

Vocational Skill Acquisition And Entrepreneurial Competence Of Fashion Enterprises In Rivers State, Nigeria

Enweluzo, Theresa Nneka¹ and B. Chima Onuoha²

1. Doctoral Student, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt.
2. Professor of Management, Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt.

ABSTRACT: *This research was undertaken to explore the correlation between the acquisition of vocational skills and the entrepreneurial competencies within fashion enterprises located in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. This study examines the critical role of vocational skill training in fostering entrepreneurial competence within fashion enterprises. The acquisition of these pragmatic skills empowers business proprietors and managers to engage in astute decision-making, employ effective methodologies, and foster innovation to enhance productivity and sustainability. This study utilised a cross-sectional survey methodology. A total of 69 individuals, comprising fashion business owners, apprentices, and employees from registered fashion enterprises, were randomly chosen to constitute the study population. Data were generated through the administration and retrieval of a questionnaire. The results of the data analysis indicate that the acquisition of vocational skills significantly impacts the entrepreneurial competence within the fashion industry. Furthermore, there exists a robust positive correlation between technical skills and entrepreneurial competence, evidenced by a rho value of 0.643 and 0.727, accompanied by a P-value of 0.000, which is below the threshold of 0.05. The research further demonstrates a robust linear correlation between innovative abilities and entrepreneurial proficiency, evidenced by a P-value of 0.000 and correlation coefficients of 0.641 and 0.581. The research findings indicate that the acquisition of vocational skills significantly bolsters the entrepreneurial capabilities within the fashion industry. It was suggested, among other considerations, that fashion entrepreneurs should be motivated to engage in continuous vocational skill enhancement in areas such as garment construction, pattern making, and textile handling.*

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Competence, Innovative Skill, Technical Skill, Vocational Skill Acquisition

Introduction

Throughout the years, the global landscape has transformed into one characterised by entrepreneurial endeavours, where entrepreneurs are revered as pivotal figures for their contributions to the creation of competitive new economies and industries. Advancements in technology have enabled digital enterprises to function on a global scale, thereby transforming small organisations into international entities and local competitors into formidable global players. This has certainly deconstructed all commercial frameworks and, in turn, transformed the international regulations governing trade (Bernard & Umogbai, 2023). Individuals aiming to create a sustainable business, grow, and thrive in the global marketplace must engage in strategic analysis, perform accurate assessments, and hold the requisite expertise to manoeuvre through the intricacies of international trade (Anoke et al., 2022; Umar et al., 2018). The proficiency in entrepreneurship, which includes the ability to identify opportunities, allocate resources effectively, and manage risks, is crucial for achieving these objectives. The proficiency in entrepreneurship is a crucial element for a business's prosperity, as it includes the skills, knowledge, and mental frameworks required to identify opportunities and carry out business functions with efficacy. Mwaniki (2018) posits that entrepreneurs possessing heightened personal and professional skills are more inclined to achieve lasting organisational growth and sustainability. Furthermore, Man and Lau (2020) contend that the proficiency in entrepreneurship has a direct impact on strategic decision-making and the performance of organisations, especially within dynamic and competitive contexts.

All prosperous enterprises draw their vitality from the entrepreneurial skills involved in the management of a particular organisation (Oyakhire & Makpor, 2021). The fashion industry in Nigeria has experienced notable transformation and expansion, establishing itself as a crucial domain for economic engagement, especially for women and the youth. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (2020) asserts that the fashion industry has the potential to generate more than \$1 billion each year, underscoring its ability to significantly enhance job creation and foster economic development. Rivers State has witnessed considerable advancement in the realm of fashion enterprises, which includes tailoring, garment manufacturing, accessory design, and branding. The viability and competitive edge of fashion enterprises are fundamentally influenced by the business insight of their proprietors, which is profoundly moulded by the calibre and nature of vocational training undertaken. The process of acquiring vocational skills encompasses the exploration of technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial competencies through structured educational frameworks, often situated beyond conventional academic environments, aimed at equipping individuals for self-employment or the management of small enterprises (Okolocha & Baba, 2016). The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) emphasises the incorporation of vocational and entrepreneurial education across all levels of education as a strategy to foster self-employment and contribute to national development. Notwithstanding these endeavours, a significant number of small-scale fashion entrepreneurs in Nigeria function with inefficiency, primarily attributable to a lack of comprehensive business planning, limited market accessibility, and a deficiency in entrepreneurial preparedness (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). The deficiencies observed are predominantly a result of shortcomings

in vocational training programs, which tend to emphasise technical education at the expense of fostering entrepreneurial competencies. As a result, although numerous fashion designers in Rivers State may exhibit remarkable craftsmanship, they often fall short in the administrative and strategic skills essential for the enduring development and viability of their businesses.

