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## Entrepreneurial Skills and Self Employment: A Theoretical Exposition

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**Citation:** Agogbua, S. N and Mgbatogu, C.D. (2022) Entrepreneurial Skills and Self Employment: A Theoretical Exposition, *International Journal of Development and Economic Sustainability*, Vol.10, No.5, pp.30-48

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**Abstract:** *This paper was a theoretical exposition of relevant concepts in entrepreneurship literature. A qualitative research design was utilized in the study. In doing so, a thematic and theoretical approach was used in presenting the facts. Entrepreneurial skills were indexed to include: technical skills, business skills and personal entrepreneurial skills. Their relationships with self-employment as seen in the literature were analyzed. The influence of the mediators (psycho- social factors: self- motivation and social influence) were also analyzed. The paper revealed that the proxies of entrepreneurial skills and the mediators as espoused in the literature were closely knitted with enterprise creation. The study thus concluded that with adequate motivation and positive social influence, entrepreneurial skills acquisition will metamorphose to self employment.*

**KEY WORDS:** entrepreneurial skills, self employment, self-motivation, social influence.

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### INTRODUCTION

Unemployment is a global phenomenon, and Nigerian economy is not left out. ILO (as cited in Efe- Imafidon, Ade- Adeniji, Umukoro and Ajtemisan, 2017) assert that 201 million people globally are unemployed and that this may rise to 219 million in 2019. Punchng (as cited by Efe- Imafidon et al, ibid) stated that 8 million Nigerians are unemployed (not inclusive of 14.4 million under employed) suggesting that 4% of the world unemployed is Nigerians. Lemo (2013) is of the opinion that entrepreneurship is the most potent option for enterprise creation by the teaming Nigerian unemployed youth. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition is the veritable alternative for self-employment, unemployment reduction, poverty alleviation, empowering youth to develop their business, pursue their dreams and contribute to National economic sustainability and development. Instant literature has pointed at the positive relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition and self- employment (Ukegbu, 2014; Ekpe, 2017). Nevertheless, researchers have also found that entrepreneurial skills acquisition does not readily translate to self- employment if the candidate is not self- motivated (Amadi, 2012). Other studies concluded that with negative social influence, entrepreneurial skills acquisition may not translate to self- employment (Amaikwu, 2011). This study thus provides a theoretical exposition of empirical findings on relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition, self- motivation, social influence and self- employment; as seen in the instant literature.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is a theoretical exposition of relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition, self-employment; and mediating effects of psycho-social factors (self-motivation and social influence) on the said relationship. Thematic and theoretical approach was used; as the study relies on findings in published articles and other secondary data. It also upholds a qualitative research design following the tradition of George et. al (as cited in Agogbua, Anekwe and Abugun, 2017).

### Definition of Terms

**Entrepreneurial Skills:** learning or acquiring skills, knowledge or entrepreneurial attitude that transient into self employment or employment creation (Amadi, 2012). Bolarinwa and Okolocha (2016) stated that entrepreneurial skills comprise a wide range of entrepreneurial competencies that are useful to youth entrepreneurs; such as knowledge, skills and personal traits. Amaikwu (2011) asserts that skill training and tertiary education exposes one to business opportunities and lead to entrepreneurship behavior. It also helps inculcating self-confidence, self-esteem and participation in decision making on entrepreneurs which ensures their full participation in the household and community engagements (Rufai, Abdulkadir & Abdul, 2013).

Shastri and Sinha (2010) suggested that tendency for one to exploit entrepreneurial opportunity is dependent on entrepreneurs' level of education, skills or knowledge gained from work experience, social network and training. However, training and other forms of learning provides experience and expertise necessary or preparatory to entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition or training and support is essential as studies have proved that entrepreneurs could be born or made (Abdullah, Osman & Rahim, 2009). Ikeagwu (2014) aver that skills acquisition is a vital means of developing human capital. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes, therefore entails a learning process that provides participants with a collection of skills (interpersonal, creative thinking, risk-taking, technology adoption, decision making and financial literacy skills) or relevant entrepreneurial behavior necessary to start a new venture or mature an existing one. Idoko (2014) suggested that creativity skills are a necessary empowerment for youth entrepreneurship development. Faloye and Olatunji (2018) assert that risk taking, creativity and innovation are invaluable for success of entrepreneurs; while technical skills and business management skills play crucial role in entrepreneurship engagement (Hisrich and Peters, 2002). However, entrepreneurs require some vital skills (entrepreneurial skills) to be innovative, source for new ideas and remain competitive in the market place. These skills according to Efe-Imafidon, Ade-Adeniji, Umukoro and Ajitemisan, (2017); Adetayo, Oke and Aderonmu, (2015); Ogundele, Akingbade and Akinlabi (2012) and Osuagwu (2006) are technical skills, business skills and personal entrepreneurial skills. This trio is used in the study as independent variables, and is discussed below.

