

## ENTREPRENEURIAL ABILITIES REQUIRED FOR THE SUSTENANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMS) IN THE SOUTHEAST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The study examined the entrepreneurial abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Two research questions and two correspondence hypotheses were developed to guide the study in order to achieve the study objectives. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design on a population of three hundred and twenty (320) small and medium enterprises in the south-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria with a sample size of one hundred and seventy-five (175) respondents using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. A validated researcher's structured questionnaire titled "Entrepreneurial Abilities Required for the Sustenance of Small and Medium Enterprises" (EARSSMEQ) was the instrument used for data collection. The Cronbach's alpha reliability was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, which had a high internal consistency of .94 indexed. Descriptive statistics and an independent t-test were used in the study, and hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence abilities and negotiation abilities are required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It was recommended, among others, that small and medium enterprises be trained on how to develop their emotional intelligence abilities to enhance and sustain the operation of their businesses.*

**Key words:** Entrepreneurial abilities, Required, Sustenance, Small and medium enterprises

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### Introduction

Entrepreneurial ability is the willingness and capacity to launch, plan, and manage a new firm while accepting all the risks necessary to turn a profit. Customer service abilities, communication and listening abilities, financial skills, teamwork abilities, and leadership abilities are a few examples of necessary entrepreneurship skills. Additionally, it contributes significantly by raising living standards and generating revenue for other enterprises in the same industry. Entrepreneurs generate fresh and innovative items that open up new markets and foster change through entrepreneurship. According to Amadi, Erne, and Anireh (2020), entrepreneurial ability is the fundamental knowledge, skills, and mindset that receiving a business education instills in a person in areas like bookkeeping or

accounting, business management, marketing, business communication, records management, and other practical and creative skills required for establishing oneself or finding employment. Business talents, according to Birt (2023), are those aptitudes that enable a person or professional to flourish at work and make substantial and strategic contributions. These abilities assist people in comprehending the procedures involved in achieving organizational objectives, as well as the internal and external aspects that affect an organization's success (Raynolds, 2019). The authors outlined a list of abilities necessary for business success, including but not limited to hard or technical abilities like financial accounting as well as soft abilities like leadership and communication. Emotional intelligence, business networking, analyzing data,

interpersonal interaction, and negotiation. Following are explanations of Bird (2023; Reynolds, 2019) and Reynolds' perspectives on the five talents that were taken into consideration for this study: emotional intelligence, social media, data analysis, dialog, and skills in negotiating.

According to Amadi, Erne, and Anireh (2020), entrepreneurial ability refers to the fundamental skills, knowledge, and mindset that businessmen and businesswomen offer to individuals in the areas of bookkeeping or accounting, business management, marketing, business communication, records management, and other vocational and creative skills necessary for the survival of small and medium enterprises. According to Mbuya, Bounds, and Godman (2016), entrepreneurial ability includes knowledge management, technical skill, and human capital management—all of which are essential for business or organization success. An organization needs entrepreneurial skills to remain successful. According to Reynolds (2019), the competencies that aid professionals' business people in understanding the internal and external elements that affect business success as well as the procedures involved in achieving business objectives are referred to as entrepreneurial abilities. This includes the ability to be proficient in both hard and soft skills, such as technical skills like financial accounting and bookkeeping, for the support of small and medium enterprises. Additionally, soft abilities include leadership, communication, teamwork, motivation, initiative, problem-solving, and recognition abilities (Ukah and Atah, 2021).

Atah, Ogbuji, Idika and Ochui. (2023) asserted that emotional intelligence, one of the most important business talents and a key performance indicator in the workplace, is highly regarded by employers. It comprises four key ideas: relationship management, self-management, social awareness, and self-awareness. How to be disciplined and control our emotions during business dealings Emotional intelligence is the capacity to perceive and affect the emotions of others, as well as the capacity to understand one's own

emotions and how they affect particular situations.

Interesting, Atah, Ogbuji, and Agbor (2019) viewed emotional intelligence as the capacity for recognizing emotions in oneself and others, coping with those feelings, inspiring oneself, and sharing those emotions with others. The capacity to use emotional information to direct cognition and action is also referred to as (Afzaliza & Ibrahim, 2022). Emotional intelligence has five essential components: self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, self-regulation, and social skills. The ability to distinguish between our own feelings and those of others, inspire ourselves, manage our emotions effectively, and seek the greatest outcomes for both our relationships and ourselves is known as emotional intelligence, or emotional quotient. The ability to logically evaluate one's behaviors, personality, and daily interactions with others is known as self-awareness. Self-regulation is the process of directing and purposefully observing one's own emotions. One of the most important talents that businesses look for in job candidates and employees is the capacity to motivate others. This suggests self-motivated action and asks for emotional intelligence. Empathy is the capacity to put oneself in another person's situation and take on their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. According to Osunsan, Wilfred, Kabasinguzi, and Ahmed (2020), it is a powerful social talent that aids in relationship management and enables one to influence and inspire those around them positively.

