

Entrepreneurial passion on the success of SME's in Plateau State, Nigeria: The role of entrepreneurial skills

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which entrepreneurial skills mediate the influences of entrepreneurial passion on the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Research Methodology: The researchers self-administered 337 questionnaires to SME owners in the Jos North and South LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria, and obtained a response rate of 91.1%. Quantitative data were analyzed using PLS-SEM version 3.0.

Results: Results showed that Entrepreneurial skills partially and fully mediated the influence of entrepreneurial passion on entrepreneurial success.

Limitations: The study was limited to SME owners in the Jos North and South LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria.

Contribution: This study contributes to the body of knowledge in entrepreneurship literature. It helps policymakers formulate holistic policies that will encourage entrepreneurship and skill acquisition, as well as enhance the socio-economic well-being of people via entrepreneurship. It also helps entrepreneurs, business owners, managers, and aspiring entrepreneurs learn and obtain the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to succeed.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial passion, Entrepreneurial skills, Entrepreneurial success, SME's success, Business failure*

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1. Introduction

Globally, the importance of entrepreneurial ventures and SMEs in job creation and sustaining national growth and development has been considered key tools in poverty alleviation, economic empowerment, and the general well-being of the citizenry. SMEs are generally referred to as the backbone of a country's economy; this is because they create jobs, alleviate poverty, and contribute to a country's gross domestic product (Lohor & Nguwap, 2018; Suherna & Nasiatin, 2023). It provides mechanisms for economic growth that are beneficial to individuals, society, and the government (for example,; Ogenyi, Zhou, Ju, and Liu (2020); Okoli and Nwosu (2021); Pervin and Sarker (2021)).

Globally, SMEs contribute to 90% of businesses and more than 50% of employment worldwide. In Europe, it contributes more than 50% of Europe's GDP, represents 99% of business, and employs approximately 100 million people (Commission, 2024). SMEs contribute 70% of Ghana's GDP. In Nigeria, SMEs contribute 48% of the national GDP and account for 96% of businesses and 84% of employment (Ilo, Soyebola, & Olowofela, 2023). This implies that for every failed SME, there is a correspondingly high loss of capital and job opportunities.

Successive governments have realized that the importance and contributions of SMEs have brought in various policies to help entrepreneurs and SMEs succeed, but SMEs do not succeed (Odia & Odia,

2013). These government policies include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) founded in 1986, the People Bank of Nigeria (PBN) in 1989, the BOI in 2001, and the Micro Finance Bank in 2005, threatening economic growth and development. This is evidenced by the high rate of unemployment, poverty, social vices, and low standards of living among Nigerians.

The failures and eventual collapse of SMEs are caused by both internal and external factors (e.g., (Bharti, 2021; Ebitu, Glory, & Alfred, 2016)). Previous studies (e.g., (Ademola, Olaleye, Olusuyi, & Edun, 2013)) have identified reasons for SME failure as lack of successive planning, inadequate funds, etc.; however, the problems of business failure persist. Every day, we witness the opening and shortening of SMEs in Nigeria. Another often-neglected cause of SMEs failures is the lack of underlying training and passion to acquire the necessary entrepreneurial skills and abilities to make a successful business. Hence, the likelihood that the business will fail increases when entrepreneurial passion and skills are missing.

Given these issues, there is a need to investigate and address the problems of SME failure and challenges related to business success in Nigeria. Hence, this study introduces the concept of "entrepreneurial skills" to mediate entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurial skills are relevant skills and competencies that enable an individual to invent, establish or develop and run an enterprise successfully in an evolving complex environment (Ibrahim & Mas'ud, 2016; Suleiman, Olalekan, Adekunle, Ishola, & Abdulrasheed, 2020). EP is a strong motivational source that simulates thoughts, actions, and persistence in entrepreneurial activity. However, a lack of entrepreneurial skills has led to the collapse of many SMEs worldwide. Entrepreneurial passion and skills are probably the key factors needed to guarantee small business survival. Although entrepreneurial skills are required for SME business success, most entrepreneurs do not acquire entrepreneurial skills and abilities that guarantee business success; hence, they fail before starting a business.

Reviews of relevant literature showed a consistent positive relationship between entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial success (e.g., Fesharaki (2019); Hu, Xu, Zhao, and Chen (2022); Chen, Zhang, Tian, and Bu (2022)). Hence, there is a need to introduce the concept of "entrepreneurial skills" as a mediator to understand why a consistent positive relationship exists. Further studies should be conducted on the role of entrepreneurial passion in entrepreneurial success (Newman, Obschonka, Moeller, & Chandan, 2021; Stenholm & Nielsen, 2019). Considering the need for entrepreneurial success, the main purpose of this study is to determine the mediating influence of entrepreneurial skills on entrepreneurial passion in achieving the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Nigeria. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how entrepreneurial passion can facilitate entrepreneurial success through entrepreneurial skills in Nigeria and to serve as a model for similar regions facing comparable problems.

The outcome of this study reveals the potential of entrepreneurial skills in reducing the failure rate of small enterprises in the Plateau State. To achieve this objective, this study hypothesizes that entrepreneurial skills positively and significantly mediate the influence of entrepreneurial passion on the success of SMEs in Plateau State. This study focuses on (1) conceptualizing the various meanings of the variables. 2) Develop a conceptual framework based on these variables. 3) Establish the influence of EP and ESK on ES.

The following section provides the theoretical background, hypotheses, methodology, results, findings, discussion, conclusions, and implications.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Concept of Entrepreneurial Passion

Passion is a persistent internal force that drives individuals to accomplish worthy activities. There are many definitions of passion in the literature, such as strong inclination (Vallerand et al., 2007) and intense positive feelings (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009) related to an activity.

