenges, as it equips SME owners and managers with the necessary tools to innovate, manage resources efficiently, and respond effectively to market dynamics. These skills include intellectual skills and vocational skills. The acquisition of such skills enables entrepreneurs to make informed decisions, adapt to changing market dynamics, and effectively manage their businesses (Daniel & Ezeamuzie, 2024).

Intellectual skills enhance the growth of SMEs by enabling entrepreneurs to

effectively solve problems and make informed decisions that improve business operations. These skills foster innovation, allowing SMEs to develop new products, services, and business models that increase competitiveness. Critical thinking helps business owners analyze market trends, customer preferences, and competitor strategies, leading to better planning and positioning. As SMEs operate in highly competitive and often volatile environments, the ability to leverage intellectual skills has become a crucial determinant of their growth and survival (Mensah & Osei, 2023).

Vocational skills improve the growth of SMEs by equipping entrepreneurs and employees with practical, hands-on abilities that directly improve productivity and service delivery. These skills support the efficient use of tools, machinery, and technology, which increases output and reduces operational costs. It also fosters product quality and innovation, enabling SMEs to meet customer expectations and stay competitive in their markets (Okolie et al., 2023). Additionally, SMEs with a vocationally skilled workforce are better positioned to adapt to industry-specific demands and improve customer satisfaction, which promotes business expansion (Akinyemi & Adejumo, 2022).

The importance placed on entrepreneurial skills acquisition on the growth of small and medium enterprises is very high and empirical studies conducted by many researchers such as (Goudarzv et al., 2024; Hongal & Kinange, 2023; Ofili et al., 2024) who said that entrepreneurial skills acquisition can boost growth of SMEs in both developed and developing economies. Because of the great importance placed on SMEs and how they contribute largely to a country's economic well-being. It is on the basis of the foregoing that this study examines the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja.

Despite the recognized importance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in driving economic growth, employment, and innovation, many SMEs continue to face significant challenges in achieving sustainable growth and long-term survival. Despite receiving substantial support through financial credit schemes, tax incentives, and dedicated regulatory frameworks aimed at fostering their development, the sector's growth has alarmingly declined. This is evidenced by a significant drop in their contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), falling from 50% in 2022 to 43.3% by the last quarter of 2023, also 42.1% in the first quarter of 2025. Furthermore, a large

number of SMEs remain stagnant, fail within their early years, or operate below their growth potential.

Thus numerous studies such as (Yahaya, 2023;Yadewani, 2023; Omaliko, 2022; Nguyen, 2021; Orij, 2025; Awotunde, 2025; Jongwe , 2025; Soomro , 2025 & Emele, 2024) have investigated the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on the growth of SMEs across various sectors, economies as well as methodology, there is a paucity of empirical research specifically examining small and medium enterprises within FCT Abuja. Recognizing the identified gaps in the literature, this study investigated the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on growth of on small and medium enterprises in FCT Abuja.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on the growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja. The specific objectives were to;

- i. Investigate the effect of intellectual skills on the growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja; and
- ii. Determine the effect of vocational skills on the growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja

Conceptual Review

Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition

Entrepreneurial skills acquisition refers to the process through which individuals learn, develop, and internalize the knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and competencies required to identify business opportunities, take calculated risks, innovate, and manage or grow a successful enterprise. It encompasses both the cognitive and practical aspects of entrepreneurship and is typically achieved through education, training, mentoring, experience, and self-directed learning (Suzuki, 2024). Entrepreneurial skills acquisition is defined as clusters of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills which an entrepreneur must acquire to enable him to produce an outstanding performance and maximize profit while managing a business venture (Bird, 2024).

According to Adeyemo (2023) entrepreneurial skills acquisition refers to the systematic process of developing and obtaining the competencies, knowledge, and capabilities needed to successfully start, manage, and grow a business venture. This involved both the deliberate learning of specific business-related skills and the cultivation of entrepreneurial mindsets and behaviors. Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition refers to the process through

which individuals develop the necessary competencies and abilities to effectively identify, create, and manage business opportunities (Ezeabii et al., 2024). Similarly, Steira et al. (2024) opined that entrepreneurial skills acquisition is the process of learning and developing the necessary knowledge, abilities, and characteristics that enable an individual to successfully identify opportunities, start, manage, and grow a business venture, while also adding value to it.

Intellectual Skills

Halpern (2021) viewed intellectual skills as the mental abilities and cognitive processes that enable an individual to think critically, reason logically, solve problems, analyze information, make decisions, and understand complex concepts. These skills involve the capacity to acquire, process, interpret, and apply knowledge effectively in various situations. Intellectual skills are defined as the cognitive abilities involved in critical thinking, including analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation, which enable individuals to reason effectively and solve problems (Facione, 2020). Ennis (2022) described intellectual skills as the abilities necessary to think reflectively and rationally, to understand logical connections between ideas, and to engage in systematic problem solving.