**Technical Skills:** These are skills required for accomplishing a given task. Nwokolo (2010) opines that technical skills are know- how and capabilities possessed by an individual, deployable or utilizable for the purpose of achieving optimum productivity in industries. Abinu (2012) opined that technical skills are knowledge and abilities specific to a given task or group of tasks. Robinson (2000) suggested that technical skills are job- specific related skills needed to accomplish a given job. Possession of technical skills however, qualifies one to be referred to as technicians in their chosen field. In sum, technical skills are skills required to perform technical tasks, which Adetayo, et al. (opcit) and Efe- Imafidon et al. (opcit) itemized to comprise: writing, listening, oral presentation, organizing, coaching, being a team player and technical know- how.

**Business Skills:** These are skills necessary for effective management of an enterprise. These skills include tactics for effective management of human and material inputs which ensures optimal organizational performance. According to Abiodun and Ajayi (as cited in Oguanya, Amanger & Mlahaga, 2018) business management skills are skills required by entrepreneurs for formulating and executing policies of an enterprise. Efe- Imafidon et al. (2017) averred that business management skills are skills required in starting, developing and managing an enterprise.

**Personal Entrepreneurial Skills:** These are skills that made an entrepreneur what he or she is. They are the qualities possessed by an entrepreneur that differentiates him or her from other business owners. Adetayo et al. (2015) sum up personal entrepreneurial skills to include discipline, risk taking, innovativeness, being change oriented, persistence and being visionary leader. This study proxies entrepreneurial skills as prescribed by Adetayo et al. (2015); Efe- Imafidon et al. (2017) and Osuagwu (2006), to include; technical skills, business skills and personal entrepreneurial skills.

### **Self- Motivation**

Self motivation is the determination to succeed (Osunloye, as cited in Ekpe & Razak, 2016). It is the force that drives one to do something, the internal drive to achieve, produce, develop and be forward looking. When one sets out to achieve e.g. business venture, self- motivation is what pushes one to achieve such a dream. Self motivation makes one to learn and grow, notwithstanding the obstacles and drawbacks. Agbai (2018) averred that skills acquisition by graduates alone is not sufficient to address youth self employment. In support of this assertion, Valliere (2014) confirmed that motivation is necessary to spur application of entrepreneurship behavior among youths, as it complements the desired environment for youth entrepreneurship enhancement. Valliere (2014) concluded that schemes and initiatives that focuses on knowledge and expertise transfer may not be efficient without proper motivation in applying the acquired knowledge or training.

### **Social Influence**

In developing economies, people look down on entrepreneurship compared to paid employment. This poor perception mostly comes from peers, friends, family members, role models and other social networks (Emaikwu, 2011; Shastri & Sinha, 2010); and can hamper or hinder entrepreneurial skills acquisition from leading to self employment practice. Asikhia (2010) posits

that acquired skills may not lead to self employment if there is negative social influence; which includes social ties, friends and family influence and other social affiliations. Meyer, Hackler & Lin (2007) aver that societies have poor perception and attitude towards entrepreneurship. Studies found that social networks are positively related to entrepreneurship and self employment in Nigeria, UK and USA respectively (Carter & Shaw; Lawal et al. and Shane; as cited in Ekpe, 2017). Social influence also had positive effect on students' entrepreneurial intentions in China (Yun & Yuan- Qiong, 2010). These assertions indicate that social environment influences individual's attitude to entrepreneurship and self employment. Ekpe and Mat (2012) asserted that educational attainment, right attitude to risk, motivation and work experience aside; social influence could discourage choice and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunity. In another study, Nasuridin, Ahmed & Lin (2009) indicated a significant negative relationship between entrepreneurial intention and social influence in Malaysia.

## **THEORETICAL EXPOSITION**

### **Acquisition of Business Management Skills and Self Employment**

Business management involves coordination of human and non- human resources in order to meet set down business objectives. Such coordination obviously involves: planning, organizing, directing and controlling business resources. These business management skills are necessary, as pointed out by Igbo (as sited in Udo, 2016), individuals must identify business opportunities in the prevailing environment and take advantage of the opportunities, surmount all odds through his/her coordination abilities and be able to run the enterprise successfully. Udo (Ibid) demonstrated that "the essence of entrepreneurship education and training is to ensure self- sustainability, employment generation, income generation, wealth creation and reduction of crime rate". Akpan (2011) recommended that individuals should be taught how to recognize and develop new business opportunities.

Business management skills therefore is important for nascent entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs in general as it enables them to be able to organize materials and human resources , choose amongst different management styles to fit his business venture, communication network, and be able to monitor the business environment very closely. In monitoring the business environment, the entrepreneur needs business management technique termed SWOT. SWOT is an acronym for Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It is used to assess both the internal and external advantages and disadvantages peculiar to a business, before and during the lifetime of the business, in order to position the business well in the business environment; which in most cases is highly dynamic and complex.