A wealth of research has been conducted on the acquisition of vocational skills and the development of entrepreneurial competence. Ekpoh and Edet (2011) discerned a positive relationship between vocational education and entrepreneurial aspirations among Nigerian youth, noting that engagement with practical skills enhances individuals' self-assurance and inclination towards self-employment. Ayeni and Adedeji (2015) argue that vocational training centred on entrepreneurship enhances the cultivation of business management skills and decision-making capabilities, which are crucial for the success of enterprises. The limited availability of empirical research concerning vocational skill acquisition and entrepreneurial competency in the fashion industry in Rivers State, Nigeria, underscores the importance of this study. A dearth of research exists that has explored the relationship between occupational skill acquisition and entrepreneurial competence. As a result, our endeavour seeks to fill this void.

Statement of the Problem

Fashion enterprises persist in facing obstacles in developing the entrepreneurial acumen necessary for growth and long-term viability. A significant number of entrepreneurs lack adequate training in essential vocational and business skills, thereby constraining their ability to innovate and compete effectively in ever-evolving marketplaces (Umar et al., 2018). The inadequacy in capacity contributes significantly to diminished business longevity, sluggish growth, and a lack of responsiveness to market dynamics (Nwachukwu et al., 2017). The deficiency in skills within fashion entrepreneurship is apparent through insufficient business scalability, suboptimal brand positioning, and restricted market penetration (Umar et al., 2018). The majority of fashion entrepreneurs operate in an informal manner, often devoid of the strategic planning and networking skills essential for penetrating larger markets or obtaining investment (Anoke et al., 2022).

As a result, numerous enterprises struggle to advance past the initial startup stage, characterised by minimal profitability and constrained innovation (Nwachukwu et al., 2017). This scenario highlights a shortcoming in vocational training, which fails to equip fashion entrepreneurs with the essential skills required to adeptly manoeuvre through the complexities of a competitive business environment. The lack of entrepreneurship skills in fashion businesses negatively impacts their sustainability, resulting in higher rates of business failure and reduced contributions to local economic growth (Anoke et al., 2022). This shortcoming limits innovation, customer retention, and operational scalability, consequently diminishing the sector's competitiveness (Umar et al., 2018). The cultivation of vocational skills is paramount for fashion entrepreneurs, equipping them with the necessary technical and innovative proficiencies to create high-quality products, address market needs, and improve overall business efficacy (Nwachukwu et al., 2017). Nwodo et al. (2021) contend that the cultivation of strategic and networking competencies via vocational training empowers entrepreneurs to navigate competitive pressures, acquire essential resources, and attain enduring business sustainability. This study focusses on utilising vocational skill acquisition to tackle the issue of entrepreneurial competence within fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between vocational skill acquisition and entrepreneurial competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria. The objectives are to;

- i. Examine the relationship between technical skill and strategic competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- ii. Determine the relationship between technical skill and networking competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iii. Investigate the relationship between innovative skill and strategic competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- iv. Examine the relationship between innovative skill and networking competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions

- i. What is the relationship between technical skill and strategic competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- ii. How does technical skill relate to networking competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the nature of the relationship between innovative skill and strategic competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- iv. How does innovative skill relate to networking competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H01: There is no significant relationship between technical skill and strategic competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H02: There is no significant relationship between technical skill and networking competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H03: There is no significant relationship between innovative skill and strategic competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

H04: There is no significant relationship between innovative skill and networking competency of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in the competency-based theory of entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship competence theory posits that successful entrepreneurs possess specific competencies crucial for identifying opportunities, mobilising resources, and sustaining firm growth (Bird, 2019; Man et al., 2002). In contrast to personality theories that emphasise inherent traits, competency theory underscores attributes that can be acquired and enhanced through education, training, and experience (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013). This is particularly relevant in vocational education, where the emphasis is on developing technical and entrepreneurial skills. Boyatzis' (1992) competency-based theory of entrepreneurship asserts that entrepreneurs are prudent in making additional investments in their ventures until they have confidence in their competencies, utilising a due diligence process. In the event of a potential failure for the start-up, the due diligence modulator alerts the entrepreneur to return to the initial stage (formulation stage). The concept posits that entrepreneurs without internal expertise can obtain complementary skills via strategic partnerships. The growth, competitiveness, and success of the enterprise primarily depend on the efficiency and rapidity of competence deployment across these stages (Mishra & Zachary, 2014). The theory asserts that competencies are essential for the survival and sustainability of fashion enterprises. It highlights that proficiency in design, production, and business management improves competitiveness, which is crucial for the growth and sustainability of small and medium-sized fashion enterprises.

