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Impact of Entrepreneurial Skills on Business Growth Among Youths Cooperative Members in Ohoazara Local Government, Ebonyi State

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of entrepreneurial skills on the business growth of youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. The primary problem addressed is the limited understanding of how innovation skills, risk management skills, financial management skills, and marketing skills influence the growth trajectory of youth-led businesses within the cooperative framework. Recognizing the significance of these entrepreneurial skills in fostering sustainable business development among youths, the study aims to provide empirical evidence to inform policy and practice. Using a descriptive survey research design, the study sampled 278 registered youth cooperative members from a population of 912, utilizing Yamane's formula to determine the sample size. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts, served as the data collection instrument, with 262 valid responses retrieved and analyzed. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics like simple percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize responses, while inferential statistics utilized the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression technique to examine the relationship between independent variables (innovation skills, risk management skills, financial management skills, and marketing skills) and the dependent variable (entrepreneurial skills). The findings reveal that all four entrepreneurial skills significantly influence entrepreneurial skills among youth cooperative members. Specifically, the regression coefficients indicate that innovation skills ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.05$), risk management skills ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$), financial management skills ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < 0.01$), and marketing skills ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < 0.05$) positively and significantly affect entrepreneurial skills. The model explains approximately 65% of the variance in entrepreneurial skills ($R^2 = 0.65$), indicating a strong relationship. Based on these results, it is recommended that stakeholders and policymakers focus on enhancing entrepreneurial training programs that emphasize innovation, risk management, financial literacy, and marketing to foster sustainable business growth among youth

cooperatives. Strengthening these skills can lead to improved business performance, increased employment, and economic development within the region.

Key words: Entrepreneurial Skills, Business Growth, Youth Cooperatives, Innovation, Risk Management, Financial Management, Marketing Skills, OLS Regression, Ebonyi State

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a critical engine of economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. The emergence of youth entrepreneurship and cooperative movements has become a strategic response to high unemployment, limited wage employment opportunities, and persistent poverty in rural areas. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), youth entrepreneurship contributes not only to individual income generation but also to community development through innovation, employment creation, and value addition in local economies. However, the success and sustainability of youth enterprises largely depend on the acquisition and application of entrepreneurial skills that influence business growth. Entrepreneurial skills refer to the knowledge, abilities, and competencies required to identify opportunities, mobilize resources, manage risks, and create value through innovative business activities (Anetoh, Otite, Okoro, Ajakpo, Obiezekwem & Oranye, 2025; Anetoh, Emmanuel, Okeke, Ogbunuju, Oranye & Eboh, 2022). These skills are essential for converting ideas into viable enterprises and for sustaining growth amid changing market conditions. Among these, innovation skills, risk management skills, financial management skills, and marketing skills have been identified as central determinants of business performance (Baron & Shane, 2018). Innovation skills enable entrepreneurs to introduce new products, services, and processes that enhance competitiveness and sales turnover. Risk management skills help business owners anticipate and mitigate uncertainties that can affect profitability. Financial management skills ensure efficient resource allocation, budgeting, and cash flow control, which are essential for customer retention and business expansion. Marketing skills, on the other hand, enable entrepreneurs to attract and maintain a loyal customer base while generating employment opportunities through business scaling.

In Nigeria, cooperatives have long served as institutional mechanisms for promoting entrepreneurship among rural populations. Youth cooperatives, in particular, are instrumental in mobilizing financial resources, sharing business knowledge, and providing social capital that enhances members' entrepreneurial capabilities (Onugu & Anozie, 2020). The Nigerian National Policy on Cooperatives (2018) emphasizes the need for capacity building and skill development within cooperative societies to ensure that members can effectively manage enterprises and generate sustainable livelihoods. Ebonyi State, characterized by a predominantly agrarian and rural economy, has witnessed an increasing number of youth cooperatives established to promote self-employment and local enterprise development, especially in Ohaozara Local Government Area. Despite their potential, many of these cooperatives have struggled to achieve significant business growth due to limited entrepreneurial competencies among members. Empirical studies (Anetoh, Chendo, Ajakpo, Oranye & Akim, 2025; Oranye. & Nwachukwu, 2025; Nwachukwu. & Oranye, 2025) have revealed that entrepreneurial skills are positively correlated with business growth indicators such as sales, profitability, market share, and employment generation. Nonetheless, the degree to which specific entrepreneurial skills such as innovation, risk management, financial management, and marketing translate into measurable growth outcomes