The concept of entrepreneurial passion has been conceptualized as a super-ordinate construct consisting of an intense positive feeling directed at entrepreneurial activities associated with specific roles that are meaningful and salient to the self-identity of the entrepreneur, characterized as inventor, founder and developer identities (Iyortsuun, Nmadu, Dakung, & Gajere, 2019). Fesharaki (2019) defined entrepreneurial passion as an intense positive emotion that is achieved consciously and stimulated via participation in activities related to entrepreneurial role and identity. It is a strong motivational source that stimulates thoughts, actions, and persistence in entrepreneurial activity.

Entrepreneurial passion has been operationalized consisting of three dimensions (Cardon & Kirk, 2015; Fesharaki, 2019), the three dimensions according to them are passion for inventing, passion for founding and passion for developing.

1. Passion for Inventing

The concept of passion for inventing refers to entrepreneurs who have a high passion for inventing and discovering opportunities as a result of their passionate assessment of the environment with the intent of recognizing new opportunities, designing and inventing new products and services, and working on new prototypes to provide solutions. This is the discovery and creation of new opportunities and innovative methods to exploit them (Cardon et al., 2009).

People with passion for inventing are more interested in creating new innovative opportunities and inventing new tools, methods, and solutions to solve societal problems. For example, "technopreneur" Jerry Mallo of Bennie Agro Ltd in Jos Plateau state is a passionate entrepreneur who has been inventing products such as his prototype sporting car, hand washing machines, hand sanitizer dispenser, and body sterilizer machine amongst others.

Individuals experiencing passion for inventing actively seek out new opportunities, enjoy coming up with new product or service ideas, and relish inventing new solutions to important needs and problems (Cardon, Post, & Forster, 2017). For example, technopreneur Luka Zang Bot of "Zang Technologies Ltd" invented a computer foot mouse for people with disabilities, a high-capacity power bank, and many other inventions from e-waste that earned him a presidential award for the best Technology Innovation in 2019. According to Zang, the passion that motivated him to invent the high-capacity power bank is because most communities in Nigeria do not have access to electricity

2. Passion for Founding

Passion for founding simply refers to the act of providing new financial, human, and social resources to establish a new venture; that is, passion for birthing a business. These entrepreneurs channel energy towards the establishment and birth of a venture. Cardon et al posited that these entrepreneurs launch many ventures, thus' having a high passion for founding also called "habitual entrepreneurs" (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2005).

Founder entrepreneurs exhibit the characteristics of entrepreneurs who have a passion for creating new companies, and thus have high levels of passion for establishing a venture (Biraglia & Kadile, 2017; Fesharaki, 2019). Some launch and entrust the management of their ventures to trusted people, while others launch to sell the entire business venture, while moving unto launching another venture and hence tag "sequential entrepreneurs" (Ronstadt, as cited in Cardon et al. (2005)). Some habitual entrepreneurs launch, retain ownership, and manage their ventures as part of a larger business portfolio. Hence, they are known as portfolio entrepreneurs. Tony Elumelu (born in Jos) of "Heirs Holdings" maintains a portfolio of investments across several sectors including diversified investments, Banking, Financial Services, Energy, Real Estate, oil and gas, insurance, healthcare, and hospitality. Aliko Dangote (Dangote Group) is also an example of such a portfolio entrepreneur.

3. Passion for Developing

Entrepreneurial passion for development simply refers to entrepreneurs who derive satisfaction from growing and developing a venture after it has been founded. The passion for developing is entrepreneurs

who enjoy developing an existing organization more than establishing a new one because of the fear of bankruptcy that comes with new start-up ventures.

A number of these kinds of entrepreneurs according is called "organizational entrepreneurs" or intrapreneurs, who enjoy business strategies associated with activities such as sales, intensive marketing campaigns, and HRM functions to extend their current business life (Cardon et al., 2009). Thus, they have a strong passion for developing and growing businesses after their founding. They do so by developing new products and services to complement existing products and take the business to the next level of competition. For example, Nigerian industry is an example of such intrapreneurs.

The concept of passion was demonstrated sometime in December 2021 in the "Nigeria Campus Journalist of the Year Awards," where one Mr. Ishag Ringim, who never studied mass communication, but was a trained nurse and a first-year economics student in ABU Zaria, having a passion for writing successfully defeated fellow campus journalists from several top tier universities across the country, including all mass communication students to emerged the "Best Syndicated Writer Award of the year," and also emerged winner of the coveted prize (Consults, 2021).

In a television interview on TVC NEWS titled "Borno restoration: Restoring hope in the face of adversity". The presenter Jesse Tafida was caught on a camera asking the Governor of Borno State Professor Babagana Zulum to say '.... your Excellency sir! You have demonstrated "passion" in uplifting the living standard of your people; Tell us how you have been doing that' (TVC NEWS, December 25, 2021). This shows that Nigerians, especially those in the media field, are becoming more aware that "passion" is the way forward to anything a person wants to achieve. This was evidenced in the statements of some media personalities, such as Jesse Tafida of TVC NEWS, Nigeria.

We therefore draw from the work of all these scholars to conceptualize and re-rhapsodize entrepreneurial passion as a positive inner force directed towards entrepreneurial activities that are legally and ethically related with meaningful and salient roles to the self-identity of the entrepreneur (inventor, founder and developer) identities

2.2 The Concept of Entrepreneurial Skills

Skill as a concept is the ability or proficiency to demonstrate knowledge through action while performing a certain task. This includes creativity and teamwork (Despotidou & Prastacos, 2012). It is the ability or proficiency to perform a particular task (Suleiman et al., 2020). Therefore, entrepreneurial skills are defined as the ability to develop or create new things that add value to society and generate monetary benefits for the entrepreneur (Ibrahim & Mas'ud, 2016). It is vital to business performance and is essential for achieving great success. Entrepreneurial skills are the skills and competencies needed to develop innovative products and services to solve problems and enable a person to run an enterprise successfully (Suleiman et al., 2020).