According to a study by Hamzah, Kai Le, and Musa (2021), emotional intelligence has a large and advantageous effect on small-business owners. In line with a different study done in Nigeria, According to Atitsogbe, Mama, Sovet, Pari, and Rossie (2019), emotional intelligence, which includes self-efficacy, was also found to have a strong link with the survival of small and medium-sized businesses. Considering the aforementioned research, one might conclude that emotional intelligence has Emotional intelligence, according to Palmer and Gignac (2012), is a predictor for SMS operations in Nigeria. The

resilience of Nigeria's small and medium-sized businesses is positively impacted by emotional intelligence. Palmer and Gignac (2012) asserted that emotional intelligence is a predictor of SMS operations in Nigeria. Ability requiring proficiency in resolving client disputes in commercial settings A compromise or agreement is established while resolving conflicts and disputes graciously through the capacity for social involvement. This skill entails the planning, communication, goal-setting, and negotiating processes necessary to reach a win-win agreement. It is impossible to overstate the value of negotiation skills in any endeavor, particularly small and medium businesses, for resolving disputes and building connections with clients. According to a study by Atah (2019), there is a strong correlation between negotiation skills and talents and the survival of small and medium-sized businesses in River State, Nigeria. Khan and Baldini's (2019) research shows that bargaining is a predictor of the expansion and sustainability of small and medium-sized businesses. According to Atah, Ushie, Chukwurah, Idike, and Ochui (2023), negotiation skills may simulate and build small and medium-sized firms' cognitive, mental, linguistic expressions, communication, and other talents so they could conduct business in the twenty-first century. The marketing courses that improve an entrepreneur's ability in the workplace are simulated by their bargaining skills. Based on this note, the researchers therefore deem it necessary to carry out a study on entrepreneurial abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SMS) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to identify entrepreneurial abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to identify

1. Emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises in the

southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

2. Negotiation skills required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.
- Research questions

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the emotional intelligence skills required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria?
2. What are the negotiation skills required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria?

### **Statement of hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female entrepreneurs on emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female entrepreneurs on the negotiation abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The study examined the entrepreneurial abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Two research questions and two correspondence hypotheses were developed to guide the study in order to achieve the study objectives. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design on a population of three hundred and twenty (320)

small and medium enterprises in the south-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with a sample size of one hundred and seventy-five (175) respondents using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. A validated researcher's structured questionnaire titled "Entrepreneurial Abilities Required for the Sustenance of Small and Medium Enterprises" (EARSSMEQ.) was the instrument used for data collection, with four response options: highly required (HR), moderately required (MR), slightly required (SR), and not required (NR). The Cronbach Alpha Reliability was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, which had a high internal consistency of .94 indexed. The instrument was administered to the one hundred and seventy-five (175) respondents, and all 175 copies were returned and used for analysis using SPSS. The mean and standard

deviation were used to answer the research question, and an independent t-test was used to test the research hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision rules were based on a benchmark point of 2.50, which was considered highly required, while any item below 2.50 was considered not required. For the hypotheses, if the t-value calculated was greater than the t-crit at the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted; if not, it was rejected. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

### Findings of the study

#### Research question 1

Emotional intelligence abilities required by for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises in southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria

**Table 1: The mean score of participants' responds on Emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises in southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria**

S/No.	Items Statement	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Ability to manage customers' orders	175	3.02	1.18	Agree
2	Ability to regulate one outburst	175	3.24	1.02	Agree
3	Ability to empathize with customers	175	3.12	1.04	Agree
4	Ability to socialize with customers	175	3.02	1.02	Agree
5	Ability to respond to customers' needs	175	2.69	1.27	Agree
6	Ability knows customers' needs.	175	3.00	.97	Agree
7	Ability to resolve customers	175	3.17	.88	Agree
8	Ability to manage customers complaints'	175	2.98	1.08	Agree
9	Ability to motivate customers	175	3.12	1.10	Agree
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>Agree</b>

The results of Table 1 show that every finding indicates the importance of emotional intelligence skills for the survival of small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical region. According to the study, the mean score for items 1 through 9 was higher than 2.50. This supports the belief of entrepreneurs in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical zone that small and medium firms need to possess emotional intelligence skills in order to continue their operations in their everyday

operations. The range of standard deviations for each question demonstrates that the respondents' mean scores were consistent from one question to the next.