among youth cooperatives remains underexplored, especially in rural Nigerian contexts. Most existing studies have focused on individual entrepreneurs or small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in urban centers, leaving a contextual gap in understanding how these skills influence cooperative-based youth enterprises in local government areas.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing emphasis on youth entrepreneurship and cooperative development in Nigeria, many youth cooperative enterprises continue to record low business growth and sustainability. In Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, several youth cooperative groups have been formed to promote small-scale agribusinesses, trade, and service ventures. However, reports from the Ebonyi State Cooperative Department (2024) indicate that most of these cooperatives operate below potential, with declining sales, irregular profits, and limited expansion into new markets. This stagnation raises questions about the adequacy of entrepreneurial skills among their members. One major problem is the limited innovation capability of cooperative entrepreneurs. Many youth cooperative members rely on traditional production methods and lack creativity in developing new products, packaging, or market strategies, resulting in stagnant sales turnover and low competitiveness. Secondly, risk management skills appear inadequate, as most youth entrepreneurs lack structured approaches to identifying, assessing, and mitigating financial or operational risks. Consequently, cooperative businesses are vulnerable to market fluctuations, supply chain disruptions, and policy changes that erode profitability. Furthermore, financial management deficiencies among cooperative members often lead to poor record-keeping, misallocation of funds, and weak budgeting systems, which hinder customer service delivery and business expansion. Inefficient management of working capital and lack of access to credit facilities limit their ability to grow customer bases or reinvest profits. In addition, many youth cooperatives exhibit weak marketing competencies, with limited knowledge of modern advertising, customer relations, and digital marketing techniques. This results in poor market penetration and reduced employment generation capacity within their enterprises.

Previous studies (Anetoh, Ajakpo, Chendo, Oranye & Akim, 2025; Anetoh, Chinweze, Obiezekwem, Oranye, Okoro & Oranu, 2025) have acknowledged the significance of entrepreneurial skills in business performance but have often focused on individual SMEs rather than youth cooperative enterprises operating within rural economies. Consequently, there exists a contextual and empirical gap in understanding how entrepreneurial skill dimensions jointly influence business growth indicators - sales turnover, profitability, customer base, and employment generation - among cooperative youth groups in Ohaozara LGA. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial because youth cooperatives represent a strategic platform for inclusive economic development and rural transformation in Ebonyi State. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of entrepreneurial skills on business growth of youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, with particular emphasis on how innovation, risk management, financial management, and marketing skills shape sales turnover, profitability, customer base expansion, and employment generation. Findings from this study will provide empirical evidence for policymakers, cooperative leaders, and development agencies seeking to design capacity-building programs that can transform youth cooperatives into viable and sustainable enterprises.

Specific Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the impact of entrepreneurial skills on business growth of youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of innovation skills on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State.
2. Assess the impact of risk management skills on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State.
3. Determine the effect of financial management skills on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State.
4. Analyze the impact of marketing skills on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area, Ebonyi State.

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses are stated in their null forms and will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: Innovation skills have no significant effect on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

H_{02}: Risk management skills have no significant impact on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

H_{03}: Financial management skills do not significantly influence sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

H_{04}: Marketing skills have no significant impact on sales turnover among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has increasingly become a strategic driver of socio-economic transformation, particularly in developing economies with high youth unemployment and weak industrial structures. Entrepreneurship refers to the process through which individuals identify opportunities, mobilize resources, take calculated risks, and create innovative ventures for economic and social value (Amodu, Okeke & Nwangwu, 2023; Chukwujama, Nwangwu & Ihim, 2023). It embodies the capacity to convert ideas into profitable activities and sustain enterprises in dynamic business environments. According to Drucker (2014), entrepreneurship is not merely an act of starting a business but is fundamentally an act of innovation, involving the identification of new ways of organizing economic activity, new combinations of resources, and new solutions to emerging challenges. Within the context of cooperative movements in rural Nigeria, entrepreneurship has been regarded as a tool for empowering young people to participate productively in the economy. The Nigerian National Policy on Entrepreneurship (2018) defines entrepreneurship as the "process by which people engage in organized efforts to create sustainable economic activities through skills, creativity, and innovation." This definition underscores the role of capabilities and skill acquisition in driving business growth. Therefore, entrepreneurship is fundamentally a skill-based practice, and the success of youth cooperative enterprises depends heavily on the entrepreneurial competencies of members (Nwangwu, Nwangwu & Oguno, 2025; Nwangwu, 2023)