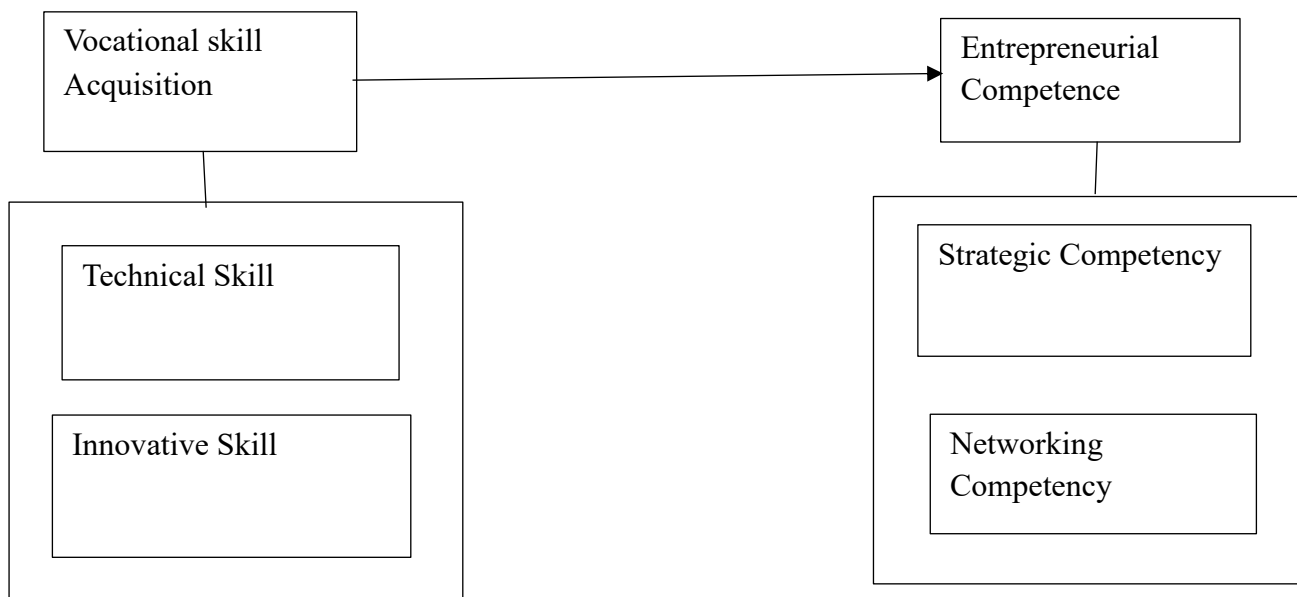


Figure 1: Conceptual model showing the link between vocational skill acquisition and entrepreneurial competence.

Source: Researchers conceptualization (2025), based on the dimensions of vocational skill acquisition adapted from Olarewaju and Olatokunbo, (2022) and the measures of entrepreneurial competence adapted from Sulaiman (2024).

Vocational Skill Acquisition

Skill represents the ability to acquire practical knowledge in new situations, rooted in an individual's previous competencies and experiences. Oke (2019) asserts that mastery of a skill is achieved when an individual can perform it with ease, without the need to deliberate on the method or break the task down into its conventional parts. The acquisition of vocational skills entails the mastery of competencies through their application within particular contexts. This signifies the capacity for acquiring knowledge (Kalu, 2015). The attainment of vocational skills serves as a fundamental component in the formation of a prosperous career. Skill acquisition can manifest through diverse approaches: individual experimentation within a particular field, imaginative exploration alongside persistent practice, or the mechanical repetition of actions lacking cognitive involvement (Urieto, 2015).

