

Communication and Managerial Competencies Needed for Successful Entrepreneurship by Female Polytechnic Students as Perceived by Stakeholders in South Western Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated communication and managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship as perceived by stakeholders in south western Nigeria. The researchers employed mixed method design involving the use of qualitative technique within a dominant quantitative design. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population consisted of registered female entrepreneurs, female Office Technology and Management students and lecturers in public polytechnics in southwestern Nigeria. The instrument for quantitative data collection was a questionnaire while a semi structured interview was used to collect qualitative information for the study. The instrument was administered with the assistance of six research assistants. Quantitative data was analyzed with percentage, mean rating, standard deviation, ANOVA and t-test while the qualitative data was analyzed with content analysis. The result of the study showed that there are gender sensitive communication competencies and gender specific managerial competencies which female polytechnic undergraduates must master if they are to prosper in the patriarchal business environment of southwestern Nigeria. Based on these findings, the study recommended the incorporation of gender specific items in the entrepreneurship curricula of polytechnic female students.*

KEY WORDS: communication, management, competencies and entrepreneurship, polytechnic

INTRODUCTION

The need to develop and promote female entrepreneurship has become a universal concern especially among development scholars of the Third World. Since the world became cognisant of the need to engender and encourage youth entrepreneurship in the last two decades, the focus has been on male entrepreneurship. However, in the last couple of years, it has begun to dawn on scholars that entrepreneurship education cannot optimally attain its objectives unless attention is paid to the special concerns and challenges of female entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship education was thus introduced into educational curriculum as a compulsory course in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria over a decade ago. Today, on the Federal government's directives, all universities, polytechnics and colleges of education have made Entrepreneurship Education a general course for students, irrespective of discipline and level. This was aimed at reducing the rate of graduate unemployment, endemic poverty and the numerous social vices associated with poverty. Bakare (2015) citing Ajufor notes that unemployment has become a major concern among graduates, contributing to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. Okafor (2014) also observes that many unemployed female graduates do not possess many of the competencies and qualities needed to secure paid jobs or establish their own businesses. Even, when they establish their own businesses, such businesses may not thrive because the founders rarely possess the entrepreneurial competencies and qualities needed to manage and nurture the businesses. Therefore, the acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies for business success has become imperative for individual success and national economic development.

In the Nigerian society, boys and girls tend to undergo different socialization experiences and they tend to learn different gender roles and behaviour patterns, hence they develop different interests which could later become dominant factors in the person's life experience and entrepreneurial opinion. Gender is a socially constructed term depicting the system of relationship between males and females. It also designates behaviour, attitudes, roles, status and other practices among the sexes in a given educational, socio economic and political context. Consequently, gender conditioning and sex stereotyping messages are reinforced through allocation of roles at the family level and this has influence on entrepreneurial orientation, outlook and possibilities. Hence, bridging the gender gap must be a central part of any strategy to create social and economic development in the society. Consequently, achieving greater gender-equality remains a big challenge notwithstanding the important gains that have been made in female education and employment in recent years. Furthermore, women remain severely under-represented in the entrepreneurship field. They often have less of the experience, competencies and qualities needed to excel in the world of business than their male counterparts (Henry, 2016). Yet female-owned businesses make key contributions to family income and economic growth. Women's participation in entrepreneurship therefore, needs to be encouraged and strengthened.

The increasing rate of poverty, unemployment and social vices among graduates of higher institutions of learning, especially female graduates has accentuated the drive to encourage female entrepreneurship. Researchers have observed that there is a "gender gap" between male and female engagement in entrepreneurship. Gender gap implies that more men are engaged in entrepreneurial activities than women and the number of businesses established by male surpasses the number of businesses established by females (Vossenber, 2015). Nigerian female entrepreneurs are often necessity and sustenance investors; they resort to self-employment as a result of unemployment or to raise money to supplement the family income or to alleviate family poverty.