Vocational Skills

According to Johnson and Lee (2024) vocational skills refer to the practical or technical abilities, knowledge, and competencies required to perform specific tasks or activities associated with a particular trade, occupation, or profession. These skills are typically gained through formal training, apprenticeships, or hands-on experience, and are directly applicable to jobs in sectors such as construction, agriculture, automotive technology, healthcare, electrical work, tailoring, culinary arts, and many others. Vocational skills are specialized abilities acquired for the purpose of enabling an individual to engage in and perform the duties of a chosen career or occupation efficiently and effectively. These skills are often task-oriented, industry-specific, and closely aligned with labor market demands, emphasizing "learning by doing" over theoretical knowledge (Okoye & Mensah, 2024). Vocational skills are described as "applied skills you acquire to become proficient in a specific trade or profession." They usually include a combination of technical, hands-on, and craft skills to excel in fields like construction, culinary, administration, healthcare, and many other professions. Vocational competencies are available to a wide range of individuals, especially those who don't have a degree,

and can be acquired through vocational training programs, apprenticeships, and standalone courses (Ramirez & Thompson, 2023).

SMEs Growth

SMEs growth refers to the measurable and sustainable expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in terms of key performance indicators such as revenue, market share, employment, assets, customer base, and geographic reach. It typically reflects the ability of SMEs to scale up their operations, improve productivity, innovate, and compete effectively in local and international markets (Davidsson et al., 2023). Similarly, SMEs growth can be defined as the process through which a small or medium-sized enterprise increases its operational size, profitability, market presence, or organizational capabilities over time, often measured by metrics such as sales volume, number of employees, profits, market expansion, or asset base (Mazanai & Fatoki, 2022). Similarly, SMEs growth can be referred to the positive transformation in the scale, scope, and value of operations of small and medium enterprises, typically measured by increased turnover, profits, employee numbers, asset base, or market reach (Ayyagari et al., 2020). According to Wiklund et al. (2022) SME growth is the

sustained increase in a firm's ability to generate revenue, enhance operational scale, and expand market reach over time, often as a result of entrepreneurial orientation, innovation, and strategic resource deployment.

Empirical Review

Ezeani (2024) examined the effect of intellectual skills on the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises in Enugu State. Three research questions and three hypotheses directed the study. The study employed a survey research design and 300 SMEs managers registered with the chamber of commerce and industry in Enugu constituted the research population. A modified 4-point Likert rating scale made up of 29 structure questionnaire items was used in generating data for the study, while the instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.70 using test re-test method. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that intellectual skill have a significant positive effect on the growth of SMEs. Emele (2024) examined the effect of vocational skills on the growth of SMEs in South-East, Nigeria. Relevant literatures were reviewed and the study was anchored on the Schumpeter's theory of innovation

and opportunity-based theory. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The survey instrument used in this study was structured questionnaire with 5 Likert scale response. The population of the study comprised 7061 registered SMES in South-East. The statistical formula by Borg and Gall was employed to determine the sample size of 1377. The instruments were subjected to face and content validity. The reliability of the questionnaire was established through the test- retest and Cronbach Alpha. Simple percentage analysis was used in analyzing the research question. Hypotheses for the study were tested using Liner regression analysis. The result from the findings revealed that vocational skills had a positive significant effect on the growth of Small and medium enterprises.

Yahya et al. (2024) investigated the effect of vocational skills on the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the services sector in Malaysia. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated for the study. The design of the study was descriptive survey. A random sampling method was adopted to select a sample size of 500 entrepreneurs of SMEs in the services sector in Malaysia. A structured and validated questionnaire was used for data collection. Reliability coefficient of 0.87 was established using

Cronbach alpha. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test and stepwise regression procedures were employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that vocational skill has a significant positive effect on the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Akande (2023) investigated the effect of intellectual skills on the growth of small businesses in Ogun State, Nigeria. Research questions and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A simple random sampling technique was used to select a total of 140 small business owners that constituted the sample population. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using test re-test method which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.71. Simple frequency was used to answer the research questions and chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that intellectual skills have a significant effect on the growth of small businesses in Ogun State.

Khamis and Gumawa (2023) investigated the effect of intellectual skills on SMEs growth among owners/managers operating

registered businesses in Sabon Gari Market Kano, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was used while a sample size of one hundred and seventy two (172) business owners/managers were drawn through the use of Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination out of three hundred and three (303) owners/managers operating registered businesses in Sabon Gari Market, Kano, which constituted the study population. Probability sampling technique was used which involves simple random sampling. Closed-ended questionnaire served as a data collection tool for the study and Regression analysis was used to analyse the collected data through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21. Face validity and reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha) were conducted. The findings indicate that intellectual skills have significant effect on SMEs growth.