Odoko (2014) posits that the acquisition of vocational skills in Nigeria has become increasingly essential in light of the current unemployment rates. Life fundamentally centres on the ongoing journey of acquiring skills. Johnson (2019) delineates numerous benefits associated with skill acquisition: it enhances adaptability to the job market, allows for the attainment of skills that meet current needs, establishes a basis for future modifications, promotes flexibility, and equips individuals with expertise. Confidence in specialists bolsters credibility, resulting in heightened earning potential and broader career prospects (Olawajuwale & Olatokunbo, 2022). Informing individuals about the importance of making their own business decisions, obtaining fundamental vocational skills, and applying them alongside the knowledge acquired in educational settings is essential for fostering economic empowerment and development, which is urgently required (Mgbonyebi & Olaniyi, 2019). Comprehensive and efficient systems for skills development that connect education with vocational training can promote a nation's enduring productive growth and advancement. When optimised, these systems have the potential to create high-quality employment opportunities, thereby elevating the standard of living for the population. Information and communication technology, an essential vocational skill, serves as a crucial tool in the realm of entrepreneurship education worldwide.

According to Okereke and Okoroafor (2011), vocational skills are universally acknowledged as vital and advantageous tools for job creation, self-employment, and the economic viability of any nation. The cultivation of vocational skills is regarded as a fundamental repertoire of abilities requisite for the pursuit of entrepreneurship. Skills represent particular approaches to utilising abilities in reaction to environmental demands, where both the individual and external conditions together form an operational system (Adeyemo, 2009). Vocational skills represent the essential competencies that enable the effective initiation and management of a business venture. These competencies are acquired through programs focused on the development of entrepreneurship.

Dimensions of Vocational Skill Acquisition

The subsequent dimensions of skill acquisition are delineated by Olawajuwale & Olatokunbo, (2022).

Technical Skill

Technical skills constitute fundamental competencies necessary for the production of an organization's goods or services. These encompass operations specific to the industry, effective communication, design principles, research and development methodologies, and environmental analysis (Fashua, 2016). Nwinee (2011) posits that technical skills are characteristics acquired through the diligent practice and mastery of performing physical or digital tasks. Professionals in the fields of mathematics, computer science, mechanics, and information technology often utilise a diverse array of technical skills. At present, a multitude of enterprises relies on individuals with specialised technical knowledge. Employees in retail and foodservice sectors often necessitate a high level of competence in point-of-sale (POS) software (Ajayi, 2017). The range of technical skills is diverse, influenced by both the specific industry and the nature of the job role. In the realm of fashion, the processes of garment creation, pattern development, fabric selection, sewing methodologies, and alterations are recognised as specialised competencies. Proficient technical skills empower fashion professionals to create superior products, meet client expectations, and adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of the industry. Technical skills are typically acquired through structured vocational education, apprenticeships, or hands-on experience. Ogbuanyia and Chukwuedo (2017) argue that vocational training equips individuals with the technical skills essential for economic productivity and self-sufficiency, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) emphasises the importance of acquiring pertinent skills for the advancement of entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. Entrepreneurs with a deeper understanding of their technical operations demonstrate enhanced capabilities in innovation, problem-solving in production, and meeting client needs (Mitchellmore & Rowley, 2013). This practical understanding promotes corporate sustainability and growth by guaranteeing product quality, minimising dependence on external technical resources, and improving operational control. Mastery of technical skills proves advantageous when educating and directing individuals within a business environment. Entrepreneurs with technical expertise demonstrate an exceptional ability to inspire their teams and maintain high standards, a vital aspect in industries like fashion, woodworking, electronics, and catering. Uche, Modebelu, & Ejie (2019) assert that technical competency enhances organisational resilience by empowering entrepreneurs to adapt their skill sets in alignment with evolving market trends and technological advancements.

Innovative Skill

Innovative skills denote the ability to generate, develop, and implement novel ideas, processes, or products that improve existing systems or create new value. They are crucial for efficient problem-solving, promoting innovation, and facilitating adaptability in dynamic business contexts. Innovation involves both the creation of ideas and their execution to improve growth, efficiency, and competitiveness (Ofoegbu, 2016). Innovative competencies facilitate responses to market fluctuations, anticipation of customer demands, and product individualisation. Innovation is a vital driver of productivity and a catalyst for economic growth, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (OECD, 2010). Effective entrepreneurs demonstrate innovative competencies that enable them to identify opportunities, respond to technological trends, and sustain business relevance. Innovative competencies are cultivated through the encouragement of creative thinking, the acceptance of risk-taking, active engagement in experimentation, and a sustained openness to change. Anike (2014) posits that innovation includes technological advancements as well as the creation of new business models, marketing strategies, and methods of customer interaction. Innovation is essential for creating unique products and facilitating market growth. Fostering innovative skills in vocational and entrepreneurial students enhances individual competence and contributes to national economic strength.

