

**THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF  
SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE POULTRY FARMERS IN UMUAHIA  
METROPOLIS OF ABIA STATE, NIGERIA**

**Okezie, Chidinma Rosemary**

Department of Agribusiness & Management  
College of Agricultural Economics, Rural Sociology and Extension  
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike  
PMB 7267 Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria  
Phone: +2348052469820  
E-mail: [rosynma2003@gmail.com](mailto:rosynma2003@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*This study assessed the role of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of small and medium scale poultry farmers in Umuahia Metropolis of Abia State. Primary data were used for data collection with the use of a well-structured questionnaire. Two-stage sampling procedure was used to select 100 poultry entrepreneurs from the two local government areas in Umuahia metropolis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data collected. Majority (65%) of the poultry entrepreneurs were males, with an average of six years farming experience, the mean age of 44 years was recorded, 89% were literates, Majority (38%) of the owners of poultry farms had a stock size of 51 – 100 birds and 50% of the poultry entrepreneurs had a range of annual income of ₦100,001 - ₦200,000 with an annual average income of ₦172,000. The correlation between entrepreneurial skills and performance of poultry SMEs ( $r = .578$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicates the existence of a positive significant relationship and that the variables are linearly related at 1% probability level. The coefficient for educational level, farm experience, farm/stock size, training needs and entrepreneurial skills were all positively signed and significant at 5% level of probability. Vaccination, use of drugs and poultry management ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively for training needs while goal oriented/ risk taking, creative thinking/planning and problem solving ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively for entrepreneurial skills among the poultry entrepreneurs. It is recommended that Government, Non- Governmental agencies and institutions who are major stakeholders in SMEs development should organize trainings, seminars and workshops which will improve SMEs entrepreneurs' managerial capabilities and trainings on entrepreneurial skills should be more of practical than theorizing its principles.*

**Key words:** entrepreneurial skills, training needs, performance.

**INTRODUCTION**

The level of economic growth of any region largely depends on the level of entrepreneurial activities in the region. Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship development have been globally acknowledged as instruments for achieving economic growth and development as well as employment creation (Rebecca, 2009). Therefore, knowledge-based human capital investment is a prerequisite for sustained growth and productivity of enterprises (Kerosi & Kayisime, 2013). They noted that a firm's competitive advantage stems from its entrepreneurial abilities, technical knowledge, and its adaptability to the internal and external business environment. One contributing factor to the success of SMEs depends on entrepreneurial characteristics and traits (Syamsuriana & Mohammed, 2014). Entrepreneurial characteristics ought to be combined to bring out the creative and innovative abilities in an individual who seeks to own a business.

According to Global Entrepreneurial Monitor (2012), Nigeria is a world leader in entrepreneurial spirit, and they believe they have necessary skills and knowledge. However, despite this report, the amount of failed SME has not reduced in recent years. The empirical studies of Bosire and Nzaramba (2013) in their findings, concluded that development of entrepreneurial skills could serve as a measure for improving the self-reliant of startups and established entrepreneurs. Similarly, Coric, Katavic, and Kopecki, (2011) claimed that entrepreneur's success depended on the connection of crucial entrepreneurial skills for starting businesses, as well as the survival and development in their early years. However, such study is still missing in Nigeria context to the best of the researcher knowledge. This study, therefore, intends to examine the role of these skills on SMEs growth.

Entrepreneurship is the application of creativity and innovation to solve problems and attempt to exploit opportunities (Conceicao, Moeljadi, Rohman, & Solimun, 2014). According to (Tambwe, 2015), entrepreneurship is the way of thinking, reasoning, and acting that results in the creation, enhancement, realization and renewal of the value of the individual, group, organization and society. The entrepreneur seeks out investment opportunities and assumes the risk of establishing a business, which depends on the individuals' entrepreneurship skills. Entrepreneurial skills are the ability to combine both the innate characteristics and other resources, which depends on the individual's entrepreneurial skills (Moska, 2013). These skills complement the entrepreneur to analyze situations, opportunities and environments, and assist the entrepreneur/manager to organize, manage and assume the risks and rewards of a business or enterprise (Gakure, Ngugi, Waititi, & Keraro, 2013). These skills complement the entrepreneur to analyze situations, opportunities and environments, and assist the entrepreneur/manager to organize, manage and assume the risks and rewards of a business or enterprise (Gakure, Ngugi, Waititi, & Keraro, 2013). Skills are attained and developed through training (Zehra, 2016). Also, skills acquisition through training can provide a long-lasting solution to the survival battle of SMEs. According to (Afolabi & Macheke, 2012), the entrepreneurial skills essential for the success of SMEs include motivation, ability to gather resources, financial management, human resource management, marketing and technical skills while training needs are all those needs that can be fulfilled by imparting training to the participants of program and that training thereby will improve the productivity of the participants (Smith and Perks 2006). Training entrepreneurs in management training improves management competencies while skills training is a powerful tool for job creation (International Labor Organization, 2014). Studies by (Sajilan and Tehseen, 2016) indicate that entrepreneurial skills lead to venture performance and, expansion and growth; and contribute towards profitability and growth of business. Entrepreneurial competencies linked with behaviour and decision-making skills have been proven to influence business performance (Nieuwoudt, 2016).