Thus, as a result of the importance of skills in an entrepreneurial venture, President Muhammadu Buhari was quoted as saying, '.....we believe that building the right skills and experiences across these sectors are important to sustain the economic growth we are experiencing, beyond the skills and work experience, we will be building a new culture of mentorship and guidance that can figure out a new way for skills development and experience in Nigeria' (Haleem & Javaid, 2022). The Bishop of Sokoto Catholic Diocese Most Rev Matthew Hassan Kukah in January 2022 in Kaduna during the launching of an innovation hub, 'GreyHobb,' founded by Greysoft Technologies encourage the youths to acquire digital skills for both the present and to survive the future. Kukah stated that very soon, no one would ask: Who is your father? What will attract people to you is your skills and nothing else" (Leadership, 2022).

Thus, considering the various definitions of entrepreneurial skills by the authors, we conceptualize and re-rhapsodize entrepreneurial skills as the ability to demonstrate knowledge through action in performing entrepreneurial activities that will add value to society and the entrepreneur.

2.3 The Concept of Entrepreneurial Success

Generally, the literature does not show a consistent and accepted definition, nor a benchmark for the attainment of success, as there is no accepted definition of success. The concept of success depends on an individual's perspective and what they want to achieve in life. Be it profitable or the ability to open and maintain a business for a particular period in a sector or geographical location. Few scholars have attempted to define success as 'the progressive realization of a worthy ideal' (Nightingale, 2019). Anderson, Conn, Gamas, Borkhuis, and Lantto (2018) defined success as "an increasing realization of a contribution to the improvement of self or others by doing that which one has the desire to do".

In business, the concept of success is crucial. However, this is not always explicitly stated (Stephen, Ayodele, & Oluremi, 2017). Some have defined business success as surviving a certain number of years in operations (Olakitan & Ayobami, 2011). While others use profit as an indicator of business success (Lim & Teoh, 2021), the fact that young firms may not make profits in their first few years of operation, even though sales are increasing due to interest payments and setting up costs, makes it difficult to define success or performance from the perspective of profit (Stephen et al., 2017).

Therefore, considering these scholars' views, we conceptualized entrepreneurial success to mean "worthy achievement of set goals and objectives in a stipulated timeframe.

2.4 Theoretical Review

After careful consideration of the various theories related to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial success, the human capital theory (Becker, 1964, 1994) and effectuation theory (Sarasvathy, 2001) are the most suitable for this study.

2.4.1 Human Capital Theory (underpinning theory)

Becker (1964) originally developed the theory of human capital Becker (1964) to estimate employees' income distribution from their investment in human capital. The theory emphasizes that human capital investments 'improve knowledge, skills, or health, and thereby raise money or psychic incomes' (Becker, 1964). From the perspective of classical economics, Becker noted that the most valuable of all capital is an investment in human beings, which further translates to entrepreneurial success. This capital is simply the "skills and knowledge acquired through investments in schooling, training, and experiences that bring about the creation of social, personal, and economic well-being" (Marimuthu, Arokiasamy, & Ismail, 2009; Unger, Rauch, Frese, & Rosenbusch, 2011). To an organization, Human Capital is the sum of the knowledge, skills, and abilities featured and vested in the individuals it employs (Borodako, Berbeka, Rudnicki, & Łapczyński, 2019).

This theory assumes that people try to obtain a reward for their investments in human capital (Becker, 1964). That is, 'increased learning does result in increased productivity. Entrepreneurs who have invested more in their human capital strive for more economic benefits in their business than those who have invested less in their human capital (Cassar, 2006; Marvel, Davis, & Sproul, 2016). Second, this theory assumes that greater productivity results in higher wages for individuals and earnings for businesses (Marimuthu et al., 2009). Human capital enhances growth (Anochiwa, 2021). Third, knowledge is critical in acquiring other practical and functional resources, such as finance (Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2001).

Human capital is a necessary prior condition for further learning, and assists in amassing new knowledge and skills (e.g., Ackerman and Humphreys (1990); Hunter (1986)).

2.4.2 Effectuation theory (supportive theory)

Effectuation theory propounded by Professor Saras Sarasvathy in 2001 attempts to explain 'what makes entrepreneurs entrepreneurial'. This theory considers the first resources and then the goals that can be achieved by those resources. The theory of effectuation is defined as a form of reasoning or problem solving that assumes that the future is unpredictable; however, it can be controlled through human action

(Sarasvathy, 2001; Vorontsova, 2016). Effectuation is based on the idea that entrepreneurs create their future by taking action and making things happen.

Therefore, entrepreneurs can create their future by inventing, founding, and developing entrepreneurial ventures. This creates opportunities and solves problems using the resources available to them. The theory is based on what entrepreneurial activities entail by creating a distinction and forging ahead through various processes of learning. This learning helps acquire the needed human capital to make successful entrepreneurial ventures (Etim, Akpan, Augustine, & Michael, 2022). Based on the principles of effectuation, human capital can include the skills, abilities, knowledge, and experiences of entrepreneurs that help ensure entrepreneurial success. In a nutshell, the five principles of effectuation theory explain that an entrepreneur should "start with what he has, risk what he can afford, be open to pleasant surprises, and seek relationships with others."

2.4.3 Contribution of the Theory

This theory is used to reduce an entrepreneur's failure costs (Sarasvathy, 2001). The theory helps entrepreneurs adopt survival strategies, where one identifies the next best step based on available resources (Wale-Oshinowo, Lebura, Ibidunni, & Jevwegaga, 2017). In the face of lingering mortality issues or potential losses, entrepreneurs can leverage survival strategies to survive in challenging, complex environments.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study.