#### Research question 2

Negotiation skills required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

**Table 2: The mean score of participants' responses on emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria**

S/No.	Items Statement	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
10	Ability to persuade customers to purchase goods	175	2.91	.91	Agree
11	Ability to resolve issues with clients	175	3.17	1.04	Agree
12	Ability to build a relationship client	175	2.80	.80	Agree
13	Ability to communicate appropriately	175	2.94	1.19	Agree
14	Ability to work in a team to achieve goals	175	2.79	1.13	Agree
15	Ability to manage business outcomes	175	3.00	1.06	Agree
16	Ability to relate with customers properly	175	2.96	1.01	Agree
17	Ability to engage one's personality	175	2.99	1.00	Agree
18	Ability to mediate disputes	175	3.17	1.015	Agree
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>2.97</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>Agree</b>

The findings in Table 2 reveal that every item points to the necessity of emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The research found that the mean score for items 10–18 was greater than 2.50. This demonstrates the opinion of the entrepreneurs in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria that emotional intelligence abilities are required by small and medium enterprises for their sustainability. The range of standard deviations for each question

shows that the mean scores of the respondents are uniform across all questions.

**Hypotheses testing**

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female entrepreneurs on emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

**Table 3: Independent t-test on the average score of respondents' male and female entrepreneurs on emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria**

Items	Respondents' category	N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	t-cal	Alpha	t-cri.	Decision
1	Male small and Medium	120	3.0500	1.15845	173	.445	0.05	.065	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	2.9636	1.26145					
2	Male small and Medium	120	3.1667	1.07947	173	-1.514	0.05	.102	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.4182	.87540					
3	Male small and Medium	120	3.0083	1.10382	173	-2.106	0.05	.018	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.3636	.86845					
4	Male small and Medium	120	2.9750	1.02459	173	-1.021	0.05	.917	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.1455	1.02593					
5	Male small and Medium	120	2.5500	1.30834	173	-2.180	0.05	.001	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.0000	1.15470					
6	Male small and Medium	120	3.0667	.89568	173	1.225	0.05	.005	Accepted

	Medium									
	Female	small	and	55	2.8727	1.12307				
	Medium									
7	Male	small	and	120	3.1167	.89989	173	-1.332	.897	
	Medium								0.05	Accepted
	Female	small	and	55	3.3091	.85792				
	Medium									
8	Male	small	and	120	3.0167	1.07675	173	.503	.632	
	Medium								0.05	Accepted
	Female	small	and	55	2.9273	1.11976				
	Medium									
9	Male	small	and	120	3.1583	1.10001	173	.575	.922	
	Medium								0.05	Accepted
	Female	small	and	55	3.0545	1.12905				
	Medium									
	Male	small	and		27.1083	9.64701	173	-601	0.395	
	Medium								0.05	
	Female	small	and		28.055455	9.415726				
	Medium									

In table 3, the calculated t-cal of -601 is less than the t-cri of 0.395 at 173 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 level of significance. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female entrepreneurs on emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This is because both the male and female counterparts in small and medium enterprises are in need of emotional

intelligence to sustain SMEs in Nigeria and the world at large.

**Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female entrepreneurs on the negotiation abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

**Table 4: Independent t-test on the average score of respondents, male and female entrepreneurs, on negotiation abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria**

Items	Respondents' category	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-cal	Alpha	t-cri	Decision
10	Male small and Medium	120	2.9583	0.87347	173	0.94	0.05	0.052	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	2.8182	1.00168					
12	Male small and Medium	120	3.1167	1.07049	173	-1.022	0.05	0.591	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.2909	0.99392					
13	Male small and Medium	120	2.825	0.8061	173	0.466	0.05	0.874	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	2.7636	0.81567					
14	Male small and Medium	120	2.7583	1.22985	173	-3.205	0.05	0.004	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.3636	0.98815					
15	Male small and Medium	120	2.8167	1.10752	173	0.386	0.05	0.218	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	2.7455	1.18974					