The Nigerian poultry industry comprises about 180 million birds – Nigeria has the second largest chicken population in Africa after South Africa (SAHEL, 2015) – producing 650 000 tonnes of eggs and 300 000 tonnes of poultry meat in 2013 (FAOSTAT, 2017). Also, poultry meat according to research is an excellent source of most b-complex vitamins available to human beings especially niacin. It also supplies protein and amino acids.

Despite increased productivity of the industry in recent years, the industry has been faced with challenges. Oladiro et al. (2006) opined that the downward trend of poultry industry is attributed to poor knowledge of or experience in the management of the enterprise and high cost of feed. Sherief (2005) stated that entrepreneurship training/education that exposes farmers to life applicable issues is capable of helping them in adoption of new management practices and strengthen their confidence and ability to risk and accept a new technology. Cheeke (2002)

emphasized the need for improved poultry technologies that are capable of raising the farmers' agricultural production. He further stressed that these technologies are innovations and skills in selection of strains, brooding techniques, vaccination, handling, feed and feed techniques. To buttress more on this, Badi and Badi (2006) reported that entrepreneurship education/training provides cultural, social and technological awareness. In relation to this, Kuratko (2005) stressed that farmers will venture into new technologies if they are taught the likely pitfall they are probable to face and the possible strategy to curb them. This makes entrepreneurship training of great importance in adoption of new technologies.

Therefore, it is of great importance to assess and specify success factors that promote efficiency and survival of SMEs that could serve as Benchmarks for emerging SMEs. This study thus, assesses the role of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of small and medium scale poultry farmers with a view to making appropriate policy recommendation that will promote SMEs in the state and nation at large.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Umuahia Metropolis. Umuahia is the capital city of Abia State in south-eastern Nigeria. It is located along the rail road that lies between Port-Harcourt to Umuahia south and Enugu city to its north. It has a population of 359,230 (NPC 2006). Umuahia's indigenous ethnic group is the Igbo's. It is well known as being an agricultural market centre since 1916. It comprises of two local government areas: Umuahia north and Umuahia south.

Primary data were used for data collection with the use of a well-structured questionnaire. Two-stage sampling procedure was used to select 100 poultry farmers from the two LGAs (50 poultry farmers from each LGA). First stage involves random selection of 5 communities from each LGA, then second stage is random selection of 10 poultry farmers from each community through the list of poultry entrepreneurs generated from the agricultural development programme (ADP) resident officers in the two LGAs.

Data were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient and ordinary least square methods.

### **Specification of Model**

The ordinary least square regression model was implicitly specified as:

$$Y = F(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6, X_7, X_8, e) \dots\dots\dots \text{eqtn 1}$$

Where:

Y = Performance of SMEs (profit in ₦)

X<sub>1</sub> = Gender (dummy variable; 1=male, 0=females)

X<sub>2</sub> = Age (yrs)

X<sub>3</sub> = Educational level (yrs)

X<sub>4</sub> = income level (₦)

X<sub>5</sub> = flock size (Number of birds reared)

X<sub>6</sub> = Training needs (mean rating scale of training needs)

X<sub>7</sub> = Entrepreneurial skill (mean rating scale of entrepreneurial skills)

X<sub>8</sub> = access to credit (dummy: accessed = 1, otherwise 0)

e = Error term

### **Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient**

$$r = \frac{n\sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2} \sqrt{n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}}$$

Where:

r=correlation coefficient

Y= training needs (mean rating scale of training needs)

X= entrepreneurial skills (mean rating scale of entrepreneurial skills)

n= sample size

**5 Point Likert Scale range**

Strongly disagree	=	5
Disagree	=	4
Undecided	=	3
Agree	=	2
Strongly Agree	=	1

The value of the five responses were added and further divided by 5 to obtain 3 which was regarded as the mean of participation.

