



Digital Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Intentions of Business Owners in Ekiti State

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ABSTRACT: The study investigates the relationship between digital skills acquisition and entrepreneurial interest of business owners in Ekiti State. The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted in the study. The population of the study comprised all the owners of small businesses in Ekiti State, Nigeria, totaled 1 87,663. The sample of the study consisted of 1,200 respondents which were achieved through the use of simple random sampling technique across the nature of businesses in the state. The study adopted an instrument tagged 'Digital Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Intention of Business owners in Ekiti State, Nigeria (DSAEI). The instrument was subjected to face and content validity while the reliability of the instrument was estimated at 0.78 using Chronbach's Alpha. The data collected for this study was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the intention to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State and a significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State. It was therefore recommended based on the findings that business owners should strive to acquire digital skills, in order to be relevant with global trend. Government is also encouraged to provide enabling environment for digital skills acquisition for business oriented ones.

KEYWORDS: Digital skills, Entrepreneurial Intention, Entrepreneurial Mindset, Innovativeness, Technology

I. INTRODUCTION

Business owners have often been appraised as one of the major drivers of economic development in Nigeria according to SMEDAN (2017), about 70% of the entire workforce in Nigeria came from this sector as there are several enterprise engagements to fit in for them. The global internet boom hit all sectors hard that everyone wants to acquire these skills for relevance in their workplace or improvement in their business line. Digital skills are the combination of computer and Smartphone knowledge, skill, literacy, and expertise that are necessary for individuals to be successful in work and in daily life. Digital skills can be acquired through various means and there exists many types of digital skills with many advantages as well as challenges. Entrepreneurial intention is the desire to start a business, determination of the nature of enterprise engagements and life span of a business. It is believed that business owners make decisions that affect their enterprises based on their level of skills acquisition, knowledge and competencies. There are many forms and series of small businesses to venture into in Nigeria and there are so many divergent innovative means for an enterprise.

The era of internet boom was significantly felt globally by both the young and old across all sectors. A simultaneous increase was noted in the use of internet/digital technologies and the business sector; especially small businesses as everyone strive and yearn to acquire digital skills and



competencies. Dominant among the new businesses were businesses such as fin-tech and other on-line facilitated businesses. The question that may be burdensome is whether it is the evolution of information communication technologies that have informed business owners to venture into their business activities or has caused any form of change in form of innovation in their various businesses. Against this backdrop, this study therefore sought to investigate the relationship between digital skills acquisition and entrepreneurial intentions of business owners in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between digital skills acquisition and entrepreneurial interest of business owners in Ekiti State. Specifically, the study shall:

1. investigate the relationship between digital skills acquisition and the decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State;
2. examine the relationship between digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State; and
3. analyze the relationship between digital skills acquisition and innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between digital skills acquisition and the decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State?
2. What is the relationship between digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State?
3. What are the relationship between digital skills acquisition and innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the

decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid change and development in the 21st century make it necessary for individuals to equip themselves with certain competencies and skills. These skills, called the 21st century or digital skills are the combination of computer and Smartphone's knowledge, skill, literacy, and expertise that are necessary for individuals to be successful in work and in daily life (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Digital skills refer to those skills needed by individuals to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2018). They enable individuals to create and share digital content, communicate and collaborate with others, and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfillment in life, learning, work, and social activities at large. According to [1], digital skills represent set of skills needed to effectively and efficiently perform office tasks using new technologies in the digital environment. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2019) stated that any definition of digital skills should involve the ability to confidently, critically and responsibly use and engage digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in 21st century society. In view of this, the European Council view 21st digital/digital skills as encompassing information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), safety (including digital well-being and competences related to cyber security), intellectual property related questions, problem solving and critical thinking. This dimension is the social,



emotional and interpersonal effects of using technology alone and with other people.

Soft skills are very important when it comes to digital technologies. You cannot just focus on the technology - you have to see the full picture. Digital technologies include computers (desktop and laptop), smart phones, scanners, digital photocopiers, internet, and audio/video conferencing facilities among others. However, internet/digital skills foundation skills include abilities to; turn on an electronic devices, use the keyboard, mouse to perform operations, open and connect to the internet, create passwords and keep login details safe [2]. Digital foundation skills [3] ability to; create and write an email, make a résumé, or search for specific information on the internet. These skills according to [3] make it easier for people to start up small scale businesses and manage them successfully. Other digital communication skills expected for effective job performance are ability to; interact and collaborate online, participate in online communities and networks, and critically assess the information to be consumed and distributed [4].