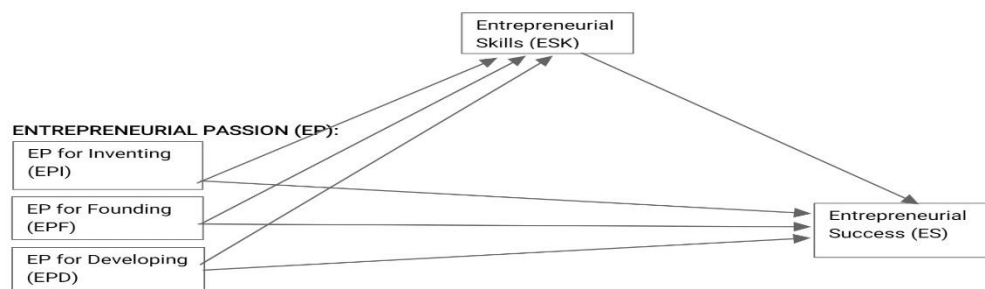


Figure 1 Above. Propose a Conceptual Framework Of Entrepreneurial Passion And Entrepreneurial Success Mediated By Entrepreneurial Skills

SOURCE: Authors Model (2023)

2.6 Empirical Review

2.6.1 Entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial success

Hu et al. (2022) carried out a study on entrepreneurial Passion and entrepreneurial success: The role of Psychological Capital and entrepreneurial policy support. Their findings show that entrepreneurial passion has a significant positive impact on entrepreneurial success. They showed that entrepreneurial passion is a must-have for anyone on the road to success. In their work, they explained that passion is the driving force that makes an individual achieve set goals and objectives despite the challenges and difficulties encountered in trying to achieve them.

Chen et al. (2022) carried out a study on "The impact of entrepreneurial passion on entrepreneurial Success and Psychological well-being: a person-centered investigation". They find that entrepreneurial passion has important implications for entrepreneurial success and psychological well-being. Their study findings based on identity theory further explained that a fully passionate entrepreneur showed the highest level of entrepreneurial success, followed by action-driven and interest-driven entrepreneurs, while dispassionate entrepreneurs showed the lowest level of entrepreneurial success. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

H0₁: Entrepreneurial passion for inventing influences the entrepreneurial success in a plateau state.

H0₂: Entrepreneurial passion for founding influences the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State.

H0₃: Entrepreneurial passion for development influences the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State.

2.6.2 Entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial skills

Extant literature (Hu et al., 2022) has shown that people with entrepreneurial passion increase their capacity to achieve entrepreneurial goals and improve their skill acquisition through ethical and legal means, not minding the challenges and difficulties involved in such a process. Entrepreneurial passion motivates entrepreneurial behavior to acquire skills to ensure entrepreneurial success.

Lohor and Nguwap (2018) carried out a study to "assess entrepreneur's characteristics among small businesses in Jos South LGA of Plateau State". Their findings showed that many factors determine business success, but the entrepreneur himself or herself is the major determinant of business success. In their conclusion, they submitted that the entrepreneur's business knowledge and craftsmanship played roles. Having complementary skills and talents to take care of his weaknesses but the characteristic (the personality of the entrepreneur) is even more important (Oyeku, Oduyoye, Asikhia, Kabuoh, & Elemo, 2014). This results in the following hypothesis:

H0₄: Entrepreneurial passion for inventing influences the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in the Plateau State.

H0₅: Entrepreneurial passion for founding influences the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in a Plateau State.

H0₆: Entrepreneurial passion for developing influence on acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in the Plateau State.

2.6.3 Entrepreneurial skills and entrepreneurial success

Entrepreneurs must have special skills and abilities to succeed (Thom 2016). Entrepreneurial skills are necessary ingredients that enhance entrepreneurial performance, and are therefore vital in achieving success (Abdullah & Mansor, 2018). Entrepreneurial success is inseparable from a person's entrepreneurial skills (Hu et al., 2022).

Jardim (2021) conducted a study on "entrepreneurial skills to be successful in the global and digital world: proposal for a frame of references for entrepreneurial education". They found that for most professionals to succeed in the current job market, they needed some entrepreneurial skills. In his submission, he asserted that entrepreneurial skills are essential to success in the 21st century. A large number of success in entrepreneurship and venture capital can be attributed to skills (Gompers, Kovner, Lerner, & Scharfstein, 2006).

Odia and Odia (2013) carry out an empirical study on "Developing Entrepreneurial Skills and Transforming Challenges into Opportunities in Nigeria." The findings of their study show that entrepreneurship education in Nigeria should refocus on the teaching and training of students to inculcate entrepreneurial skills that can help students to be creative, innovatively develop feasible business plans, and set up new business ventures. Thus, we hypothesize as follows:

H0₇: Entrepreneurial skills influence the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State.

2.6.4 Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Skills between Entrepreneurial Passion and Entrepreneurial Success

Entrepreneurial skills are related to the ability to develop or create new things that add value to society and generate monetary benefits for the entrepreneur (Ibrahim & Mas'ud, 2016). These skills and competencies are needed to develop innovative products and services to solve problems and enable a person to run an enterprise successfully (Suleiman et al., 2020). Thus, it is vital to business performance and essential for achieving business entrepreneurial success.

Entrepreneurial skills enable individuals to develop greater capacities that increase the likelihood of success in entrepreneurial ventures (Gieure, del Mar Benavides-Espinosa, & Roig-Dobón, 2020). Thus, entrepreneurial skills being the way to go (Olabiya, Ojo, & Olayinka, 2021) play a vital role in ensuring

business success (Lohor & Nguwap, 2018). The acquisition of these skills is motivated by entrepreneurial passion (EP). Therefore, understanding how entrepreneurial skills mediate the influence of EP on ES accounts for the increase in SME success (Chen et al., 2022). Entrepreneurial passion is about equipping SMEs owners with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for business success. It is also a tool available to motivate an individual to increase their skills and abilities to achieve great success (Hu et al., 2022).