Any result with the mean score of 3.0 and above is accepted while the result with the mean score of less than 3.0 is rejected.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Socio-economic Characteristics of the poultry farmers**

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1a:** Distribution of farmers based on socio-economic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	65	65.00
Female	35	35.00
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	62	62.00
Single/separated	30	30.00
Divorced	2	2.00
Widowed	6	6.00
<b>Age</b>		
21 -30	7	7.00
31 -40	29	29.00
41 -50	41	41.00
51 -60	18	18.00
61 – 70	5	5.00
<b>Mean</b>	<b>44</b>	
<b>Std dev</b>	<b>11.27</b>	
<b>Educational level</b>		
No formal Education	11	11.00
Primary	20	20.00
Secondary	48	48.00
Tertiary	21	21.00
<b>Farm experience</b>		
1 – 5	50	50.00
6 – 10	34	34.00
11 – 20	11	11.00
21 –30	5	5.00
<b>Mean</b>	<b>6.55</b>	
<b>Std dev</b>	<b>1.08</b>	
<b>Location</b>		
Urban	25	25.00

Peri -Urban	33	33.00
Rural	42	42.00
<b>Farm/stock size</b>		
1 – 50birds	20	20.00
51 – 100birds	38	38.00
101 – 150birds	24	24.00
151 – 200 birds	10	10.00
201– 250 birds	8	8.00
<b>Mean</b>	<b>99.5</b>	
<b>Std dev</b>	<b>47.21</b>	
Income/annum		
1 - ₦100,000	20	20.00
₦100,001-₦200,000	50	50.00
₦200,001- ₦300,000	18	18.00
₦300,001 - ₦400000	12	12.00
<b>Mean</b>	<b>172000.43</b>	
<b>Std Dev</b>	<b>8952.21</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Survey Data 2018**

The result showed that majority (65%) of the poultry entrepreneurs were males, with an average of six (6) years farming experience. The level of experience is an important factor as it is a major determinant of their managerial acumen (Eze *et al*, 2000). The mean age of forty-four (44) years was recorded, showing that they were in their productive age. GEM (2012) noted that young and active entrepreneur can develop more competence to manage business when compared to their older counterparts. Most of the respondents were married (62%) and 89% were literates showing that majority of poultry owners can read and write and, most importantly can read manuscripts and labels of feeds, poultry medications and drugs. This result is in line with Ezeibe et al. (2011) who reported that if more educated farmers would continue to take up poultry production as a business in the future, then the production of meat and eggs will sustain the provision of meat protein to the teeming population in Nigeria. Majority (38%) of the owners of poultry farms had a stock size of 51 – 100 birds followed by 101 – 150 stock size with mean stock of ninety- nine (99). The small stock size may be attributed to high mortality rate due to low trainings on entrepreneurial skills and poultry management practices. Udoh (2010) reported that poultry farmers in Akwa Ibom State expanded their stock size due to trainings acquired on improved poultry techniques.

About 50% of the poultry entrepreneurs had a range of annual income of ₦100,001 - ₦200,000 with an annual average income of ₦172,000 and standard deviation of 8952.21 while only 12% of the poultry entrepreneurs had an annual income range of ₦300,001- ₦400,000. Poultry entrepreneurs could increase their annual income by attending entrepreneurial skills and trainings to learn new techniques in poultry productions and management that will enhance their performance.

**Table 1b: Descriptive statistics**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Performance</b>	25.000	5.333	12.000	35.000
<b>Skills</b>	27.086	4.129	19.000	33.000

**Source: Survey Data, 2018.**

The poultry entrepreneurs’ opinion on entrepreneurship skills indicated a high level of entrepreneurship skills with mean of 27 while performance of poultry SMEs was also moderate, with mean of 25. The standard deviations for performance (5.333) and entrepreneurial skills (4.128) were less than their means indicating low variance effects within each group.

**Relationship between entrepreneurial skill and performance**

The result in Table 2 shows the relationship between the entrepreneurial skills and performance of the poultry farmers in the study area.

**Table 2. Pearson product correlation coefficient between the entrepreneurial skill and performance in the study area**

	Performance of SMEs	of	Entrepreneurial skills
<b>Performance of SMEs</b>	Pearson correlation	1	.578***
	Sig: (2 tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
<b>Entrepreneurial skills</b>	Pearson correlation	.578***	1
	Sig: (2 tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

*Source: Survey Data, 2018.* \*\*\* = Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

The correlation between entrepreneurial skills and performance of poultry SMEs ( $r = .578, p < .01$ ) indicates the existence of a positive significant relationship and that the variables are linearly related at 1% probability level. This implies that a variation in the level of entrepreneurial skills is associated to a variation in the level of poultry enterprise. This result is in corroboration with Sajilan and Tesheen, (2016) who asserted that entrepreneurial skills led to venture performance and expansion of growth; and contribute towards profitability and growth of business.