Theoretical Framework

The Human Capital

The Human Capital Theory was first proposed by Theodore W. Schultz in 1961 and later expanded by Gary Becker in 1964. The theory posits that individuals can improve their productivity and economic value through investments in education, training, experience, and skill development. These investments are considered forms of

capital, just like physical assets, and they contribute to individual and organizational growth. According to Becker (1964), human capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and competencies that enable individuals to perform tasks efficiently and contribute to economic development. The theory is particularly relevant to entrepreneurship, where skills such as innovation, risk-taking, leadership, and financial literacy are critical for business success.

One of the major strengths of the Human Capital Theory is its ability to link personal development to economic performance, making it a foundational model in labor economics and entrepreneurship studies. It highlights the value of continuous learning and skill acquisition as drivers of productivity. However, the theory has been criticized by several authors such as Bourdieu (1986); Bowles and Gintis (1975); Ridley (2023); Foley (1999) and Fix (2018) for focusing primarily on economic returns, often ignoring the social, emotional, and structural factors that affect individuals' access to education and training. It also tends to treat education as a purely economic investment rather than a social process influenced by various contextual factors. In relation to the topic "Effect of Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition on the Growth of SMEs,"

Human Capital Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation. Entrepreneurial skills are seen as a form of human capital that SME owners acquire through formal education, vocational training, and experiential learning. These skills enhance decision-making, innovation, resource management, and strategic planning, all of which contribute to the growth and performance of SMEs.

Methodology

This study employed the survey research design; the design involves studying a sample of the population once at a point in time for the purpose of drawing inference that is generalized to the entire population of the study. The population of the study consists of thirty eight thousand and three (38,003) small and medium enterprises registered with Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) as at (2021) operating in FCT Abuja. The minimum sample size for this study was ascertained using the following formula proposed by Taro Yamane for statistically attaining sample size from a given population (Yamane, 1967), which is 1580 for this study. Calculations were made at 5% significance level as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n is sample size,

N is the population size,

e is the margin of error (commonly set at 5%, which is 0.05).

Given:

$$n = \frac{38,003}{1 + 38,003(0.05)^2}$$
$$n = 400$$

Thus; a minimum sample size of four hundred (400) was required for the study, For the purpose of anticipated non-response, bias and non-return of questionnaire, the sample size was increased by 10% which was added to the minimum sample size given by the formula making it four hundred and forty (440) as the sample size that was used for this study. This takes care of other unavoidable errors such as incorrect filling and failure of some respondents to return the questionnaire (Israel, 2013).

This study used stratified random sampling technique in selecting the respondents for the study, the respondents for the study were the owners/or managers of the SMEs. This technique was used by dividing the

SME population into distinct, non-overlapping strata based on relevant characteristics such as business size, SME sector, and geographic location. From each stratum, respondents were randomly selected in proportion to their representation in the overall SME population. By dividing the population into strata and selecting respondents randomly within each category, stratified sampling minimizes bias, enhances comparability across groups, and improves the reliability of results and generalizability of findings to the broader SMEs population.

Primary source of data were explore in getting important and useful information for the study. The data were gathered from the respondents through a closed ended questionnaire structured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The study also employed Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) method of evaluate the effect of the variables in the study. The regression model is represented as:

$$ESA = f(IS, VS)$$

Where;

ESA = Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition

f = Functional notation

IS = Intellectual Skills

VS = Vocational Skills

This model is stated in econometric form as:

$$EI = \alpha + \beta_1 IS + \beta VS_2 + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where:

Y = Dependent Variables, α = Constant Term, β = Beta coefficients, ϵ = Error Term

Data Presentation and Analysis

The distribution and retrieval of questionnaires to the owners and managers of SMEs in FCT Abuja is presented in Table 1

Table 1: Distribution and Retrieval of Questionnaires

| Questionnaires | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Properly filled/Returned | 403 | 92 |
| Not Properly filled / Not Returned | 37 | 8 |
| Total | 440 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 showed that four hundred and forty (440) copies of questionnaire were administered to owners and managers of SMEs in FCT Abuja, of which four hundred and three (403) copies were properly filled

and returned which represents 92% response rate. Consequently all further analysis was conducted using four hundred and three (403) valid responses

Table 2: Model Summary

| Model | R | R square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .792 ^a | .627 | .622 | .86842 |

Predictors: (Constant), IS, VS

Source: SPSS (2025)

The results indicate an R-squared value of .627, meaning that 62.7% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the collective influence of the independent variables. Furthermore, the adjusted R-

squared value of .622 implies that 62.2% of the factors related to the emotional intelligence are captured within the model, with 37.8% remaining unaccounted for.