Moreover, the internal influence mechanism of entrepreneurial passion on entrepreneurial success remains insufficient in academic circles (Chen et al., 2022). Hence, this study analyzes the influence of entrepreneurial passion through entrepreneurial skills on entrepreneurial success. Based on the theoretical framework of human capital theory (Becker, 1964, 1994), also supported by effectuation theory, we advance our argument that entrepreneurial skills enhance entrepreneurial passion to achieve entrepreneurial success (ES). In line with this, the following hypotheses are proposed in alternative form:

H0₈: Entrepreneurial skills mediate the influence of entrepreneurial passion for inventing on the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State

H0₉: Entrepreneurial skills mediate the influence of entrepreneurial passion for founding on entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State

H0₁₀: Entrepreneurial skills mediate the influence of entrepreneurial passion for developing on entrepreneurial success in SMEs in Plateau State

3. Research methodology

The study adopted the positivism paradigm, which is based on the assumption that a single tangible reality exists that can be understood, identified, and measured (Park, Konge, & Artino Jr, 2020). The study used a questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 337 out of the total population of 2125 SMEs in the Jos North and South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, according to the Taro Yamane Formula. The researchers used a 5-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Data obtained from the field were quantitatively analyzed using PLS-SEM version 3.0.

3.1 Measurement of the research variables

These variables were measured by adapting item scales developed by previous scholars drawn from the existing literature, in which modifications were made to suit the study context.

Entrepreneurial passion was measured by adapting the scale of item developed by Cardon and Kirk (2015) and Cardon et al. (2009). The factor loadings exceeded 0.70 thresholds, so were accepted for the model. Reliability was calculated using two measures: Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). Passion for inventing seemed reliable, with CA = 0.905, CR = 0.905, and AVE = 0.785. Passion for founding was also reliable (CA = 0.639, CR = 0.873, AVE = 0.604), as was passion for developing (CA = 0.898, CR = 0.900, AVE = 0.771).

Entrepreneurial skills were measured by adapting the scale developed by Gieure et al. (2020). The calculated reliability and convergent validity values were CA = 0.916, CR = 0.920, and AVE = 0.596, which are all acceptable.

Entrepreneurial success was measured by adapting (Fisher, Maritz, & Lobo, 2014). The reliability and convergent validity of the remaining items were satisfactory (CA = 0.839, CR = 0.864, AVE = 0.680).

3.2 Ethical consideration

Privacy and activity confidentiality are essential in all areas of study. Hence, we ensure that our target audiences and the organization have a right to their private life, and should be protected from public scrutiny of their private life (Bender, Jarmin, Kreuter, & Lane, 2020). Therefore, the researcher ascertained that the respondents and participants were well-informed about the background and purpose of this research. The researcher confidentially treated every respondent's response.

4. Results and discussions

The study obtained a 91.1% response rate because the researchers self-administered the questionnaires, which were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The importance of PLS-SEM emanates from its quality to examine predictive applications, theory establishment, and justification (Chin, 1998; Li et al., 2020). This is suitable for measuring the direct and mediating effects in the same path model. Recently, this software has been considered a silver bullet in the field of management science and behavioral research (Li et al., 2020).

4.1 Measurement Model Analysis

The reliability and validity of the adapted measurement scales were assessed before estimation was performed. The Construct and composite reliability of the variables were measured using α (Brown, 2002). As indicated in Table 6.

Table 6. Construct Reliability And Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
EPI	2	0.898	0.905	0.905	0.785
	3	0.940			
	4	0.759			
	5	0.941			
EPF	1	0.732	0.639	0.873	0.604
	2	0.780			
	3	0.750			
	4	0.853			
EPD	5	0.765	0.898	0.900	0.771
	1	0.886			
	2	0.927			
	3	0.750			
ESK	4	0.937	0.916	0.920	0.596
	1	0.760			
	2	0.758			
	3	0.746			
ES	4	0.776	0.839	0.864	0.680
	5	0.799			
	6	0.763			
	7	0.768			
ES	8	0.816	0.839	0.864	0.680
	9	0.762			
	1	0.891			
	2	0.920			
ES	3	0.786	0.839	0.864	0.680
	4	0.681			

4.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was also measured using both criteria of the Fornell–Larcker and Hetero-trait and Mono-trait ratio (HTMT). Discriminant validity values are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. Discriminant Validity Fonell Lacker Craterion

	EPD	EPF	EPI	ES	ESK
EPD	0.878				
EPF	-0.199	0.777			
EPI	0.983	-0.182	0.886		
ES	0.949	-0.218	0.964	0.825	
ESK	0.852	-0.216	0.881	0.932	0.772

Table 8. Discriminant Validity Heterotriat Monotriat Ratio (Htmt)

	EPD	EPF	EPI	ES	ESK
EPD					
EPF	1.209				
EPI	1.09	0.189			
ES	1.075	0.255	1.088		
ESK	1.918	0.241	0.945	0.07	

Table 9. R-Square

	R-square	R-square Adjusted
ES	0.962	0.962
ESK	0.785	0.783

Table 10. F-Square

	EPD	EPF	EPI	ES	ESK
EPD				0.003	0.031
EPF				0.009	0.02
EPI				0.014	0.269
ES					0.801
ESK					

4.3 Structural Model Analysis

The structural model was evaluated using the PLS-SEM software version 3.0. The fitness of the structural model was assessed with the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value, as suggested by Henseler, Hubona, and Ray (2016). Therefore, the value of SRMR for the proposed model is 0.07, which shows the overall fitness of the model.