Innovation skills refer to the capacity to utilise novel concepts to generate social or economic value (Urieto, 2015). Innovation skills generally include an individual's ability for creative thinking, proficiency in problem-solving, and pertinent functional or technical competencies (Johnson, 2019). Innovation skills denote an individual's ability to amalgamate knowledge, skills, and attributes within a specific context. An employee with innovation skills is often distinguished by visionary thinking in the face of challenges, alongside the ability to cultivate ideas—whether their own or those of others with commitment and independence (Stanton, 2020). Innovation in business denotes the ability to develop and implement new, distinctive, or improved solutions that provide significant value to the organisation. It involves the incremental or bold improvement of current products, processes, services, or solutions (Hanson, 2019).

Entrepreneurial Competence

Competence encompasses the observable and measurable integration of knowledge and skills, which enhances performance and ultimately leads to entrepreneurial success (Al Mamun & Fazal, 2018). Entrepreneurial competence consists of elements that are inherently rooted in an individual's background and can be acquired through experience (Man & Lau, 2005). Acquiring essential competencies such as strategic, opportunity, organising, relationship, networking, learning, and conceptual skills is recognised as crucial for entrepreneurs in achieving success (Seabela & Fatoki, 2014; Umeze & Ohen, 2015). Entrepreneurial competencies are critical elements of entrepreneurial activity, considered as behavioural traits (Umar et al., 2018). Despite the increasing interest in entrepreneurship in Nigeria, evidence suggests that individual attributes often do not lead to enhanced entrepreneurial success without the effective utilisation of entrepreneurial competence (Agumadu et al., 2022).

Entrepreneurial competencies are crucial for the establishment, management, performance, survival, growth, and competitiveness of SMEs (Utoyo et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial competencies refer to a set of skills utilised in the establishment and management of businesses (Riyanti et al., 2022). The individual with these competencies is an entrepreneur who improves and develops the firm by coordinating resources and opportunities to generate profits (Qiu, 2022). Entrepreneurial competencies are considered the most critical factor for the survival, sustained growth, and success of an organisation (Klyver & Arenius, 2020; Sakib & Shohoz, 2020). Martina et al. (2012) define entrepreneurial competences as a set of specialised knowledge, talents, skills, qualities, motives, attitudes, and values essential for individual development and effective participation in an organisation. Rezaei-Zadeh et al. (2014) defined it as the individual's abilities that enable the demonstration of appropriate entrepreneurial activity.

Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013) argue that the recognition and development of entrepreneurial competencies namely, idea generation, innovation, opportunity identification, risk-taking, and creativity can promote the growth of emerging firms. Entrepreneurs with strong competencies can recognise and leverage market opportunities (Nabiswa and Mukwa, 2017) while efficiently utilising resources to create economic value. Entrepreneurial competencies are often limited and difficult for competitors to develop because of the ambiguity surrounding their origins and their inherent connection to specific individuals (Tehseen and Ramayah, 2015). Competency is defined as an inherent quality of an individual that is linked to improved job performance (Megahed, 2015).

Strategic Competency

Strategic competency embodies the capacity of entrepreneurs to formulate, assess, and implement the strategies of their enterprises (Rahman et al., 2014). Strategic competency involves the capacity for strategic thinking (Rahman, 2015), which assists entrepreneurs in making informed decisions that lead to significant advantages and improved performance (Ahmad et al., 2010). This capability requires entrepreneurs to have a unique strategic perspective regarding their firm's operations. It is essential to establish comprehensive objectives and goals, accompanied by the formulation and implementation of strategies to realise these aspirations and aims (Li, 2009). This skill is essential for entrepreneurs in leveraging competitive breadth and organisational capabilities to attain remarkable long-term success (Man et al., 2008). Strategic competency facilitates the navigation of corporate uncertainties through a long-term perspective (Agbenyegah & Mahohoma, 2020). A clearly defined array of goals and procedures for competition

will enable entrepreneurs to realise their desired results. These strategies adeptly align the organization's competencies with its assets (Rahman, 2015). Strategic competencies empower individuals and organisations to define their position and manoeuvre through a constantly changing landscape that poses ever-shifting challenges to the realisation of their goals.