Nigeria is a society in which women need their husband's approval to start businesses, conduct business affairs and they are not expected to outshine their husbands whether at home or in businesses because women are subordinate to men (Woldie & Adesua, 2013). Mordi, Simpson and Singh (2012) observe that the primary responsibility of men is family sustenance while women are responsible for child-bearing, physical care of children and domestic chores. Yet, Sanni (2012) avers that women in polygamous settings often have additional responsibility of providing for their children. This often limits the time and resources available for business activities. Gartner (2014) posits that unless adequate attention is accorded to gender entrepreneurship issues, the efforts to promote entrepreneurial knowledge and activities among Nigerian graduates may produce, at best, marginal result. All these suggest that female entrepreneurs have unique challenges not experienced by men.

Entrepreneurship, in one form or another, is arguably as old as the human race (Nnadozie, 2013). However, though entrepreneurial activities can be traced as far back as the beginning of human history, entrepreneurship as a course of study is a relatively recent development and is still in its infancy. Its current pre-eminence is traceable to the fall of European communism in the late 1980s and the universal acceptance of the free enterprise system as the ideal model for social-economic development (Ademiluyi, 2014).

Agbor (2016) citing Ntikudan traces the efforts to recognize business and entrepreneurial training as an area of national need, to the establishment of the first generation of commercial schools in the mid-forties and early fifties by some private individuals, prompted mainly by profit motive. Unfortunately this aspect of education was neglected for a long time before it became incorporated into the curriculum of the formal educational system. Oliha and Mbeliachi (2014) posit that a major development in the Nigerian educational system is the increasing awareness of, and interest in entrepreneurship education programmes at all levels. This trend, accelerated by the need to promote empowerment and national development, is illustrated by the recent attention on entrepreneurship education at various levels of the school system in Nigeria by federal and state governments. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) identifies entrepreneurship education as an educational discipline which is indispensable to national development. This is because entrepreneurship education, if effectively harnessed, can equip students with saleable skills, enable students to acquire entrepreneurial skills and produce graduates who are not only occupationally competent but also entrepreneurially effective (Oyedepo, 2015).

While the current curriculum provides for the acquisition and mastery of some important competencies, some others are not covered especially in respect of gender factors in entrepreneurship. There is therefore, the need to continually identify potential contents, based on training needs, which may assist in entrepreneurship curriculum improvement. At the dawn of the new millennium, gender issues have been pushed to the front burner of national discourse. It is therefore, important to discuss gender in respect of entrepreneurial engagements. Furthermore, in view of the complex changes being engendered and accelerated by the advent of ICT, there is the need to consistently identify the competencies which can improve entrepreneurial knowledge and

enhance entrepreneurial intention among female students (Vadja, 2014). If Nigeria is to banish poverty and achieve accelerated national development, issues and challenges of female entrepreneurship should be studied, identified and addressed. To achieve this, competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female entrepreneurs need to be identified and incorporated into the entrepreneurship curriculum, hence the need for this study.

Hornby (2012) describes stakeholder as persons, groups or organizations that have interest or concern in the activities of an institution or organization. In the context of this study, stakeholders include: Office Technology and Management lecturers, registered female entrepreneurs and female OTM students in polytechnics in South Western, Nigeria. Each stakeholder in the education system is essential to the success of educational goals.

Acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies and knowledge has been described as a prerequisite for successful entrepreneurship. There is a broad consensus that entrepreneurship skills acquisition is potentially the perfect panacea to the challenge of graduate unemployment and endemic poverty (Mcmanus, 2013).

Competencies are the expertise or talents needed in order to perform certain tasks. Aina (2013) thus refers to competency as knowledge, skill and behaviour that enables an individual to meet established performance criteria. One of these competencies which may be needed for female entrepreneurship is communication. Communication competencies are important in all entrepreneurial activities. It has been identified as a desirable asset for entrepreneurial survival Alex (2015). It is one of the fundamental determinants of organizational survival, success and progress (Drumond, 2013). Also, it is a vital part of human existence and an important aspect of everyday life. Communication competencies include: good knowledge of grammar, knowledge of correspondence writing, proper dissemination of information and politeness in conversation among others (Odunaike, 2014). However, poor communication skills have often been associated with female entrepreneurial failure (Ademiluyi, 2019). It may therefore be important for female entrepreneurs to have unique communication skills especially in dealing with employees, employers, customers and the general public.