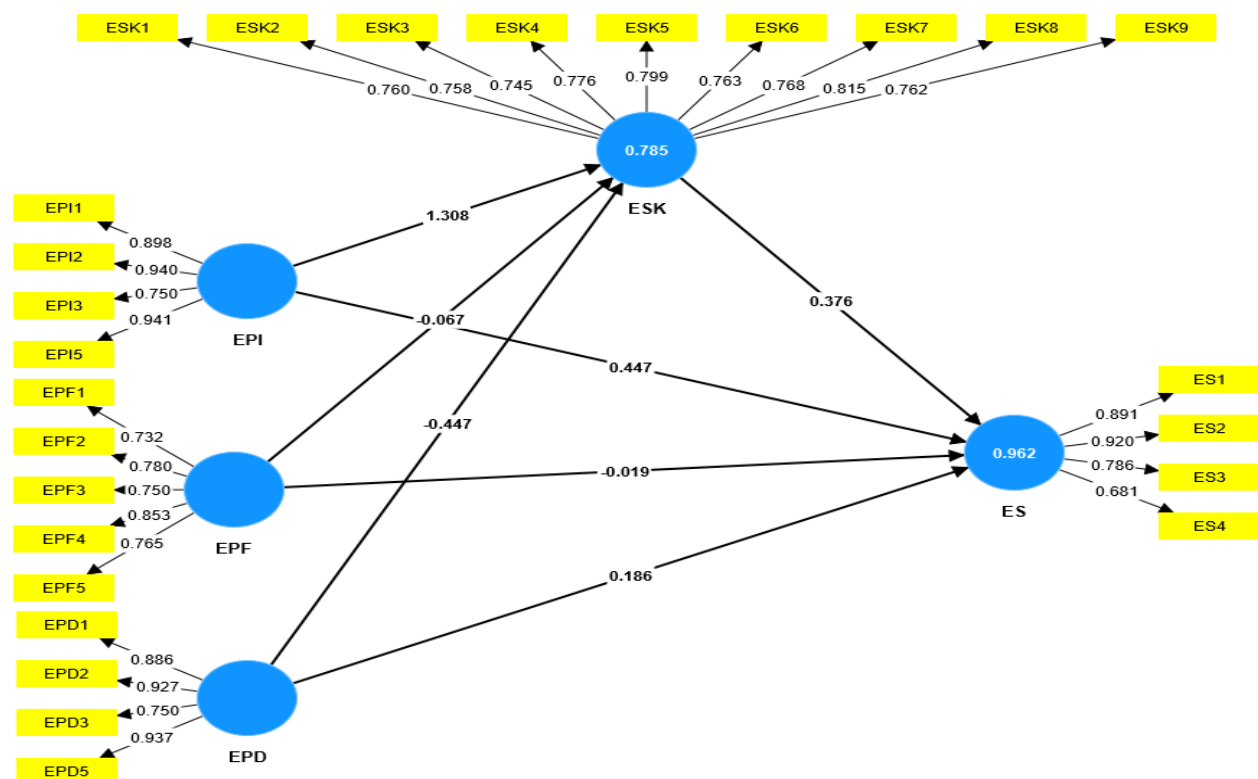


Figure 3: Structural Model

Table 11. Colliniarity Statistics Vif Inner Model

	EPD	EPF	EPI	ES	ESK
EPD				30.752	29.819
EPF				1.068	1.047
EPI				37.598	29.621
ES					
ESK				4.661	

4.4 Hypotheses Testing and Discussion

Decision Rule: If the P-value is less than 5% (0.05), the null hypothesis is rejected; otherwise, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. The results are summarized as follows.

Direct effects

Table 12. Path Analysis (Direct Effects)

Hypotheses	Relationships	T. Values	P. Values	Accept/Reject
HO ₁	EPI -> ES	2.696	0.007	Reject H0
HO ₂	EPF -> ES	1.683	0.093	Accept H0
HO ₃	EPD-> ES	1.108	0.268	Accept H0
HO ₄	EPI -> ESK	6.841	0.000	Reject H0
HO ₅	EPF-> ESK	2.419	0.016	Reject H0
HO ₆	EPD->ESK	2.249	0.023	Reject H0
HO ₇	ESK->ES	9.385	0.000	Reject H0

The hypotheses were tested with bootstrapping to identify the significance level of all the research measurement constructs, as shown in Tables 12 and 13 and Figure 3.

HO₁ The result revealed that Entrepreneurial passion for inventing (EPI) positively influences entrepreneurial success ($\beta = 0.447$, $t = 2.696$, $p = 0.007$) at a significance level of 0.05. Based on the P-values in Table 12, EPI has a positive and significant influence on ES. This finding is consistent with that of related studies in other settings (Anderson et al., 2018; Fesharaki, 2019). This means that an increase in EPI increases ES by 44.7%, as seen from the structural model in fig 3.

HO₂ The result reveal that entrepreneurial passion for founding (EPF) alone does not influence the entrepreneurial success (ES) of SMEs in Plateau State. The findings reveal that EPF alone has a negative and insignificant influence on entrepreneurial success ($\beta = -0.019$, $t = 1.683$, $P = 0.093$). With a P-value of 0.093 greater than the alpha value of 0.05, we can conclude that our result is not significant. This means that an increase in EPF without skills decreases the ES of SMEs in Plateau State by 1.9%.

HO₃ The result revealed that entrepreneurial passion for development (EPD) has a negative and insignificant influence on entrepreneurial success ($\beta = -0.186$, $t = 1.108$, $p = 0.268$). That is, 'an increase in EPD alone decreases the ES of SMEs in Plateau State by 18.6%. This shows that EPD alone does not translate into SMEs' success in the Plateau State. These results support the view of (Fesharaki, 2019) who stated that EPD requires economic resources and firm strategic financial planning. The EPD largely depends on the economic conditions.