Strategic competencies foster independence, allowing employees to frame their decision-making within the intricate subtleties of their situations (Khana & Sakib, 2020). Strategic competency denotes the ability of organisations, or more precisely their members, to gather, preserve, access, analyse, and respond to knowledge that is crucial for the enduring survival and well-being of the organisation (Zaia & Al Mamun, 2018). Competencies reflect the strategic framework of the organisation, harmonising with immediate goals and objectives (Baylie & Singh, 2019). The ability to strategise equips entrepreneurs to adeptly manoeuvre through uncertain circumstances. Ahmad (2007) links this competency to the behaviours of entrepreneurs, enabling them to anticipate trends and shifts within industries, cultivate competitive advantages, and formulate strategies to navigate unfavourable circumstances. Ahmad and colleagues (2010) have established a connection between strategic competency and the entrepreneurial role. Jackson (2015) asserts that the importance of strategic management techniques is comparable for both SMEs and large enterprises. Moreover, case studies reveal that small and medium-sized enterprises have reaped benefits from the implementation of strategic management tools and techniques, leading to improved performance (Jackson, 2015). To navigate the challenges posed by fierce competition and enhance organisational competitiveness and adaptability in an unpredictable landscape, entrepreneurs are required to cultivate strategic competencies that enable business success through the careful formulation and execution of effective strategies (Sugiyarti, 2015).

Networking Competency

The concept of a "entrepreneurial network" denotes a gathering of entrepreneurs, structured in either a formal or informal manner, with the objective of improving the effectiveness of the business endeavours of its members (Das & Goswami, 2019). Networks are composed of individuals intricately linked through a multitude of connections. Abidur et al. (2016) elucidated a correlation between networking competency and non-financial performance, advocating for additional inquiry into entrepreneurial competencies across diverse business types and rural settings. Al Mamun, Fazal, & Zainol (2019) similarly observed that networking competency has a detrimental effect on microenterprise performance; however, they failed to consider additional dimensions of competency and the role of entrepreneurial commitment. Al Mamun, Faizal, and Muniady (2019) discerned a significant influence of networking competencies on enterprise performance and advocated for further comprehensive cross-country investigations. Sajilan and Tehseen (2019), along with Tehseen, Qureshi, and Ramayah (2018), established positive correlations between network competence and firm performance among Malaysian entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, their studies overlooked other dimensions of competency and the moderating influence of commitment. This pertains to the entrepreneur's ability to cultivate and maintain relationships, alliances, and coalitions both within and outside the organisation, leveraging these connections to obtain information, support, and collaboration (Aladejebi, 2020).

Vocational Skill Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Competence

The interplay between the attainment of vocational skills and the cultivation of entrepreneurial competence is of paramount importance, as vocational training equips individuals with essential technical and practical capabilities to initiate and proficiently oversee prosperous business ventures. The acquisition of vocational skills necessitates the development of specialised competencies, such as sewing, carpentry, metal work, and computer graphics, which enable individuals to perform tasks adeptly within a specific trade or profession (Okolocha & Ibik, 2014). The cultivation of entrepreneurial competence is inherently dependent on a spectrum of functional skills, encompassing various abilities such as innovation, opportunity recognition, risk assessment, and strategic business planning (Man, Lau, & Chan, 2002). The cultivation of entrepreneurial competence, defined by the integration of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes essential for attaining success in business, is primarily nurtured through vocational training programs. These programs provide participants with a profound understanding of genuine environments, refine their problem-solving skills, and foster the confidence necessary to initiate and maintain a business (Kolawole & Arikpo, 2020). In Nigeria's fashion enterprises, technical training in garment construction enriches not only technical skills but also the creative and managerial competencies essential for nurturing innovation, sustaining competitiveness, and propelling growth. Empirical evidence indicates that individuals with vocational skills have the capacity to identify business opportunities and convert them into successful enterprises (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). Vocational education serves as a catalyst for economic empowerment and the fostering of entrepreneurship, particularly in developing economies characterised by pervasive poverty and unemployment.