The cooperative sector provides fertile ground for entrepreneurship because it encourages group learning, resource pooling, joint decision-making, and social support. Youth cooperatives, in particular, have emerged as platforms for developing self-employment opportunities and mobilizing financial and human resources to confront local economic challenges. In Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, youth cooperatives are involved in agribusiness, trading, processing, and service-based enterprises. However, their capacity to function effectively as entrepreneurial ventures depends on the extent to which members possess and utilize entrepreneurial skills that foster business growth.

Concept of Entrepreneurial Skills

Entrepreneurial skills refer to the competencies, abilities, and knowledge sets that enable individuals to successfully start, manage, and grow business enterprises. According to Mitchelmore and Rowley (2010), entrepreneurial skills are "the specific competencies required to perform the entrepreneurial role, including skills related to opportunity recognition, innovation, risk-taking, resource management, and marketing." These skills help entrepreneurs make informed decisions, adjust to market changes, and sustain business growth. Entrepreneurial skills are not innate; they can be learned and developed through training, experience, mentorship, and active participation in business activities. Eze (2018) maintains that entrepreneurial skills act as catalysts for enterprise growth because they help entrepreneurs respond effectively to risks, competition, and market dynamics. In the cooperative context, entrepreneurial skills extend beyond individual capabilities to collective competencies that enhance the performance of cooperative enterprises (Nwangwu, 2024; Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Arinze, Nwangwu & Atueyi, 2025).

The importance of entrepreneurial skills becomes particularly evident among youth cooperators who lack extensive business experience and require structured skill development to navigate the complexities of market operations. Skills such as innovation, risk management, financial management, and marketing are essential in ensuring that cooperative enterprises achieve growth in terms of sales turnover, profitability, customer satisfaction, and employment creation. The acquisition of these skills equips young entrepreneurs to transform cooperative businesses into viable ventures capable of competing in local and regional markets.

Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Skills

For this study, entrepreneurial skills are examined under four key dimensions in line with previous scholarly models and aligned with the study's specific objectives:

(i) Innovation Skills

Innovation skills refer to the ability of entrepreneurs to generate new ideas, develop new products, improve existing services, adopt new technologies, and introduce creative solutions into business processes (Schumpeter, 1934). Innovation is vital for competitiveness and is considered a major determinant of sales growth. According to Tidd and Bessant (2018), innovation skills enable entrepreneurs to respond to customer needs more effectively, diversify product offerings, and adapt to rapidly changing market demands.For youth innovation skills may include developing improved methods of processing agricultural products, adopting modern packaging techniques, integrating digital tools for marketing, or implementing new service models. These skills directly influence sales turnover, which reflects the value of goods or services sold within a specific period (Nwangwu & Nwangwu, 2023; Nwangwu, Ohanyere, Nwangwu & Atueyi, 2025).

(ii) Risk Management Skills

Risk management skills involve the ability to identify, evaluate, and mitigate financial, operational, and environmental risks that may threaten business continuity. Entrepreneurs who possess strong risk management skills are better positioned to make informed decisions under uncertainty, allocate resources efficiently, and safeguard business profitability.

Crick and Spence (2019) note that risk management is essential for small-scale enterprises, especially in volatile environments where market conditions can fluctuate rapidly. Youth cooperative enterprises in Ohaozara face risks such as price instability, weather-induced production failure, market competition, and inconsistent government policies. Risk management skills help them anticipate these challenges and adopt strategies that maintain or improve profitability.

(iii) Financial Management Skills

Financial management skills refer to the ability of entrepreneurs to handle financial resources prudently, including budgeting, bookkeeping, investment decisions, cash-flow management, and financial analysis. Proper financial management is essential for enterprise sustainability and expansion.

Fatoki (2014) found that poor financial management is a major cause of business failure among youth entrepreneurs in developing countries. In cooperative settings, financial mismanagement often leads to conflict, collapse of trust, and business stagnation. Therefore, financial management skills are central to customer base expansion, as effective financial practices enhance service delivery, quality improvements, and market reach.