Managerial competency is another definite requisite for entrepreneurship. Boyatzis (2017) defines managerial competencies as the underlying characteristics of a person which results in effective and superior performance in a job. Managerial competencies are activities, knowledge, attitude and personal characteristics needed to improve management and ensure effective job performance. These skills are imperative for the success of an entrepreneur and for successful execution of business initiatives in organizations. Female entrepreneurs need these competencies in different areas in order to effectively influence the behaviours of others and ultimately achieve desired results (Robert, 2020). These competencies include: critical thinking, effective time management practices, conflict resolution, business acumen, team building, delegation and change agent among others.

Statement of the Problem

Entrepreneurship has become universally recognized as the panacea to the challenge of endemic poverty and national development. As a result, NBTE in 2006 introduced entrepreneurship as a compulsory course for all polytechnic students at all levels irrespective of discipline. The NBTE also developed curricula which sought to develop in the students' appropriate entrepreneurial competencies, orientation and intention. However, no special attention was paid to the intricacies of female entrepreneurship.

Researchers have identified “gender gap” in entrepreneurship training as the missing link in the effort to promote entrepreneurial orientation and intention in the developing world (Agboola & Ademiluyi, 2015). They have similarly identified a gender gap in entrepreneurship engagement in Nigeria. Women still own and manage fewer businesses, earn less money, are more likely to fail and are often necessity investors than men (Minniti & Nande, 2013). Women are more likely to operate in the informal sector. Less number of women are engaged in entrepreneurial activities or are seriously thinking about starting a business.

All these demand that special attention be paid to the challenge of promoting female entrepreneurship. However, the NBTE curriculum has paid no particular attention to female entrepreneurship. Also, while some studies have been conducted on competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship (Agboola, 2011; Ademiluyi & Okwuanaso, 2013), very few studies have focused on female entrepreneurship; yet, gender differences have been identified in entrepreneurship training needs.

The cause of concern is that entrepreneurship education is unlikely to attain its optimal objectives unless adequate focus is placed on female aspects of entrepreneurship training. This is because while women constitute over half of the Nigerian adult population they represent less than one-quarter of people involved in entrepreneurial activities (Kelly, 2016). This large gender gap in entrepreneurial engagement has potentially severe implications for the economy. Also, it appears that there is a gender gap in the current entrepreneurship training materials. If the focus of the problem is not pinpointed and addressed, the training of female polytechnic graduates in entrepreneurial activities would be inadequate while entrepreneurial knowledge, competencies, qualities, culture and practices needed to excel in the world of business by female graduates may not be acquired. Above all, fewer female polytechnic graduates will continue to engage in entrepreneurial activities while businesses established by some female graduates may continue to collapse as a result of inadequate entrepreneurial training and skills, hence, the need for this study;

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to identify competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students, as perceived by stakeholders in South Western, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. identify gender-sensitive communication competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.
2. identify gender-specific managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What gender-sensitive communication competencies are needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students?
2. What gender-specific managerial competencies are needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

- Ho₁. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of lecturers, students and entrepreneurs on gender-sensitive communication competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.
- Ho₂. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in Lagos and those in other South Western States regarding gender-specific managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed mixed method design involving collection, analysis and integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The design involved the use of qualitative approach within a quantitative methodology. The quantitative aspect involved the use of descriptive survey instruments. Umoru (2013) explains that survey is particularly effective for seeking individuals' opinions, attitude and perceptions.

Mixed method designs are ideal for studies in which quantitative approach cannot bring out all the salient points and emphasis which the study demands. They are used to augment quantitative outcomes. The population of the study comprised 115 OTM lecturers, 338 female HND II OTM students registered for 2019/2020 academic session in the nine public polytechnics offering Higher National Diploma in OTM programme in South Western, Nigeria and 425 female entrepreneurs who registered with the 11 different Chambers of Commerce in the six states in South Western, Nigeria, totaling 878.

For the quantitative aspect of the study the researchers studied the entire population. No sample was drawn because the population was manageable and could easily be surveyed. This is in line with the postulations of Ademiluyi and Okwuanaso (2013) that it is ideal to study the entire population whenever possible. For the qualitative aspect of the study, a total of 22 participants which comprised two female entrepreneurs purposively selected from each Chamber of Commerce

were interviewed. This was necessitated by the need to gain deeper insight on competencies and qualities needed by females for successful entrepreneurship. The number was chosen to ensure adequate representation of each Chamber of Commerce.