Empirical Review

Kaigama (2023) conducted an examination of the influence of entrepreneurial competencies on the sustainable performance of small businesses, developing a causal model derived from data gathered from small enterprises in northeastern Nigeria. The findings indicate that entrepreneurial competence has a substantial impact on the performance of small businesses. Ganiyu et al. (2023) investigated the moderating influence of religiosity on the interplay between entrepreneurial competencies and the performance of

MSMEs in Adamawa State. The statistical examination of the moderation relationships revealed that one of the three null hypotheses was rejected, whereas the other two were upheld. The influence of religiosity was recognised as a substantial moderating factor in the relationship between entrepreneurial technical competency and the performance of MSMEs in Adamawa State. Conversely, the moderating influences on personal competency and ethical competency were determined to be empirically negligible, highlighting a significant correlation between entrepreneurial competencies and the performance of MSMEs.

Aga (2024) examined the influence of entrepreneurial competence on the sustainability of small and medium manufacturing enterprises in Benue State, Nigeria. The study utilised a survey methodology, employing questionnaires to gather data from a sample of 325 employees across selected small and medium manufacturing enterprises in Benue State, Nigeria. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilised for the analysis of the data. The research findings indicate that entrepreneurial competence, which includes strategic, opportunity, and networking skills, plays a crucial role in enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises. This capability improves organisational agility and competitive edge, creating a setting that promotes the recognition and cultivation of viable market opportunities, thus aiding in the firm's sustainability. The research suggests that the leadership of small and medium manufacturing enterprises should emphasise opportunity competencies to inspire employees in recognising and cultivating feasible business initiatives. This methodology is anticipated to elevate the capacity for innovation, adaptability, and long-term viability within the organisation.

Olawaju and Olatokunbo (2022) examined the relationship between skill acquisition and entrepreneurial development. The study advocates for aspiring entrepreneurs to cultivate vital competencies to elevate their enterprises before embarking on their selected domains. A thorough comprehension of the merits and drawbacks of business is essential for aspiring entrepreneurs to avert financial loss and the misallocation of time in unsuccessful endeavours. Furthermore, it is imperative that governmental bodies across various tiers advocate for the advancement of small-scale enterprises through the establishment of policies that offer soft loans to budding entrepreneurs, thus fostering swift economic development. Moreover, it is imperative that policies be instituted mandating multinational oil corporations to provide financial and material support to local entrepreneurs as a fundamental aspect of their corporate social responsibility efforts.

Methodology

This research was undertaken to explore the correlation between vocational skill acquisition and the entrepreneurial competence of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria. This study utilised a cross-sectional survey methodology. The study's population consisted of thirteen (13) registered fashion industries functioning in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, as reported by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 2019. A total of sixty-nine (69) respondents was randomly chosen from the population for the study. A total of thirteen managers, thirty-nine additional employees, and twenty-six apprentices are present. Data were generated through the administration and retrieval of a questionnaire. Five distinct items were employed to assess each component. The reliability of the variables was evaluated using the Cronbach alpha. The items of the questionnaire were evaluated using a 4-point Likert scale, structured as follows: 1-strongly disagreed, 2-disagreed, 3-agreed, and 4-strongly agreed. The proposed hypotheses were analysed through the application of the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient.

Results and Discussion

Of the 69 copies of questionnaire distributed, 60 were successfully completed and returned. The hypotheses test is conducted using a 95% confidence interval, and the decision rule is outlined as follows. If $P < 0.05$, then the null hypotheses should be rejected. If $P > 0.05$, then the null hypothesis is accepted.

Technical Skill and Entrepreneurial Competence

Table 1: Correlation between Technical skill and Entrepreneurial Competence

			Technical Skill	Strategic Competence	Networking Competence
Spearman's rho	Technical Skill	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.643**	.727**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	60	60	60
	Strategic Competence	Correlation Coefficient	.643**	1.000	.608**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	60	60	60

Networking Competence	Correlation Coefficient	.727**	.608**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
	N	60	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data Output, 2025.

Ho₁: There exists no substantial correlation between technical proficiency and the entrepreneurial capabilities of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The analysis of the data indicates a noteworthy finding, with a significant level of $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$), and a correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.643^{**}$. This indicates a noteworthy correlation between technical proficiency and strategic acumen. The null hypothesis, Ho_1 , is consequently dismissed, and the alternative is embraced.