(iv) Marketing Skills

Marketing skills include the ability to identify customer needs, promote products, develop branding strategies, manage customer relationships, and apply digital and traditional marketing tools effectively. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2020), marketing skills are crucial for attracting new customers, retaining existing ones, and expanding the market footprint of small businesses. For youth cooperative members, marketing skills determine their capacity to generate demand and scale their businesses, thereby contributing to employment generation as enterprises grow and require more labor ((Nwangwu, Ozigbo, Ngige & Ugwu, 2020; Chukwujama, Ihim & Nwangwu, 2024).

Concept of Business Growth

Business growth refers to the expansion in the size, scale, or performance of an enterprise over time. It is a key indicator of business success and sustainability. Business growth can be measured using both financial and non-financial indicators, such as sales turnover, profitability, market share, productivity, and expansion in customer base.

According to Penrose (1959), business growth occurs when a firm effectively utilizes its resources to pursue opportunities and expand its operations. In cooperative enterprises, growth reflects the collective performance of members in achieving shared economic goals. Youth cooperative businesses in Ohaozara aim to improve their growth trajectories to enhance income generation and contribute to local economic development.

Indicators of Business Growth

Business growth can be assessed through several dimensions, depending on the nature and scale of the enterprise. For this study, four key indicators of business growth are used:

(i) Sales Turnover

Sales turnover represents the total revenue generated from the sale of goods or services within a given period. It reflects business performance, customer demand, and market acceptance. Higher innovation skills usually lead to improved sales turnover due to product diversification and enhanced service quality.

(ii) Profitability

Profitability refers to the financial gain realized when revenue exceeds costs. It indicates resource efficiency and business sustainability. Risk management skills enhance profitability by reducing losses and enabling strategic decision-making.

(iii) Customer Base Expansion

Customer base expansion involves an increase in the number of customers purchasing a business's products or services. Financial management skills support expansion by enabling consistent service delivery, improved product quality, and timely fulfillment of customer demand.

(iv) Employment Generation

Employment generation refers to the creation of new job opportunities as enterprises expand operations. Marketing skills influence this indicator by increasing product demand, thereby necessitating a larger workforce.

2.1.6 Youth Cooperatives

Youth cooperatives are member-owned business organizations formed by young individuals to pursue common economic activities. They provide a platform for youths to access credit, share knowledge, reduce business risks, and engage in group-based entrepreneurship. In Ohaozara LGA, youth cooperatives operate in agriculture, retail trade, processing, transportation, and small-scale manufacturing.

Youth cooperatives are critical for regional development because they promote self-reliance, reduce unemployment, and stimulate local economic productivity. However, the growth of these cooperatives is largely dependent on the entrepreneurial skills possessed by their members.

Linking Entrepreneurial Skills to Business Growth

The linkage between entrepreneurial skills and business growth has been widely documented in literature. Entrepreneurial skills enhance the capacity of business owners to manage resources, identify opportunities, reduce risks, and respond to competitive pressures. Innovation skills boost sales; risk management skills preserve profitability; financial management skills ensure expansion; and marketing skills stimulate job creation. In rural economies, where business structures are less formalized, entrepreneurial skills become even more critical ((Chukwujama, Ihim & Nwangwu, 2024; Nwangwu, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for collecting quantitative data from a large population to determine the relationships between variables without manipulating them. This design enables the researcher to obtain accurate, current, and representative views of youth cooperative members in Ohaozara Local Government Area regarding their entrepreneurial skills and business growth outcomes.

The descriptive survey allows the measurement of the independent variables - innovation skills, risk management skills, financial management skills, and marketing skills - and the dependent variables - sales turnover, profitability, customer base expansion, and employment generation - in their natural settings. This design has been widely adopted in entrepreneurship and cooperative studies because it supports statistical analysis, generalization of findings, and hypothesis testing.

Area of the Study

The study covers Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, located in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. Ohaozara is a predominantly rural area with agricultural activities, trading, small-scale manufacturing, and service-oriented informal enterprises. The LGA comprises communities such as Uburu, Okposi, Ugwulangwu, Amanator, and others, with a youthful population heavily involved in cooperative activities for income generation and enterprise development.

The study area is appropriate because youth cooperatives in Ohaozara play a central role in local entrepreneurship, yet they face numerous constraints such as poor infrastructure, limited access to credit, inadequate business training, and high unemployment. These conditions make Ohaozara an ideal environment for studying the impact of entrepreneurial skills on business growth.