The instrument for data collection for the study was a 30-item structured questionnaire titled: Female Entrepreneurship Communication and Managerial Competencies Questionnaire (FECMCQ). The questionnaire consists of two parts: A and B. Part A sought information on demographic characteristics of the respondents. Part B contains question items generated from literature reviewed based on the study purposes. The questionnaire was designed to elicit the ratings of respondents on 4-point rating scale of: Very Much Needed (VMN – 4 points), Much Needed (MN – 3 points), Slightly Needed (SN – 2 points), Not Needed (NN – 1 point). Interviews were also conducted on the 22 selected female entrepreneurs on their perceptions of the communication and management competencies needed to succeed by female entrepreneurs in South Western, Nigeria

The interview was designed to seek clarifications and more detailed explanations on items and issues which might not be obvious from the quantitative results of the questionnaire. The interview guide used was self-designed and it comprised 10 open-ended questions which sought respondents' clarifications on competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. The instrument designed for this study was subjected to face, construct and content validation by three experts in Business Education Department from Kwara State University, Malete. A pilot study was conducted in Kwara State using eight lecturers, 81 female HND II OTM students of Federal Polytechnic, Offa and 20 registered female entrepreneurs of Kwara Chamber of Commerce, Kwara State. Kwara State was chosen because it is outside the study area.

The reliability of the research instrument was established with the use of test-retest method. For the purpose of obtaining the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used; the overall result of the reliability test yielded a coefficient of 0.96. This is considered to be very high, indicating that the instrument was reliable and stable for measuring what it sought to measure in a consistent manner. The researchers and the research assistants distributed copies of the questionnaire by hand to the respondents who filled and returned the questionnaire on the same day whenever possible. The institutional respondents were reached through their respective schools while the female entrepreneurs were reached through the Chambers of Commerce. In-depth interviews with the selected female entrepreneurs were subsequently conducted by the researchers to reinforce the findings of the questionnaire and to clarify grey areas of the findings. The demographic data were analyzed using percentage while the data collected for the research questions were analyzed using mean rating and standard deviation. The formulated hypotheses were tested using ANOVA and t-test. For the qualitative data analysis, content analysis was used to analyze the respondents' comments on competencies needed for successful female entrepreneurship.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What gender-sensitive communication competencies are needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Gender-Sensitive Communication Competencies Needed for Successful Entrepreneurship

S/N	Item Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1.	Ability to speak fluently and eloquently as a woman.	3.48	0.57	Much needed
2.	Ability to control one's temper and moods when interacting with others especially male clients.	2.63	0.74	Much needed
3.	Ability to listen attentively to both female and male clients.	3.47	0.63	Much needed
4.	Ability to explain things to clients and subordinates in a firm but feminine manner.	2.91	0.75	Much needed
5.	Ability to draft and process all types of business correspondence.	3.52	0.55	Very much needed
6.	Ability to engage in polite conversation with customers.	2.72	0.95	Much needed
7.	Ability to communicate correctly using body language as a woman.	2.95	0.86	Much needed
8.	Good elocution and ability to pronounce words appropriately.	3.31	0.92	Much needed
9.	Ability to give information pleasantly and appropriately to receivers.	3.45	0.63	Much needed
10.	Ability to use appropriate words and gestures in different situations as a female entrepreneur.	3.39	0.62	Much needed
11.	Having clarity of language and knowledge of grammar.	3.06	0.48	Much needed
12.	Ability to communicate using different languages.	3.07	0.55	Much needed
13.	Ability to use various business terminologies correctly.	3.10	0.67	Much needed
14.	Ability to understand and interpret information correctly as a female entrepreneur.	3.04	0.59	Much needed
15.	Having good knowledge of sources of accurate information.	3.13	0.74	Much needed
Grand Mean		3.15	0.68	Much needed