Previous literatures affirmed entrepreneurial interest/intention as the desire to start a business, determination of the nature of enterprise engagements and life span of a business. From the contributions of [5], entrepreneurial interest was described as desiring, willing and having the urge to engage in a business activity. This was supported by [6] who noted that understanding entrepreneurial intention is important as a result of its relationship with the process of starting an enterprise. [7] purported that the reading of a person to establish a personal enterprise is known as entrepreneurial interest; the decision and anxiety to venture into a new business. Entrepreneurial intention was clarified by [8] as the extent of knowledge acquisition that informs the decision to start a business. [9] explained that to have entrepreneurial intention as the beginning of establishing an enterprise is a long term process. [10] described entrepreneurial interest as individual commitment to commence a new business. [11] opined that entrepreneurship behaviour is closely associated with the entrepreneurial interest as it lays emphasis on the self-realization through motivation. [12] stated that digital skills acquisition enables

individuals to discover their potentials as well as develop such potentials.

Factors influencing entrepreneurial interest have been classified and grouped into various categories by some scholars. One of them was [13] who revealed that involvement of students in different entrepreneurial activities in Cameroon were influenced by push factors like joblessness, fear of loss of job and poor economic status. Also, [14] believed that students' entrepreneurial interest were more influenced by pull factors than push factors. Examples of such pull factors are quest for talent exhibitions, desire to earn more and independence as against push factors like joblessness. In furtherance to this, [13] argued that the urge to starting a new business does not usually come from poor funding, threats from the existing competitors, required skills for the business operations and uncertainty of success. [15] submitted that sex, ethnic group, level of education and experience from family are the factors that inform entrepreneurial interest of an individual. In another development, [16] argued that the entrepreneurial interest of an individual can be affected by social psychological variables. Alma [17] buttressed this by categorizing the factors influencing entrepreneurial interest into personal, sociological and environmental factors. [18] while leveraging on the theory of planned behaviour, believed that the entrepreneurial interest in an individual can be determined by behavioural attitude, subjective factors and ability to manage one's behaviour. While the level of competence/capabilities and responses to the environment in the process of entrepreneurship refer to the behavioural attitude, the plan to react or otherwise to the prevailing situation in an organization, industry or society refers to the subjective norm. They also found that entrepreneurial intentions are influenced by the theory of Planed Behaviour model. They concluded that self-confidence, self-realization, economic imbalance, social career, avoidance of duties, quest for independence and autonomy and security are the based in the theory of planned behaviour as the elements of attitude.

In addition, [18] believed that business environment, social and academic status influence



entrepreneurial intention. [19] supported this by saying that entrepreneurial intentions were positively influenced by social support and entrepreneurial education. However, [20] contradicted this with the argument that entrepreneurial intentions are not affected by social environment, avoidance of responsibility and academic status. [21] postulated some factors that influence entrepreneurial intentions as acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, social factors and a country's disposition to entrepreneurship. These factors were further interpreted as personality factors which hinged on McClelland (1976)'s need for achievement theory, control locus and self-efficacy. The need for achievement concept was introduced as a form of motivation that is related to psychology. Gifford (2003) noted that the ability of an individual to identify new business opportunity in an environment is as a result of locus of control on his/her constant readiness. Holleabeck & Hall (2004) opined that self-efficacy is affected by previous experiences and education. Other factors mentioned by [21] were capital sources, personality traits, entrepreneurship education, previous experience of the entrepreneur, support from family and friends, expected gains from the business, sex and age.

A small business owner has been defined by [22] as a person who creates a business with the hope of realizing profits, employs people, and risks financial loss. [23] sees business owners as those operating businesses to provide income to their families while entrepreneurs aimed at achieving profit and growth of businesses. In the submission of [24], most of the business owners work for their well-being while entrepreneurs desired innovation and growth of their businesses; business owners usually strategize to provide an existing product or service to an existing market where competition is imminent while entrepreneurs work toward providing new goods and services with new ideas into an existing market or create a new market. He stressed further that most small business start-ups have no monetary benefits motive and are usually for the owner to be the boss, have a flexible schedule, or have controlled working hours. He also found that learning new skills are necessary for managers of small businesses to make decisions to

assist them in creating success. Meanwhile, [25] opined that many business owners in Nigeria are dissatisfied with being self-employed which leads to low commitment and eventual business failure. He also concluded that for the business owners to be successful, they must be satisfied with self-employment, have a passion for the job, show a commitment to the business, and have a personal involvement in steering the enterprises to success.