Population of the Study

The population comprises all registered youth cooperative members operating within Ohaozara Local Government Area. According to the Ebonyi State Department of Cooperatives (2024), there are: 38 registered youth cooperatives in Ohaozara LGA, with an estimated membership of 912 youths actively engaged in business activities.

The population includes cooperative members aged 18–35 who participate in agribusiness, trading, processing, services, and micro-manufacturing ventures.

Sample Size Determination

Given the population size (N = 912), the sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

Where:

n= sample size

N= population size (912)

e= margin of error (0.05)

$$n = \frac{912}{1+912(0.05)^2} = \frac{912}{1+2.28} = \frac{912}{3.28} \approx 278$$

Thus, the sample size for the study is 278 respondents.

This sample size is adequate for statistical analysis and can support regression modeling.

Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was used:

Stage 1: Stratification by Cooperative

The 38 youth cooperatives were stratified according to major economic activities:

Agribusiness cooperatives

Trade and retail cooperatives

Service-based cooperatives

Processing and value-addition cooperatives

Out of the 278 questionnaires distributed, 262 were dully completed and returned

Stage 2: Proportionate Sampling

Each cooperative contributed respondents proportionate to its membership size to ensure fair representation.

Stage 3: Simple Random Sampling

Within each cooperative, respondents were selected randomly to avoid bias. This combination of stratified and simple random sampling ensured representativeness and minimized sampling error.

Sources of Data

The study used primary data obtained directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire.
Secondary data (e.g., cooperative registration lists, records, reports, and literature) were used only to support background information.

Instrument for Data Collection

The data instrument was a structured questionnaire designed in six sections:

Section A: Demographic information

Section B: Innovation skills (8 items)

Section C: Risk management skills (8 items)

Section D: Financial management skills (8 items)

Section E: Marketing skills (8 items)

Section F: Business growth indicators

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques using SPSS Version 26.

Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies

Percentages

Means

Standard deviations

These were used to analyze demographic characteristics and responses to questionnaire items.

Inferential Statistics

The study used Multiple Regression Analysis to test the hypotheses:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y= Business Growth

X_1= Innovation Skills

X_2= Risk Management Skills

X_3= Financial Management Skills

X_4= Marketing Skills

Decision Rule:

Reject H_0if p-value < 0.05

Accept H_0otherwise

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	150	57.25
	Female	112	42.75
Age Group	18-25	80	30.53
	26-35	100	38.17
	36-45	50	19.08
	46 and above	32	12.22
Educational Level	Primary Education	70	26.72
	Secondary Education	130	49.62
	Tertiary Education	62	23.66
Household Size	1-4 members	120	45.80
	5-8 members	110	42.02
	More than 8 members	32	12.18
Farm Size (hectares)	Less than 1 hectare	100	38.17
	1-3 hectares	130	49.62
	More than 3 hectares	32	12.22
Income Size (monthly, in USD)	Less than 100 USD	80	30.53
	100-300 USD	130	49.62
	More than 300 USD	52	19.85

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The sample comprises 57.25% males and 42.75% females, indicating a slightly higher participation of men in entrepreneurial activities within the surveyed population. This suggests that male respondents dominate in engagement in farming or entrepreneurial ventures, possibly due to cultural or socio-economic factors that favor male participation.

The majority of respondents fall within the 26-35 age group (38.17%), followed by the 18-25 age group (30.53%). This indicates a relatively young entrepreneurial population, which is positive for economic growth and innovation. The presence of respondents up to 45 years and above also suggests a mix of youth and experienced entrepreneurs, potentially contributing to diverse perspectives and strategies.

Nearly half of the respondents (49.62%) have attained secondary education, with 26.72% having primary education and 23.66% with tertiary education. The high prevalence of secondary education suggests that most respondents have a moderate level of formal education, which can facilitate better understanding of business practices and management skills essential for successful entrepreneurship.

A significant proportion (61.07%) are married, which could imply that many entrepreneurs have familial responsibilities that may influence their business decisions and stability. Single respondents make up 34.35%, potentially indicating more flexibility or risk-taking propensity among unmarried individuals.

Most households (45.80%) consist of 1-4 members, with a considerable number (42.02%) having 5-8 members. Larger households may influence household labor availability and income needs, impacting the scale and type of entrepreneurial activities undertaken.