H0₄ The result revealed that EPI has a positive and significant influence on entrepreneurial skills acquisition ($\beta = 1.308$, $t = 6.841$, $p = 0.000$). This means that an increase in EPI increased entrepreneurial skill acquisition by 130.8%. This shows that people with entrepreneurial passion increase their ability to achieve entrepreneurial success, thereby improving their skill acquisition through ethical and legal means, not minding the challenges and difficulties involved in such a process (Hu et al., 2022). The connection between entrepreneurial passion for inventing and entrepreneurial skills acquisition is supported by the human capital theory, as the entrepreneurial decision to invent is based on the entrepreneur's skills and abilities.

H0₅ The result revealed that EPF had a significant influence on entrepreneurial skills acquisition ($\beta = -0.067$, $t = 2.419$, $p = 0.016$). Entrepreneurs who have a passion for founding can go the extra mile to acquire the skills and abilities required for SME success. The theory suggests that entrepreneurial passion for founding significantly influences the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in Nigeria.

H0₆ We found that entrepreneurial passion for developing (EPD) significantly influences entrepreneurial skill acquisition ($\beta = -0.447$, $t = 0.249$, $p = 0.023$). These findings agree with the results of Hu et al. (2022), who posited that people with entrepreneurial passion increase their attention to achieve entrepreneurial goals and improve their skills acquisition through whatever ethical and legal means are possible, not minding the challenges and difficulties involved in such a process.

H0₇ revealed that entrepreneurial skills (ESK) have a positive and significant influence on entrepreneurial success ($\beta = 0.376$, $t = 9.385$, $p = 0.023$). This value implies that a unit increase in entrepreneurial skills acquisition increases entrepreneurial success by 37.6%. The theory also suggests that entrepreneurial skill acquisitions positively lead to entrepreneurial success in Nigeria. This aligns with the work of Abdullah and Mansor (2018), and Jardim (2021) who submitted that entrepreneurial skills are the necessary ingredients that enhance entrepreneurial performance and therefore vital in achieving great success. A person's entrepreneurial success is inseparable from the or person's entrepreneurial skills (Hu et al., 2022).

Mediation effects

Table 13. Specific Indirect Effects

Hypotheses	Relationships	T. Values	P. Values	Accept/Reject
HO ₈	EPI->ESK->ES	5.689	0.000	Reject H0
HO ₉	EPF->ESK->ES	2.315	0.021	Reject H0
HO ₁₀	EPD->ESK->ES	2.201	0.028	Reject H0

Complementary (partial mediation)

HO₈ The result showed that the total and specific indirect influences of entrepreneurial skills on the relationship between entrepreneurial passion for inventing and success were positive and significant (complementary partial mediation). This means that the relationships between EPI and ESK, between ESK and ES, and between EPI and ES are all positive and significant. The findings explain that entrepreneurial skills mediate the influence of entrepreneurial passion on inventing entrepreneurial success ($t = 5.689$, $P < 0.000$), which is also shown in the mediation results in Table 13. This agrees with the work of Abdullah and Mansor (2018), and Jardim (2021) who submitted that entrepreneurial skills are the necessary ingredients that enhance entrepreneurial performance and are therefore vital in achieving great success. A person's entrepreneurial success is inseparable from the or person's entrepreneurial skills (Hu et al., 2022).

Here, all other situations under the condition that both the direct effect "EPI on ES" and indirect effect "EPI on ESK, ESK on ES" point in the same positive and significant direction (Baron and Kenny, 1986), which indicated that a portion of the effect of EPI on ES is mediated through ESK, while EPI still explains a portion of ES that is independent of ESK. This complementary mediation hypothesis suggests

that the intermediate variable, ESK, explains, complements, and confirms the relationship between EPI and ES.

Indirect only (full mediation)

The results of Hypothesis **HO₉** revealed full mediation ($t = 2.315$, $P < 0.021$). The relationships between 'EPF and ESK, ESK, and ES' were significant, whereas EPF and ES were not significant. This implies that only an indirect effect via the mediator (ESK) exists. In other words, the effect of EPF on ES was completely transmitted with the help of ESK. Technically speaking, the EPF extracts its influence only under certain ESK on ES. This means that entrepreneurial passion for founding influences success through entrepreneurial skills. The entrepreneurial success of SMEs is inseparable from their skills (Hu et al., 2022).

HO₁₀ Just like hypothesis nine above, the results explain that entrepreneurial skills fully mediate the influences of entrepreneurial passion for developing on the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State ($t = 2.201$, $p < 0.028$), as shown in the mediation results in Table 13 above. The influence of EPD on ESK and ESK on ES is significant, while EPD on ES is not; hence, the reason for full mediation.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The objectives of this study were to examine the mediating influence of entrepreneurial skills on entrepreneurial passion in achieving the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in plateau Nigeria. Therefore, the findings of this study, in line with the objectives stated above, are as follows:

1. Entrepreneurship and SMEs form the bedrock of economic growth and development.
2. The findings from Hypothesis One revealed that a person with entrepreneurial passion for inventing leads to entrepreneurial success. The connection between entrepreneurial passion for inventing and entrepreneurial success is supported by human capital theory and effectuation theory, as the entrepreneurial decision to invent is based on the entrepreneur's human capital. This finding is consistent with those of related studies in other settings (Anderson et al., 2018; Fesharaki, 2019).
3. Findings from Hypothesis Two showed a negative relationship between entrepreneurial passion for founding and the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State. These findings contradict the results of Fesharaki (2019), who posited a positive relationship between entrepreneurial passion and entrepreneurial success.
4. In line with hypothesis two, the findings from hypothesis three reveal interesting results: EPD does not influence ES. The EPD did not have an impact on entrepreneurial success. This is because passion for development depends heavily on economic conditions (Fesharaki, 2019). These findings contradict the results of Hatak, Chang, Harms, and Wiklund (2021); Hu et al. (2022) who stated that Success in entrepreneurship most especially in the young venture stage likely depends on activities that relate to developing, founding, and inventing. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that individuals with higher levels of passion for inventing and founding are keener to discover novel ways of doing business differently, as well as ensuring their business growth, and thus report a higher passion for inventing in their entrepreneurial success.
5. Findings from hypothesis four revealed that entrepreneurial passion for inventing influences the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by SMEs in Plateau State. This is because people with entrepreneurial passion increase their attention to achieve entrepreneurial goals and improve their skill acquisition (Hu et al., 2022).
6. Similar to hypothesis four, findings from hypothesis five also revealed the influence of entrepreneurial passion for founding in the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Entrepreneurs who have a passion for founding can go an extra mile to acquire the necessary skills and abilities to succeed.
7. The findings from hypothesis six also revealed a positive relationship between entrepreneurial passion for developing and entrepreneurial skills acquisition. These findings support those of Hu et al. (2022).
8. hypothesis seven revealed a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial skills and the entrepreneurial success of SMEs in Plateau State. The findings show that a unit increase in