Moreover, the intention of business owners seems to be important as series of literature have revealed a challenge of intention of owners to the growth and survival of small businesses. [25] stated that if owners of small businesses restrict their intention to providing income to their families, the growth of the business is not guaranteed. [26] stated that despite the efforts of creating small business development agencies in Nigeria, small businesses continued to face the challenges that threatened their survival and are failing. Consequently, the business owners are faced with the challenge of their intention of starting a new business for family income or make a profit and grow the business. [27] opined that 80% of small businesses fail within the first five years of formation. This was buttressed by SMEDAN (2013) stating that small business success involves sustaining small business operations longer than first five years. [28] stated that small businesses in Nigeria are faced with numerous challenges that resulted in their failure. He stressed further that small businesses must develop strategies that will mitigate challenges and sustain operations. In addition to this, [29] agreed that when these small businesses fail or do not do well, jobs will be lost and owner/managers will suffer financially, socially and psychologically leading to extreme emotional and traumatic experience for them and their families and friends. However, scaling up SMEs' internal capacity, as reported by OECD (2020), involves providing SMEs with technology support and assistance, through targeted financial support (consultancy vouchers, grants), technology extension programmes (diagnosis, self-assessment tools, e-business solutions, guidance and package of learning material) or a mix of both; encouraging SME training and upskilling, by reducing training costs (e.g. tax incentives, subsidies) and promoting workplace training (e.g. via employers networks and



associations, or intermediary “brokers”, apprenticeships programmes) or by pooling training investments, and strengthening management skills in SMEs (e.g. through training, workshops, coaching programmes and by raising demand for these programmes); building a data culture in SMEs, by increasing awareness and capacity to manage and protect their data (e.g. through information dissemination, financial support or technical assistance) and raising the digital security profile of SMEs, through awareness campaigns, or providing them with guidance on useful digital security measures, toolkit, auditing, assurance framework, protocols and certification schemes, and training opportunities. Meanwhile, as a measure to easing SMEs’ access to strategic resources, Valero (2020) suggested leveraging fintech and alternative sources of finance for SMEs, by promoting the use of new technologies (such as blockchain and AI) to lower transaction costs on finance markets; encouraging the deployment of financing and matching marketplaces, as well as the use of mobile banking, or alternative data for credit risk assessment; encouraging business innovation and the supply of new digital solutions, through a range of research and innovation policies (e.g. research grants, public procurement, tax incentives, demand-side regulation, competences centres, public-private partnerships etc.) in the field of digital security, blockchain, AI etc.; connecting SMEs with knowledge networks, through cooperation programmes (e.g. with large firms or online platforms), or SME-lead public procurement (e.g. Small Business Innovation Research-type of programme) or networking interfaces (e.g. digital innovation hubs, centres of excellence, clusters and co-working spaces) and providing SMES with access to data and technology, through testbeds and experimentation labs, data centres, digital innovation hubs, university transfer offices, co-creation platforms among others.

Nigeria, being one of the largest economies in Africa has a very large number of small entrepreneurs possibly as a result of the various efforts the government is putting to place in terms of finance, training and favorable business regulations. However, there are so many profitable small business being practiced at various sectors and

categories by the both the indigenes and non-indigenes. There are six major types of businesses available to entrepreneurs in Nigeria. These businesses according to [30] they are Sole Proprietorship, General Partnership, Limited Partnership, Limited Liability Partnership, Limited Liability Company and the S-Corporation. The sole proprietorship is a type of business owned and controlled by one person. The business owner bears the risks, takes the profits as well as the losses alone. Decision making is a sole responsibility of the entrepreneur; the general partnership entails two people coming together to own a business. Both partners have equal right to the business and there is usually a written document containing information and agreement on the conduct of the business at the start-up stage. The document usually contains the names and addresses of partners, profit sharing ratio, types of company and some others; the limited partnership comprise both the general and the limited partners. Partners share profit/loss and rights equally; the limited liability partnership has two types of partners which are limited and unlimited partners. The limited partners are not involved in the management of the business and their profit/loss share is based on their investment in the business; the limited liability company is a legal entity that has a clear cut between the personal assets of the members and the entity. Liabilities are offset with the company’s asset alone and the S-corporation which can only be differentiated from the limited liability company based on its acceptance of shares and board of directors.