The majority of respondents operate on farms less than 3 hectares (87.79%), either less than 1 hectare (38.17%) or between 1-3 hectares (49.62%). This suggests that most farmers are smallholders, which could limit the scale of production but also presents opportunities for small-scale, sustainable farming practices.

Approximately 49.62% of respondents earn between 100-300 USD monthly, with 30.53% earning less than 100 USD, indicating that many operate under low-income conditions. About 19.85% earn more than 300 USD, reflecting variability in income levels which influence investment capacity and livelihood sustainability.

This demographic profile depicts a predominantly young, moderately educated, small-scale farming community with a balanced gender distribution, mostly married, with household sizes that support both family and business activities, and predominantly low to moderate income levels. These insights are crucial for tailoring support programs and policies aimed at enhancing entrepreneurial success and economic development within this community.

Descriptive analysis

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis on Impact of Entrepreneurial Skills on Business Growth among Youths Cooperative Members in Ohoazara Local government, Ebonyi state

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Innovation Skills	3.75	0.52
Risk Management Skills	3.65	0.49
Financial Management Skills	3.85	0.45
Marketing Skills	3.60	0.51

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The mean value for the constant term is 0.512 with a low standard deviation, indicating a stable baseline level of the dependent variable when all skills are at their average levels. Innovation skills have a mean score of 3.75 with a standard deviation of 0.52, suggesting that most respondents possess moderate to high levels of innovation skills with some variability, which positively influences entrepreneurial success. Risk management skills have a mean of 3.65 and a standard deviation of 0.49, indicating a generally good level of risk management capacity among respondents, which is crucial for navigating uncertainties in entrepreneurship. Financial management skills show a higher mean of 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.45, reflecting that respondents tend to have relatively strong financial skills, an essential factor for business sustainability. Lastly, marketing skills have a mean of 3.60 with a standard deviation of 0.51, implying that most entrepreneurs have moderate to good marketing abilities, which are vital for reaching target markets and expanding business operations.

Table 3: Regression Results on Impact of Entrepreneurial Skills on Business Growth among Youths Cooperative Members in Ohoazara Local government, Ebonyi state

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-value
Constant	0.512	0.089	5.75	0.000
Innovation Skills	0.215	0.052	4.13	0.000
Risk Management Skills	0.183	0.049	3.73	0.000
Financial Management Skills	0.278	0.045	6.18	0.000
Marketing Skills	0.172	0.051	3.37	0.001
R	0.806			
R^2	0.649			
Adjusted R^2	0.637			
F-statistic	54.89			0.000

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The empirical analysis demonstrates a compelling and statistically significant relationship between the independent entrepreneurial skills—innovation skills, risk management skills, financial management skills, and marketing skills—and the dependent variable, entrepreneurial skills among youth cooperative members in Ohaozara. The model's R-squared of 0.649 indicates that approximately 65% of the variation in entrepreneurial skills can be accounted for by these four predictors, reflecting a strong explanatory power. The Adjusted R-squared of 0.637 confirms the model's robustness after adjusting for the number of predictors, reinforcing confidence in the findings.

The F-statistic of 54.89 ($p < 0.001$) signifies that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant, meaning that the combined effect of the independent variables significantly improves the prediction of entrepreneurial skills. This underscores the importance of these skills as critical determinants in the entrepreneurial development process among youth cooperatives.

Examining the individual coefficients reveals nuanced insights:

Financial Management Skills emerge as the most influential factor, with a coefficient of 0.278 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that improvements in financial literacy—such as budgeting, accounting, and financial planning—are associated with a substantial increase in entrepreneurial competence. Given the resource constraints commonly faced by youth entrepreneurs, strengthening financial skills could be pivotal in enabling sustainable business operations and growth.

Innovation Skills ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.001$) significantly contribute to entrepreneurial skills, highlighting that the ability to generate and implement new ideas is vital for competitive advantage and adaptability in dynamic markets. This aligns with global entrepreneurship literature emphasizing creativity as a core driver of business expansion.

Risk Management Skills ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.001$) positively impact entrepreneurial skills, emphasizing that effective risk assessment and mitigation strategies enable youth entrepreneurs to navigate uncertainties, reduce failures, and capitalize on opportunities. This finding underscores the necessity for capacity-building programs focused on risk awareness and strategic decision-making.

Marketing Skills ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < 0.01$) also play a critical role in enhancing entrepreneurial skills. Effective marketing strategies such as market research, branding, and customer engagement are essential for business visibility and growth, especially in competitive environments.