Source: Field survey, 2021

Data in Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on gender-sensitive communication competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. The table reveals that the respondents indicated that ability to speak fluently and eloquently as a woman, control one's temper and moods when interacting with others, listen attentively to both female and male clients as well as ability to explain things to clients and subordinates in a firm but feminine manner are much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female students. Mean scores of 3.48, 2.63, 3.47 and 2.91 respectively support this assertion. The respondents also indicated that ability to draft and process all types of business correspondence is very much needed while ability to engage in polite conversation with customers, communicate correctly using body language as a woman, good elocution and ability to pronounce words appropriately as well as ability to give information pleasantly and appropriately to recipients are also much needed. These constructs were supported with the mean scores of 3.52, 2.72, 2.95, 3.31 and 3.45 respectively. In addition, the respondents indicated that ability to use appropriate words and gestures in different situations as a female entrepreneur, having clarity of language and

knowledge of grammar, communicating using different languages, ability to use various business terminologies correctly, understand and interpret information correctly as a female entrepreneur as well as having good knowledge of sources of accurate information are much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. These constructs were supported with the mean scores of 3.39, 3.06, 3.07, 3.10, 3.04 and 3.13 respectively. The standard deviation is 0.68 and the grand mean, 3.15, which falls within the range of much needed.

Research Question 2: What gender-specific managerial competencies are needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Gender-Specific Managerial Competencies Needed for Successful Entrepreneurship

S/N	Item Statements	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1.	Ability to make business plans diligently and unemotionally.	3.57	0.72	Very much needed
2.	Ability to scout for good businesses which a woman can handle.	3.25	0.71	Much needed
3.	Ability to establish gender neutral relationship with workers.	3.32	0.64	Much needed
4.	Ability to ensure diligent monitoring of organization's resources to attain organization's objectives.	3.27	0.73	Much needed
5.	Ability to perform effectively and efficiently at different managerial levels as a female entrepreneur.	2.68	0.82	Much needed
6.	Ability to exercise patience in managing subordinates and clients.	3.34	0.47	Much needed
7.	Having self control to cope with failures and learn from mistakes.	3.48	0.52	Much needed
8.	Ability to coordinate organization's activities effectively, in order to achieve organization's goals.	3.72	0.45	Very much needed
9.	Ability to manage time effectively to achieve success.	3.83	0.38	Very much needed
10.	Gender sensitivity in recruiting personnel into various units and departments in organizations.	3.74	0.44	Very much needed
11.	Ability to delegate authority to the right people irrespective of gender in order to achieve organization's objectives.	3.77	0.42	Very much needed
12.	Ability to source and manage business funds.	3.83	0.38	Very much needed
13.	Ability to manage many customers at the same time without losing attention and focus.	3.78	0.41	Very much needed
14.	Ability to provide leadership and inspiration to subordinates irrespective of gender.	3.40	0.49	Much needed
15.	Ability to write and execute business plans successfully.	3.40	0.51	Much needed
Grand Mean		3.49	0.54	Much Needed

Source: Field survey, 2021

Data in Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on gender-specific managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. The table reveals that the respondents indicated that ability to make business plans diligently and unemotionally is very much needed; while ability to scout for good businesses which a woman can handle, establish gender neutral relationship with workers as well as ability to ensure diligent monitoring of organization's resources to attain organization's objectives are much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. These

were supported by mean scores of 3.57, 2.25, 3.32 and 3.27 respectively. The respondents also indicated that ability to perform effectively and efficiently at different managerial levels, exercise patience in managing subordinates and clients, having self control to cope with failures and learn from mistakes are much needed (2.68, 3.34 and 3.48); and ability to coordinate organization's activities effectively, in order to achieve organization's goals is very much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. Mean scores of 3.72 supported this.

The respondents also indicated that ability to manage time effectively to achieve success, gender sensitivity in recruiting personnel into various units and departments in organizations and ability to delegate authority to the right people irrespective of gender in order to achieve organization's objectives are very much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. These were supported by mean scores of 3.83, 3.74 and 3.77 respectively. Similarly, the respondents indicated that ability to source and manage business funds, manage many customers at the same time without losing attention and focus, ability to provide leadership and inspiration to subordinates irrespective of gender, write and execute business plans successfully are much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. These were supported by mean scores of 3.83, 3.78, 3.40 and 3.40 respectively. The grand mean is 3.49 and the standard deviation is 0.54 which fall within the range of much needed.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of female entrepreneurs, lecturers and students on gender-sensitive communication competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.