Meanwhile, ATD Press (2014) submitted five categories of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with their uniqueness and contribution as technical, hybrid, instructional, functional, and sentinel SMEs. The technical SME group is centered on the appropriateness of the technical content and assurance of strict compliance to the process/structural design at the implementation stage of projects. Examples of entrepreneur in this category are the medical practitioners, lawyers and engineers; the class of SME that incorporate both the technical and implementation professionals are the hybrid SMEs. The experts are involved at the content development as well as at the implementation stage; the third stage is the



instructional stage. Here, the primary role of the expert is to ensure the effectiveness of the training instructional aspect at the implementation stage. Coaches, teachers and mentors fall in this category; the functional SMEs are those that are neither in the technical content nor at the implementation process but have one or two areas to function in the project for hitch-free services. These people may be the first aiders, writers, designers of software packages among others. The last category is the sentinel SMEs. Managers of businesses, governing board members, leaders of organizations, directors of establishments and many others fall in this category of SMEs. These people usually have little or no knowledge on the content yet they make judgments and give directions to the technical and implementation team.

Notably, there are several small businesses through which Nigerians have been making ends meet and have also been contributing a large quota to the nation's economic development. Examples of the small business are listed as:

1. Making of Beads: this is a soft skill that is quickly and easily acquired by small entrepreneurs. Beads can be used to make ear and neck laces. From observation, the profit margin on bead making can be as high as 80%.
2. Sports Viewing and Betting Centre: one of the most populous ways Nigerian youth spend their leisure nowadays is the sporting center. Men mostly, prefer visiting view center to watch their football or other sporting club performances.
3. Retail outlets/Petty Trading: this is very common in the streets. Business owners in this category specialize majorly on consumables that are indispensable for households.
4. Repairs: repairs have also been noted as one of the ways of making money for small class entrepreneurs. Most of our electronic devices, phones and laptop often require the services of repairers and this has been a good source of income to them.
5. Hairdressing/Barbing Saloon: this has been one of the lucrative business in Nigeria because both males and females need the service of hair stylists and the most encouraging thing about this business is that it is not really capital intensive.

6. Agricultural Business: farming business has a lot of aspects one can dive into and make money easily. There are piggery, fishery and crop farming among others. Hardly will you see a farmer go broke because the society needs food on daily basis for its survival.

7. Video Coverage/Photography: photographers get paid to make snapshots and video coverage of events. Apart from the acquisition of skill, little capital is required in the business.

8. Snacks/Confectionaries: this has to do with the production of fast foods and snacks such as puff-puff, buns, chinchin, yoghurts and so on. If this type of business is situated in strategic places like the student's area, the owner will make much money from it.

9. Fashion Designing: after having learnt tailoring skills and acquisition of sewing machines and other equipment, fashion designers make money by sewing clothes for both males and females.

10. Pure Water Business: as it is often said that water is life, production and sales of pure water cannot but generate high profit because of its utility and the main material which is water is free. Others are gaming centers, catering services, blogging, tutoring, consultancy, rentals, car wash, laundering, sales of phones and accessories, computer repairs, cyber café, bars and restaurants, day care services, road side vendors, tie making, computer center services, event management and decorations, entertainments, bags and shoe making and so on.

Factors influencing the development of entrepreneurship among Nigerian business owners were analysed by [12] with the use of chi-square statistical tool. The result from the study revealed that electricity supply, availability of loan facilities and digital technologies were some of the environmental factors affecting entrepreneurial interest. Quest for more earnings, financial and time independence, safety of career choice were submitted as factors influencing entrepreneurial interest in a study carried out by [31] while using OLS technique to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial attitudes, abilities and entrepreneurial intentions in India, China, Thailand and Australia. Also, [32] used multiple regression analysis to discover that achievement's need, family business and support from family and friends affects entrepreneurial intention. Lastly, [33] showed quest for autonomy, achievement and autonomy greatly



influences entrepreneurial interest in a study they carried out in Vietnam. Several authors were discovered to have worked on subjects related to the study across the globe but their studies have been discredited because none was found to have worked on the specific variables of the study as relates to investigating the relationship between digital skills acquisition and entrepreneurial intention of business owners in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This therefore, is the gap the present study intended to fill.

III. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted in the study. The population of the study comprised all the owners of small businesses in Ekiti State, Nigeria, totalled one hundred and eighty seven thousand, six hundred and sixty three (187,663), (national survey of SMEDAN, 2022). The sample of the study consisted of one thousand two hundred (1,200) respondents which

was achieved through the use of simple random sampling technique across the nature of businesses in the state. The study adopted an instrument tagged ‘Digital skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurial Intention of Business owners in Ekiti State, Nigeria (ISAEI). The questionnaire would be structured on a five-point Likert scale as follows: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Strongly Disagreed (SD) Disagreed (DA) and Neutral (N). The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by some experts in entrepreneurial studies department. The reliability of the instrument was estimated at 0.78 using Chronbach’s Alpha reliability method. The data collected for this study was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. All hypotheses was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1 Schedule of Questionnaire distribution

S/N	Questionnaire	No returned	Percentage (%)
1.	Completed and returned	1,060	88.3
2.	Not returned	105	8.8
3.	Discarded	35	2.9
	TOTAL	1,200	100

Source: Field work (2023)

(88.3%) were dully filled and returned, upon which the analysis is based.

One thousand and two hundred (1,200) questionnaire were distributed to the respondents, one thousand and sixty (1,060), which represent

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State.

Table 5: Regression Model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.134 ^a	.632	.012	8.832

a. Predictors: (Constant), digital skills acquisition

Table 5 revealed the Regression Model, it was observed that the value of R² is 0.632 which means that digital skills acquisition contribute 63% to decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State.



II. Table 6: ANOVA Result

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	108.910	1	308.910	3.632	.004*
Residual	263.417	1059	117.348		
Total	372.327	1060			

a. Dependent Variable: decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State

b. Predictors: (Constant), digital skills acquisition

Table 6 revealed that p-value is 0.004 which is less than α -level of (0.05), therefore H_0 is rejected then, it is concluded that there is a significant relationship

between digital skills acquisition and the decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State.

H_02 : There is no significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State

Table 7: Pearson correlation of digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State

Pearson Correlation

		Digital skills acquisition	Nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners
Digital skills acquisition	Pear. correlation	1	0.83
	Sig.		.000
	N	1060	
Nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners	Pear. correlation	0.83	1
	Sig.	.000	
	N	1060	

****Correlation is significant at 0.01 level**

Table 7, shows the value of correlation (r) to be 0.83 which is strong and positive correlation which means that there is a significant relationship between

digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State.

III. Table 8: Regression Model of digital skills acquisition and the innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.326 ^a	.648	.046	3.134

a. Predictors: (Constant), digital skills acquisition

Table 8 revealed the Regression Model, the value of R^2 is 0.648 which means that digital skills

acquisition contribute 64% to innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State.



Table 9: ANOVA Result
ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	104.231	1	120.078	2.632	.002*
Residual	235.417	1059	149.225		
Total	294.326	1060			

a. Dependent Variable: innovativeness of business owners

b. Predictors: (Constant), digital skills acquisition

Table 9 revealed that p-value is 0.002 which is less than α -level of (0.05), therefore H_0 is rejected then conclude that significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that, there is positive relationship between the digital skills acquisition and the decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State. This is supported by Khudair (2021) who noted that knowledge of the digital skills influences business owners to start up a business. In other words writing and keeping accounting records, get relevant and update information about one's occupation or professional career, the digital skills acquisition cannot be overemphasized. In the present day, where the whole world has become global village, the acquisition of digital skills is a must for any entrepreneur who wants to compete among his contemporaries. Based on the findings of this study, it can therefore be concluded that: there is high level of digital skills acquisition by the business owners in Ekiti State; financial challenges, unstable power supply, Lack of internet facilities and poor motivation are the challenges confronting business owners in Ekiti State about the digital skills acquisition; there is significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the decision to start a business by the business owners in Ekiti State; there is significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the nature of enterprise engagements by the business owners in Ekiti State; finally there is significant relationship between digital skills acquisition and the innovativeness of business owners in Ekiti State. Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore recommended that, business owners should strive to acquire digital skills, in order to be relevant with global trend, Government is also encouraged to provide enabling environment for digital skills acquisition for the business owners.

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