Table 3: ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 208.939 | 2 | 104.470 | 138.525 | .000 ^a |
| | | | | .754 | | |
| | Residual | 124.436 | 165 | | | |
| | Total | 333.375 | 167 | | | |

a. Predictors: (Constant), IS, VS

b. Dependent Variable: GS

Source: SPSS (2025)

Table 3 shows an F-statistic value of 138.525 with a significance level of .000, indicating that the model is well-fitted and

statistically significant at the 5% level. This result confirms that the model is reliable for decision-making purposes.

Table 4: Coefficients^a

| | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | T | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
| Model | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | -3.090 | .763 | | -4.052 | .000 |
| | IS | 1.391 | .117 | 1.174 | 11.878 | .000 |
| | VS | 507 | .106 | .475 | 4.801 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: GS

Source: SPSS (2025)

Table 4 presents the statistical analysis results, showing a t-statistic of 11.878 with a significance level of 0.000, indicating that intellectual skills has a significant and positive effect on the growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja. Consequently, the null hypothesis, stating that intellectual skill has no significant effect on the growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja, is rejected.

Additionally, Table 4 reports a t-statistic of 4.801 with a significance level of 0.000, further demonstrating that the vocational skills significantly and positively affects growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that vocational skills has no significant effect on the growth of SMEs in FCT Abuja.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on the growth of small and enterprises in FCT Abuja, two hypotheses were tested and the findings include the following;

Firstly, the study examined the effect of intellectual skills on the growth of small and enterprises in FCT Abuja. The results show that intellectual skills has a significant positive on SMEs growth; implying that building intellectual skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making as these directly enhance entrepreneurs' ability to innovate, adapt, and grow their businesses successfully. The finding of this study is consistent with the result of (Ezeani, 2024; Akande, 2023; Khamis & Gumawa; 2023) who conducted a study earlier and also found a significant positive effect of intellectual skills on the growth of SMEs.

The findings from the second hypotheses reveal that vocational skills has a significant positive effect on the growth of small and enterprises in FCT Abuja, this finding practically implies that that promoting vocational training equips entrepreneurs with hands-on, technical skills necessary to start, manage, and expand their businesses, thereby boosting entrepreneurial growth and job creation. The significant positive effect of vocational

skills on the growth of SMEs agrees with the findings of (Emele, 2024, Yahya et al., 2024) respectively.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the effect of entrepreneurial skills acquisition on the growth of small and medium enterprises in FCT Abuja. Data were sourced from primary sources and were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. Therefore, the study concluded that entrepreneurial skill acquisition had a positive significant effect on the performance of small and medium enterprises in FCT Abuja.

In line with the findings of the study, following recommendations are proffered:

- i. Owners and managers of SMEs in (FCT) Abuja should prioritize continuous intellectual development through targeted training and capacity-building programs. This can be achieved by organizing regular workshops, enrolling in entrepreneurship and business management courses, and participating in mentorship or knowledge-sharing platforms. Additionally, government agencies and business development service providers should collaborate to

design and implement accessible, subsidized training programs focused on critical thinking, problem-solving, strategic planning, and innovation, which are key components of intellectual skills.

- ii. Owners and managers of SMEs in (FCT) Abuja should actively pursue vocational training relevant to their industry or trade, also government agencies such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) should expand and promote vocational training centers that offer practical, hands-on skills development in areas such as tailoring, carpentry, catering, digital services, and manufacturing. Furthermore, partnerships between SMEs and technical/vocational institutions should be encouraged to ensure continuous skill acquisition and upgrade among employees.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire

Key: *SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, U = Undecided, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree*

| S/N | Intellectual Skills | SA | A | U | D | SD |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | I am able to analyze complex business problems and identify effective solutions | | | | | |
| 2 | I often use critical thinking to evaluate opportunities before making business decisions | | | | | |
| 3 | I can adapt my strategies quickly in response to changes in the business environment | | | | | |
| 4 | I regularly use logical reasoning to make informed and objective decisions | | | | | |
| 5 | I am capable of thinking creatively to generate innovative ideas for business growth | | | | | |
| | Vocational Skills | | | | | |
| 6 | I possess the technical skills required to perform tasks in my line of business effectively | | | | | |
| 7 | I can confidently operate the tools and equipment necessary for my business operations | | | | | |
| 8 | I consistently maintain high-quality standards in the products or services I provide | | | | | |
| 9 | I am able to troubleshoot and solve technical problems that arise in my work | | | | | |
| 10 | I have received formal or informal training related to the practical skills of my trade | | | | | |
| | Growth of SMEs | | | | | |
| 11 | My business has experienced consistent growth in revenue over the past year | | | | | |
| 12 | I have expanded my customer base significantly since starting the business | | | | | |
| 13 | My business has introduced new products or services in response to market demand | | | | | |
| 14 | I have increased the number of employees in my business as it has grown | | | | | |
| 15 | I actively pursue new business opportunities to expand operations | | | | | |