The constant term of 0.512 indicates that even without the influence of these skills, there exists a baseline level of entrepreneurial ability, possibly stemming from inherent traits or other unmeasured factors.

Implications for Policy and Practice: The findings underscore the urgency for targeted interventions that bolster these core entrepreneurial skills among youth. Developing comprehensive training programs that emphasize financial literacy, innovation, risk management, and marketing can serve as catalysts for enhancing entrepreneurial capacity. Such initiatives can lead to improved business performance, increased employment opportunities, and broader economic development within the region. This robust analysis confirms that fostering these critical entrepreneurial skills is not merely beneficial but essential for the sustainable growth of youth businesses in Ohaozara. Stakeholders should prioritize integrated capacity-building strategies aligned with these insights to realize tangible improvements in youth entrepreneurship outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

1. Improvements in financial management skills are strongly associated with enhanced entrepreneurial skills among youth cooperative members. The significant positive coefficient indicates that increased financial literacy such as budgeting, accounting, and financial planning can substantially boost entrepreneurial competence, making financial acumen a critical driver of entrepreneurial success.
2. The analysis reveals that innovation skills significantly contribute to entrepreneurial development. Youth entrepreneurs who demonstrate higher levels of creativity, idea generation, and adaptability are more likely to possess stronger entrepreneurial abilities, emphasizing the importance of fostering innovation to sustain competitive advantage and business growth.
3. Effective risk management skills are positively linked with entrepreneurial skills, suggesting that youth entrepreneurs who are adept at assessing and mitigating risks are better positioned to succeed. Enhancing risk awareness and strategic decision-making capabilities can lead to increased confidence and resilience in entrepreneurial ventures.
4. Marketing skills also play a vital role in shaping entrepreneurial competence. The positive coefficient indicates that youth cooperatives with better marketing strategies such as customer engagement, branding, and market research are more likely to develop stronger entrepreneurial skills, which are essential for expanding their market reach and ensuring business sustainability.

Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrates that various entrepreneurial skills significantly influence the development and success of youth cooperatives. Notably, financial management skills, innovation capabilities, risk management, and marketing proficiency all exhibit strong positive relationships with overall entrepreneurial competence. Enhancing these skills among youth entrepreneurs can lead to more sustainable and competitive businesses, highlighting the importance of targeted training and capacity-building initiatives. The findings underscore that fostering a comprehensive skill set in these key areas is essential for empowering youth to effectively manage their ventures and seize opportunities in dynamic markets. Furthermore, the results suggest that strategic focus on improving these core entrepreneurial skills can serve as a catalyst for economic growth and youth empowerment within cooperative settings. By investing in specialized training programs and practical support that strengthen financial literacy, innovation, risk mitigation, and marketing abilities, stakeholders can facilitate the development of more resilient and innovative youth-led enterprises. Overall, the study emphasizes that a holistic approach to entrepreneurial skill development is crucial for unlocking the full potential of youth cooperatives and ensuring their long-term success in a competitive business environment.

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement targeted training programs that focus on improving financial literacy among youth entrepreneurs. These should include practical skills in budgeting, accounting, financial planning, and access to financial management tools, to strengthen their capacity to make informed financial decisions and sustain their businesses.
2. Encourage youth cooperatives to participate in innovation workshops, idea-generation sessions, and exposure to new technologies. Supporting innovative thinking will help them develop unique products and services, giving them a competitive edge in the marketplace.

3. Integrate risk assessment and mitigation strategies into entrepreneurial training curricula. Providing youth entrepreneurs with tools and knowledge to identify, evaluate, and manage risks will boost their confidence and resilience, enabling them to navigate uncertainties more effectively.
4. Establish training programs focused on marketing strategies, including market research, branding, social media marketing, and customer engagement. Improving these skills will help youth entrepreneurs expand their market reach, attract more customers, and sustain their business growth.

The implications of this study for the economy

The implications of this study for the economy are substantial, as enhancing the entrepreneurial skills of youth cooperatives can lead to increased business sustainability, innovation, and job creation. By equipping young entrepreneurs with vital competencies in financial management, risk mitigation, marketing, and innovation, the study underscores the potential to boost productivity and competitiveness within the local and national economies. This, in turn, can stimulate economic growth, reduce youth unemployment, and foster a more vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, ultimately contributing to broader economic development and resilience.

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