**Effect of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of poultry SMEs**

The result in Table 3 shows the regression estimates of the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of poultry SMEs in the study area.

**Table 3. Regression estimates of the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of SMEs in the study area.**

Variables	+ Linear	Exponential	Double log	Semi-log
Constant	276227.309 (2.248)**	12.518 (39.070)***	130498.672 (0.813)	12.194 (29.827)***
Sex	1.169 (0.423)	0.052 (0.723)	14539.991 (0.545)	0.059 (0.871)
Age	63.960 (1.520)	0.013 (1.208)	32644.920 (1.063)	0.045 (0.574)
Educational level	7.033 (2.152)*	0.012 (-1.411)	55669.982 (-2.107)*	0.104 (-1.544)
Income level	2.77 (1.773)*	-0.045 (1.115)	-64833.553 (1.138)	-0.072 (0.494)
Farm size	3.111 (2.259)**	-0.080 (-2.229)*	-58299.131 (-1.602)	0.161 (-1.740) *
Training needs	6.913 (5.534)***	0.161 (4.932)***	331999.434 (6.37)***	0.804 (6.061)***
Entrepreneurial skills	52.683 (11.711)***	0.087 (0.460)	61842.0 (1.420)	0.105 (0.949)
Access to credit	45.210 (10.090)***	0.000 (-0.024)	-17135.627 (-0.638)	0.008 (0.115)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.569	0.419	0.528	0.498
R <sup>-2</sup>	0.500	0.328	0.454	0.417

F- Ratio	8.250***	4.604***	7.141***	6.191***
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**Source: Survey Data, 2018**

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* is significant at 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively, figures in parentheses are t – values, + = lead equation

The result showed that the linear functional form was the lead equation because of a high  $R^2$  value, number of significant variables and agreement with a *priori* expectations. The  $R^2$  value of 0.569 indicates 57% variability in poultry performance was explained by the independent variables. The f – ratio of 8.250 was significant at 1% level indicating goodness of fit of the regression line.

The coefficient for educational level, income, farm/stock size, training needs, entrepreneurial skills and access to credit were all positively signed and significant at different levels of probability. The implication is that any increase in any of these variables will result to increase or higher performance of the poultry SMEs and vice versa.

Educational level coefficient was positive and significant at 10% probability level. This means higher educational level acquired leads to higher performance of the enterprise. This finding is in line with Iguisi (2002) who opined that entrepreneurship training/education that exposes farmers to life applicable issues is capable of improving their performance. The high-level skills acquired after the training will definitely lead to improved and increased poultry production among the farmers.

The coefficient of income was also positive and statistically significant at 10% level. This implies that as the level of income realized from the poultry enterprise increases, entrepreneurs attend the entrepreneurship training in other to learn new and more techniques in poultry production that may enhance performance. Ezeibe et al. (2014) reported that, effect of income cannot be over stressed as it guarantees affordability thereby making poultry industry a pleasurable venture.

The coefficient of farm/stock size was positive and statistically significant at 5% level. The result implies that increase in the number birds reared, increases the profit of the entrepreneur and vice versa. This is *a priori* expected as increase in stock size may be attributed to entrepreneurial skills and trainings acquired by the poultry owners which is expected to increase sales and profit accruing from poultry enterprise. This result is in consonance with Udoh (2010) who noted that poultry farmers in Akwa Ibom State increased their flock size due to improved poultry techniques acquired.

Training needs coefficient was positive and highly significant at 1% probability level. This means that poultry entrepreneurs that acquired one form of training or the other on poultry production and management is expected to have high performance in their enterprise. Heenkenda and Chandrakumara, (2016) in their work stated that SMEs whose owners had technical knowhow, attitude towards work and managerial skills had positive significant association with profitability. Implications from this study were that training in business skills for SMEs was vital for enterprises' performance, growth and improved owner's living standard. This result is also in line with the findings of (Nai-Wen et al. 2008).