Table 3: Summary of ANOVA Result Regarding Gender-Sensitive Communication Competencies

Groups	Number	Mean (\bar{x})	SD
Female Entrepreneurs	328	3.09	0.27
Lecturers	108	3.08	0.25
Students	310	3.09	0.28

Sources	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Group	.024	2	0.012			
Within Groups	54.946	743	0.074	0.160	0.852	Not Rejected
Total	54.970	745				

Source: Field survey, 2021

The result of the analysis of variance as presented in Table 3 reveals that the calculated value of F is 0.160 ($F_{(2,743)} = 0.160$) and the observed probability value is 0.852 which is greater than the fixed probability value of 0.05 ($P > 0.05$). This indicates that the null hypotheses which states that, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of entrepreneurs, lecturers and students on gender-sensitive communication competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students was not rejected.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in Lagos and those in other South Western States regarding gender-specific managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.

Table 4: Summary of t-test of the Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Respondents regarding Gender-Specific Managerial Competencies

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	p-value	Decision
Lagos	274	3.49	0.20	0.114	744	0.909	Not Rejected
Other South-west	472	3.49	0.21				

Source: Field survey, 2021

$P > 0.05$

The data in Table 4 reveals there are 274 respondents in Lagos and 472 respondents in other South-West states. The respondents in Lagos and other South-West states' responses show that gender-specific managerial competencies are much needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students ($\bar{x} = 3.49$; $SD = 0.20$) and ($\bar{x} = 3.49$; $SD = 0.21$). The table reveals that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in Lagos and those in other South-West states regarding gender-specific managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students ($t_{744} = 0.114$, $P = 0.909$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Analyses of Qualitative Data

For the qualitative aspect of the study, a total of 22 participants comprising two female entrepreneurs purposively selected from the 11 Chambers of Commerce and Industries were interviewed. The interview was informed by the need to gain deeper insight on competencies needed and to bring up information which may not be obvious in the quantitative data. The interviews were semi-structured. The themes were based on the purposes of the study. The data were analyzed using content analysis. The results are presented according to the themes as follows:

Gender-Sensitive Communication Competencies

All the 22 female entrepreneurs interviewed affirmed that communication is indeed the livewire of entrepreneurship. They stated that those endowed with communication skills have great advantage over those with less communication skills. They also confirmed that while communication is generally a gender-neutral skill, there are unique communication challenges

which confront females in entrepreneurship: especially in the Yoruba cultural environment of South West, Nigeria.

The interviewees confirmed that all the items listed on the questionnaire are much needed by all entrepreneurs; but with women, there are often subtle nuances which if not carefully watched, may unconsciously affect male clients or counterparts. According to a Lagos-based interviewee, women need to be able to speak fluently and eloquently like every business person, but a woman must watch her tone and her voice. “From my experience, one Osogbo-based interviewee opined that “men are often uncomfortable with the high-pitch voice of some women”. “They are also often uneasy with the aggressive tone which a few women use”. Fifteen of the interviewees (68%) said that a woman need to be especially careful with her words. According to another interviewee, many men including some who are well-positioned are still unconsciously uncomfortable with women in authority especially when the women are assertive in words and actions. This often affects communication, hence, the need to always explain things in firm but clearly feminine way. Aggressive women make people, including other women uncomfortable. A female entrepreneur must also be very effective and deliberate in her use of body language. Her words, questions and appearance must communicate confidence, but not arrogance, friendliness but not intimacy. “It is a very complex game, like stepping on an egg without breaking it”, said an Osogbo, Osun State based female entrepreneur.

Gender-Specific Managerial Competencies

All the 22 interviewees confirmed that female entrepreneurs need all the managerial competencies which men use to successfully operate their businesses. According to them, a female entrepreneur must be able to plan diligently, establish good rapport with workers, she must have supervisory, organizing, staffing and controlling skills, just like any other entrepreneurs: male or female.