entrepreneurial skills acquisition greatly increases entrepreneurial success by 37.6%. This is so because entrepreneurs and SME owners who have acquired some skills can translate those skills into a successful venture

9. The findings for hypothesis eight revealed complementary partial mediation. Entrepreneurial skills are the necessary ingredients that enhance entrepreneurial performance and are therefore vital in achieving great success (Abdullah & Mansor, 2018; Jardim, 2021). A person's entrepreneurial success is inseparable from the or person's entrepreneurial skills (Hu et al., 2022). This shows that passionate entrepreneurs with entrepreneurial skills and abilities tend to perform much better than those who do not have any skills.
10. Hypothesis nine and ten revealed indirect only mediation (full mediation). The findings indicate that the direct effect was not significant, whereas the indirect effect was significant. This implies that only an indirect effect via the mediator (ESK) exists. In other words, the effect of EPF and EPD on ES is completely transmitted with the help of ESK. Technically, the EP for founding and developing extracts its influence only under a certain condition of ESK on ES. Entrepreneurial skills are the necessary ingredients that enhance entrepreneurial performance and are therefore vital to achieving great success. This shows that passionate entrepreneurs with entrepreneurial skills and abilities tend to perform much better than those who do not have any skills.
11. Findings from the study further revealed that passionate and highly skilled entrepreneurs achieve entrepreneurial success compared with those who do not. These findings are consistent with human capital theory and effectuation theory, which show that highly educated and skilled persons earn more than others, and entrepreneurs with human capital outcomes, such as knowledge, skills, and abilities, tend to be more successful (Etim et al., 2022; Marvel et al., 2016).

Successive governments have enacted various programmes and policies to develop entrepreneurship and SMEs. However, people saddled with this responsibility because corruption ends up targeting the wrong people (Odalonu, 2022), thereby empowering their family, friends, and tribal, religious, and political associates (Page & Okeke, 2022).

5. Conclusion

This study shows that Entrepreneurship and SMEs are the backbone of economic growth and development in a country (e.g., Budianto et al., (2022); Adisa et al., (2014)). However, entrepreneurs and SMEs owners in Nigeria and other developing economies lack the necessary entrepreneurial skills and abilities to translate their passion into a successful venture. Hence, there is a reason for high business failure. Entrepreneurs are driven by passion but often lack the necessary skills for success. However, the few who have these skills lack passion for success. Therefore, to be a successful entrepreneur, passion must be complemented by necessary skills and abilities. Passion alone, without the necessary skills, might not translate to success. Evidence also shows that the mere possession of financial resources without the necessary skills for execution does not translate to entrepreneurial success, as skills are required to allocate and channel those resources effectively and efficiently in a challenging environment. Moreover, entrepreneurial passion for developing relatively required economic resources and a firm's strategic financial planning and support (Fesharaki, 2019). This study provides evidence that skill acquisition is necessary to achieve meaningful success. This is the reason why hypotheses eight, nine and ten reveal that entrepreneurial skills mediate the influences of entrepreneurial passion on entrepreneurial success.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the responses and results of the findings obtained from the analyses, the researcher proffers the following recommendations were made:

1. The government, as a way of encouraging entrepreneurial development, should carefully and diligently select and train people who have a passion for business to acquire the necessary requisite skills before awarding any grants to such people.
2. The government, as a way of awarding grants and loans to people, should avoid selecting people based on political or family affiliation, but should be selected based on merit.

3. There must be passion and the necessary skills to be successful in any endeavor. SME owners, entrepreneurs, and organizations are recommended to acquire the right skills and abilities for success. Because entrepreneurs need knowledge, skills and abilities to add value to their businesses and be entrepreneurially successful.
4. The government and other spirited individuals should motivate their citizenry to develop entrepreneurial passion because this passion can further motivate them to go the extra mile and acquire entrepreneurial skills to be self-employed.
5. Nigerian institutions of learning should ensure that they teach students practical skills, instead of the theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship.
6. Future researchers are urged to perform a longitudinal study within the SMEs sector, which can shed light on the causal effects of the research constructs on each other and observe the changing trends throughout the years during the research period.

5.2 Practical Contribution

The study helps successful entrepreneurs, business owners, managers, and aspiring entrepreneurs learn and obtain the necessary skills, knowledge, and information that make a successful entrepreneurial venture. Thus, reducing SMEs' failure and eventually resulting in SMEs' success, reducing unemployment and poverty, improving citizens' living standards, and spurring nations' socioeconomic growth and development.

5.3 Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the knowledge in this field and serves as a reference point for scholars, consultants, and academicians. This also serves as an additional piece of the literature on entrepreneurship.

5.4 Policy Contribution

The study helps government and non-governmental organizations formulate policies and programs that will encourage entrepreneurial participation, education, and skills acquisition, as well as enhance the socio-economic and living standards of the people via entrepreneurship in Plateau State, Nigeria, and the world at large.

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