The coefficient of entrepreneurial skills was positive and highly significant at 1% probability level. This indicates that the more an entrepreneur acquires entrepreneurial skills, the higher the SMEs performance and vice versa. This result agrees with Yazeed and Ringim (2016) who reported a positive and significant effect of organizing and controlling skills on the performance of SMEs in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Also, this result is in line with Mohammed and Obeleagu- Nzelibe (2014) who studied entrepreneurial skills and profitability of SMEs in Nigeria and asserted that entrepreneurial skills are positively related to the business success of SMEs in Nigeria. Furthermore, Sajilan and Tesheen, (2016) reported that entrepreneurial skills

led to venture performance and expansion of growth; and contribute towards profitability and growth of business.

Coefficient of access to credit was positive and significant at 1% probability level. This implies that access to credit leads to higher performance of SMEs. Mecheke (2012) asserted that entrepreneurs who accessed loans and also had entrepreneurial skills performed above average than their counterparts. He stated that entrepreneurs had the ability to recognize potentially profitable business opportunities, risk takers and had the ability to align available resources to pursue business opportunities. Also, Oluyemi and Robert (2000) asserted that access to credit is of core importance to all aspects of the poultry industry as these may hinder expansion.

**Assessment of training needs and entrepreneurial skills.**

The result in Table 4 showed the rating sale assessment of training needs and entrepreneurial skills of the poultry entrepreneurs.

**Table 4. Rating scale assessment of training needs and entrepreneurial skills among the poultry farmers**

S/No	Training needs	Mean	Standard Dev.	Min	Max
1	Record keeping	2.89	1.072098	1	5
2	Poultry mgt.(debeaking, culling, brooding)	3.81	1.001968	1	5
3	Use of disinfectants	3.54	1.336511	1	5
4	Vaccination	4.30	.7587869	1	5
5	Marketing	2.33	1.044998	1	5
6	Breed of Birds	3.63	.9603766	1	5
7	Use of drugs	4.21	.820138	1	5
<b>No 100</b>					
S/No	Entrepreneurial Skills	Mean	Standard Dev.	Min	Max
1	Creative thinking /Planning	4.28	.8418354	1	5
2	Problem Solving	4.04	.983911	1	5
3	Financially Independent	1.96	.8867145	1	5
4	Communication	3.68	.9198155	1	5
5	Team- oriented	3.54	.9472981	1	5
6	Futuristic/Proactive	3.96	1.033969	1	5
7	Goal Oriented/ Risk Taking	4.47	.717107	1	5
<b>No 100</b>					

**Source: Survey Data 2018.** Figures in parentheses are rating frequencies

Vaccination, use of drugs and poultry management ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> with breeds of bird and use of disinfectant ranking 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively for training needs while, goal oriented/ risk taking, creative thinking/planning and problem solving ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> with futuristic/proactive, communication and team-oriented ranking 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> respectively for entrepreneurial skills among the entrepreneurs in the study area. The means were all greater than 3.00 indicating that the respondents were all in agreement that these training needs and entrepreneurial skills were important to them. The study of Coric, Katavic, and Kopecki, (2011) concluded that entrepreneurs need more entrepreneurial skills such as leadership, creativity and communication before their meaningful growth. (Buttner, & Gryskiewicz, 1993) reported that creative thinking and ability to solve economy or personal problems using the right style are keys to entrepreneurial growth. Also, the perception of creative thinking agrees to the investment theory of Sternberg and Wendy (1995) which stated that creativity is an essential skill that brings about the need to begin a venture. Furthermore, the study of Bosire and Nzaramba, (2013) identified creativity and communication as skills needed by entrepreneurs for business expansion.

Dollinger (2003) reported that communication should be the bedrock of business venture as information will be conveyed to customers through the communication channels. This result is



in line with Lind (2005), who opined that entrepreneurship growth entails the development of business skills such as communication and ability to solve problems. Furthermore, Osalor (2016), reported that an SMEs growth will require entrepreneurial and creative skills, ability to work with others (team- oriented) and a good method of communicating product to customers which can be developed through training.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a positive relationship between entrepreneurial skills and performance of poultry SMEs. Also, educational level, income level, farm/stock size, training needs, entrepreneurial skills and access to credit significantly influenced the performance of poultry entrepreneurs in the study area. Goal oriented/ risk taking, creative thinking/planning and problem- solving skills were identified as the most useful skills for poultry SMEs' growth.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. Government, Non-governmental agencies and institutions who are major stakeholders in SMEs development should organize trainings, seminars and workshops which will improve SMEs entrepreneurs' managerial capabilities and trainings on entrepreneurial skills should be more of practical than theorizing its principles.
2. Flexible arrangements should be put in place by sponsoring agents and financial institution for SMEs, to enable them access funds easily.

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