According to an interviewee based in Shagamu, Ogun State, female entrepreneurs must exercise uncommon patience in dealing with staff and clients. To another interviewee the most important managerial skill needed by female entrepreneurs is the ability to identify and recruit good staffers and the capacity to delegate to staff without abdicating her responsibilities. Another interviewee justified the importance of gender sensitivity in recruitment on the basis that there are some tasks which are best performed by men, while others are best performed by woman. Fourteen (64%) of the interviewees posited that in terms of managerial skills needed, women are not really different from men in their needs. However, two respondents (9%) pointed out that a female entrepreneur must have in abundance human resource management skill. According to a Lagos-based entrepreneur, some female-owned businesses in Lagos have high senior/management staff turnover because some men instinctively, do not like to be led by women. When attention was drawn to the fact that some male subordinates find female leaders insecure, bossy and arrogant, an interviewee based in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State admitted that such complaints are common. According to her, the most important managerial competency a female entrepreneur should possess is self management skill. “If a woman cannot manage herself, especially her time and her emotions, she may rub subordinates the wrong way, to the detriment of entrepreneurial success”.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study identified communication and managerial competencies needed by female polytechnic students for successful entrepreneurship as perceived by stakeholders in South Western, Nigeria. Findings on research question one revealed that female entrepreneurs, lecturers and students rated gender-sensitive communication competencies as much needed by female polytechnic students for successful entrepreneurship in South Western, Nigeria. The result of hypothesis one revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of female entrepreneurs, lecturers and students regarding gender-sensitive communication competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students.

This study affirmed that communication competency is one of the major competencies needed by female entrepreneurs for successful entrepreneurial activities. This finding corroborates that of Odunaike (2014) who stated that communication is an inevitable primary instrument for female entrepreneurship and it is one of the fundamental determinants of organizational survival, success and progress. The functions and success of female entrepreneurs therefore are heavily dependent on their communication dexterity. This is because a large portion of time is spent communicating in one form or the other. The findings also support those of Drumond (2013) and Alex (2015) who both identified communication competency as a desirable asset for entrepreneurial survival.

The findings from the quantitative study confirmed that females have unique challenges in communicating with male colleagues, clients and subordinates. According to Ademiluyi (2019), certain communication challenges have often been associated with female entrepreneurial failure. It may therefore be important for female entrepreneurs to acquire unique gender-sensitive communication competencies especially in dealing with employees, employers, customers and the general public.

Findings on research question two revealed that respondents rated gender-specific managerial competencies as very much needed by female polytechnic students for successful entrepreneurship in South Western, Nigeria. The result of hypothesis two revealed there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in Lagos and those in other South Western States regarding gender-specific managerial competencies needed for successful entrepreneurship by female polytechnic students. This implies that acquisition of these competencies will enhance the prospects of entrepreneurial success for females. Therefore, this finding corroborates that of Boyatzis (2017) who asserted that managerial competencies are imperative for the success of female entrepreneurs and for successful execution of business initiatives in organizations. Moreover, Robert (2020) affirmed that female entrepreneurs need competencies in different areas in order to effectively influence the behaviour of others and ultimately achieve desired results. The results of the study affirmed the importance of managerial competencies, especially human resource management competencies,

to successful female entrepreneurship as managerial competencies would enable female entrepreneurs to scout for good businesses, establish effective organizational structure, set objectives and formulate guidelines to achieve these objectives.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show clearly that gender-sensitive communication and gender-specific managerial competencies are very germane to the entrepreneurship success of female polytechnic OTM undergraduates. The implication is that it is not enough for female entrepreneurship students to acquire the basic skills of entrepreneurship. They must also understand and be able to apply certain communication and managerial competencies, perhaps more effectively than men – if they are to circumvent the biases and booby traps laid for them in the patriarchal environment of South Western, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Curriculum developers should incorporate communication competencies into polytechnic entrepreneurship curriculum. Special attention should be paid to items which emphasize gender sensitive communication competencies in the curriculum in order to impart the necessary communication competencies needed for business growth and sustenance.
2. In teaching entrepreneurship to female OTM polytechnic students, entrepreneurship teachers should draw attention to the unique managerial challenges of female entrepreneurs especially with respect to managing staff, colleagues, subordinates and even their own feminine instincts’.

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