Ho₂: A significant relationship does not exist between the technical skills and networking competence of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The analysis of the data indicates a significant correlation, with a p-value of less than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$) and a rho value of 0.727^{**} . This indicates a noteworthy correlation between technical proficiency and strategic acumen. The null hypothesis, Ho_2 , is consequently rejected, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Innovative Skill and Entrepreneurial Competence

Table 2: Correlation between Innovative Skill and Entrepreneurial Competence

		Innovative Skill	Strategic Competence	Networking Competence
Spearman's rho	Innovative Skill	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.641**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	60	60
	Strategic Competence	Correlation Coefficient	.641**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	60	60
	Networking Competence	Correlation Coefficient	.581**	.608**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	60	60

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data Output, 2025.

Ho₃: A significant relationship does not exist between the innovative skills and the strategic competencies of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The analysis of the data demonstrates a noteworthy finding, with a significant level of $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$), and a correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.641^{**}$. This indicates a noteworthy correlation between innovative capability and strategic proficiency. The null hypothesis, Ho_3 , is consequently dismissed, and the alternative is embraced.

Ho₄: A significant relationship does not exist between the innovative skill and networking competence of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The analysis of the data indicates a noteworthy finding, with a significant level of $p < 0.05$ ($0.000 < 0.05$), and a correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.581^{**}$. This indicates a noteworthy connection between the ability to innovate and the proficiency in networking. The null hypothesis, Ho_4 , has been rejected, and the alternative has been accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that a questionnaire was effectively administered to 69 individuals, with 60 responses successfully retrieved. It was noted that three entries were incorrectly completed and six were not retrieved, thus rendering them invalid for the study. Nevertheless, the study obtained 60 of the respondents, which were utilised for the analysis. The analysis indicated that a correlation exists between the acquisition of vocational skills and the entrepreneurial competence of fashion enterprises. The competencies gained from vocational training in both technical and managerial domains enable entrepreneurs to launch, manage, and expand their enterprises. The evidence suggests that the responses of business proprietors and executives within the fashion sector to their operational contexts, profoundly influenced by their professional and entrepreneurial competencies, are pivotal in shaping the developmental trajectory of their enterprises. The results reveal a noteworthy correlation between the aspects of vocational skill development and the indicators of entrepreneurial proficiency within fashion enterprises. Fashion entrepreneurs equipped with vocational education demonstrate a keen aptitude for recognising opportunities, adjusting to market fluctuations, and creating distinctive products that excel amidst competition. Okolocha and Ibik (2014) noted that the attainment of vocational skills promotes self-sufficiency and encourages innovation, both of which are essential for attaining entrepreneurial success. According to Kolawole and Arikpo (2020), vocational training serves to elevate innovation and practical knowledge, subsequently improving business decision-making and strategic planning.

Conclusion

The evaluation of data reveals that the research arrives at the subsequent conclusion regarding the acquisition of vocational skills and the entrepreneurial capabilities of fashion enterprises in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The analysis conducted above reveals the noteworthy relationship that exists between the variables in question. This study demonstrates that the acquisition of vocational skills serves as a predictor for the entrepreneurial competence of fashion enterprises, which are the criterion variables in question. This research illustrates that cultivating technical and innovative skills is essential for the entrepreneurial capabilities of fashion business proprietors and managers, particularly regarding strategic and networking proficiencies. Promoting access to high-quality vocational training, particularly in technical and innovative skills, is crucial for enhancing the performance and sustainability of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

This study has successfully identified the relationship between vocational skill acquisition and the entrepreneurial competence of fashion enterprises in Rivers State, Nigeria. In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were formulated:

- i. Fashion entrepreneurs should be motivated to continuously enhance their technical skills in garment construction, pattern making, and textile handling. This will equip them with the crucial abilities to formulate and execute impactful business strategies that correspond with market needs and guarantee enduring sustainability.
- ii. Stakeholders ought to receive assistance in creating vocational programs that combine the acquisition of technical skills with training in communication and interpersonal abilities. This will equip fashion entrepreneurs with the assurance to engage in business networks, partnerships, and collaborations that foster market development and business expansion.
- iii. Workshops centred on innovation and initiatives for entrepreneurial development ought to be incorporated into vocational training programs. The focus should be on showcasing creativity, adaptability to trends, and design innovation to enhance entrepreneurs' abilities in developing dynamic business strategies that are in sync with the rapidly changing fashion industry.
- iv. Fashion business owners must leverage their innovative skills to engage in fashion networks and digital forums. This facilitates the establishment of strategic relationships, the sharing of creative concepts, and access to wider markets, thereby improving networking skills.

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