16	Male small and Medium	120	3.0583	1.07918	173	1.069	0.05	0.829	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	2.8727	1.03735					
17	Male small and Medium	120	2.8417	0.99575	173	-2.417	0.05	0.889	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	3.2364	1.01769					
18	Male small and Medium	120	3.05	0.99452	173	1.08	0.05	0.594	Accepted
	Female small and Medium	55	2.8727	1.03735					
	Male small and Medium	120	3.15	1.01791	173	-0.521	0.05	0.906	Accepted
	Male small and Medium	55	3.2364	1.01769					
	Female small and Medium		<b>26.575</b>	<b>9.1748</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>-0.358</b>		<b>0.55</b>	
							<b>0.05</b>		Accepted

In table 4, at the 0.05 level of significance, the computed t-cal of -0.358 is smaller than the t-crit of 0.550 at 173 degrees of freedom. In the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria, there is no appreciable difference between the mean ratings of male and female business owners for the negotiation skills needed to sustain SME. Thus, it is agreed that the null hypothesis exists. For the viability of small and medium-sized businesses as well as the global economy, negotiation skills are necessary for both the male and female counterparts in small and medium-sized businesses.

### Discussion of findings

#### *Emotional intelligence abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises*

The study revealed that various emotional intelligence abilities are required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises, such as the ability to manage customers' orders, the ability to regulate one's outburst, the ability to empathize with customers, the ability to socialize with customers, the ability to respond to customers' needs with anticipation, the ability to know customers' needs, the ability to resolve customer complaints, and the ability to motivate customers. This finding is consistent with that of Hamzah, Kai Le, and Musa (2021) and Succi (2019), who found that emotional intelligence has a significant and advantageous effect on the business operations of small and medium-sized firms. It's possible that small and medium-sized

businesses will be better equipped to conduct business with both present and potential clients when they have these skills. The results concur with those of Atitsogbe, Mama, Sovet, Pari, and Rossie (2019), who found a significant correlation between the survival of small and medium-sized businesses in the Nigerian business environment and self-efficacy as a component of emotional intelligence. The results also showed a favorable link between emotional intelligence and small and medium businesses in Nigeria. According to the hypothesis's findings, there is no statistically significant difference between male and female entrepreneurs' mean ratings for the emotional intelligence skills needed to sustain small and medium-sized businesses (SME) in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical region. The results of Palmer and Gignac (2012), who found that emotional intelligence is a predictor for SMS operations in Nigeria, concur with this finding. This might be because small and medium-sized businesses run by both men and women require emotional intelligence skills to manage and communicate with their clients. *Negotiation skills required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME).*

According to the study, small and medium-sized businesses (SMF) need a variety of negotiation skills in order to succeed, including the ability to persuade customers to buy products, the ability to resolve disputes between clients, the ability to develop relationships with clients, the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to work in a team to accomplish goals, the

ability to manage business outcomes, the ability to relate to customers appropriately, and the ability to engage one's audience. The study supports Chukwurah and Atah's (2019) assertion that entrepreneurial skills could model and sustain small and medium-sized businesses because SMEs develop cognition, mentality, language expressions, how to react to and communicate with customers, and how to improve business operations in the 21st-century business environment. This might be because, in small and medium-sized businesses, bargaining skills mimic marketing skills. The study's findings concur with those of Khan and Baldini (2019), who found that negotiation skills are a predictor of the expansion and sustainability of small and medium-sized businesses. The findings of the hypothesis state that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female entrepreneurs on negotiation abilities required for the sustenance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This might be the case since small and medium-sized businesses with both male and female owners are required to develop the negotiation skills essential to the long-term success of any organization. The results are in line with those of Atah (2019), who claimed that bargaining abilities and the survival of small and medium firms in River State, Nigeria, are significantly correlated.

### Conclusions

According to the study's findings, emotional intelligence and negotiation abilities are necessary for the survival of small and medium-sized businesses (SME) in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical region. The test of hypotheses found no statistically significant difference between male and female entrepreneurs' mean ratings on the emotional intelligence and negotiation skills required to sustain small and medium-sized businesses (SME) in Nigeria's southeast geopolitical region. This might be the case since both their male and female peers' enterprises depend on their ability to be entrepreneurial.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that;

1. The state management of business operations should train small and medium enterprises on how to manage their emotional intelligence abilities to enhance their business operations for sustainability.
2. The cooperative affairs commission should organize workshops and conferences on business negotiation abilities to train small and medium enterprises.

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