Entrepreneurial skills acquisition thus exposes the nascent entrepreneur in the act of business planning and other business management techniques like scenario planning, capital budgeting and just- in- time production techniques. Brown (as cited in Amadi and Opara, 2018) averred that entrepreneurial skills training expose students to drafting functional business plans. In a related

study, Anyakoha (2010) in his assessment of teaching and learning of entrepreneurship education and training found that such initiative has not really helped students to gain business management skills; as such activities are often treated as mere academic endeavor to the extent that entrepreneurship instructors are unable to impact business skills on trainees. Thus Amadi and Opara (2018) concluded that “there is a knowledge gap made evident by the paucity of research literature on studies which have empirically examined the relative impact of entrepreneurship education and training on business management skills within the geographical confines of a developing nationality such as Nigeria.

### **Technical Skills Awareness and Self- Employment**

Technical skills are skills required to get a specific task accomplished. Abinu (2012) averred that technical skills are know- how peculiar to an occupation or group of occupations. Robinson (as cited in Ogbuanya et al., 2018) inferred that technical skills are specific to a job and relates to skills required to perform the particular job. It is skills that are specific to what the organization does, e.g. the technical skill required to run a University is lecturing skills. In business parlance, those with technical skills are called technicians in their field of work. It will be difficult for an entrepreneur to achieve his vision without technical skills. Okorie and Ezeji (as cited in Ogbuanya, et al, ibid) stated that “technical skills call for understanding and proficiency in a specific activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, procedures and techniques”. Mmadumere- Obike and Abraham (as cited in Usman, Waziri, Abdullahi & Babayo, 2018) suggested that entrepreneurship training improves the participants technical and vocational skills; and enhances the abilities that are essential for self reliance. Cooney (2012) is of the opinion that technical skills are necessary skills required to produce the business product or service. Odewale, Hani, Migiro and Adeyeye (2019) investigated the impact of technical knowledge on self employment in Malaysia and found that technical education influences students’ views on self- employment. The researchers thus recommended that educational policy makers should prioritize technical education and training, amongst other entrepreneurial skills to enhance emergence of nascent entrepreneurs. Supporting this assertion, Nwekeaku (2013) opined that technical education and training is necessary for business creation as it makes the nascent entrepreneur more dynamic in the business world.

### **Personal Entrepreneurial Skills and Self- Employment**

Personal entrepreneurial skills include discipline, risk taking, innovativeness, being change oriented, persistence and being a visionary leader (Efe- Imafidon et al. (2017). Personal entrepreneurial skills as stated by Efe- Imafidon et al., emphasized innovativeness and creativity as important factors that make a nascent entrepreneur succeed. Baron and Tang (2011) averred that innovation predates venture creation and so fundamental to self- employment and business success. Extant literature provides evidence of relationship between innovation, entrepreneurship training and education; and self- employment (Dobni, 2014; Galindo & Mendez, 2014; Jiang & Sun, 2015; Zhou & Xu, 2012). In a study conducted by Odewale, Hani, Migiro & Adeyeye (2019), innovation was found to have a great influence on self-employment. The study thus recommended that education policy makers and educators should prioritize innovation training to ensure



emergence of nascent entrepreneurs. In a related study, Chiekezie, et al., (2016) assert that personal entrepreneurial skills are skills that enable one to recognize economic opportunities and be able to act effectively on them. Udo (2016) studied the impact of creativity skills on employment generation and found a very close relationship between the two variables; and concluded that such skills enhances job creation, reduce unemployment, crime rate, government expenditure, poverty and raise the productivity of Nigerian economy. Supporting the above findings, Olatoke (2009) concluded that acquisition of creativity skills enhances people to function well in the economy.

### **Self-Motivation and Self Employment**

Several studies (Uddin and Kanti, 2013; Hopp and Sonderegger, 2015) have analyzed reasons for entrepreneurial failure; but it is pertinent to understudy the push- factors that make people take up entrepreneurial ventures and decision to continue during formative stress period. Authors (Baron, 2004; Holland and Garret (2015) asserted that decision to continue is associated with expectations and values that are intrinsic to the cognitive process of the nascent entrepreneur. Colombo and Grilli (2016) concluded that “very little have been published about the entrepreneur’s decision to continue or not during an industry- specific crises”. This study corroborates a theoretical model to explain the push factor that includes entrepreneur’s motivation. Self- motivation is the force that drives one to do something, the internal drive to achieve, produce, develop and be forward looking. When one sets out to achieve e.g. business venture, self- motivation is what pushes one to achieve such a dream. Self motivation makes one to learn and grow, notwithstanding the obstacles and drawbacks.

A study conducted by Barba- Sanchez and Atienza- Sahuquillo (2017) concluded that businesses are started by those that are motivated to do it and not only by those with the aptitude and ability to do so. In a related study, Agbai (2018) averred that skills acquisition alone is necessary but not sufficient to address youths self employment. In support of this assertion, Valliere (2014) confirmed that motivation is necessary to spur application of entrepreneurship behavior amongst youths as it complements the desired environment for youth entrepreneurship enhancement. Valliere (ibid) concluded that schemes and initiatives that focused on knowledge and expertise transfer may not be efficient without proper motivation in applying the required knowledge and training. Udida, Ukwai and Agodo (2012); and Ekpe et al. (2012) confirmed that self- motivation can aid or hamper skill acquisition from leading to enterprise creation.

### **Social Influence and Self Employment**

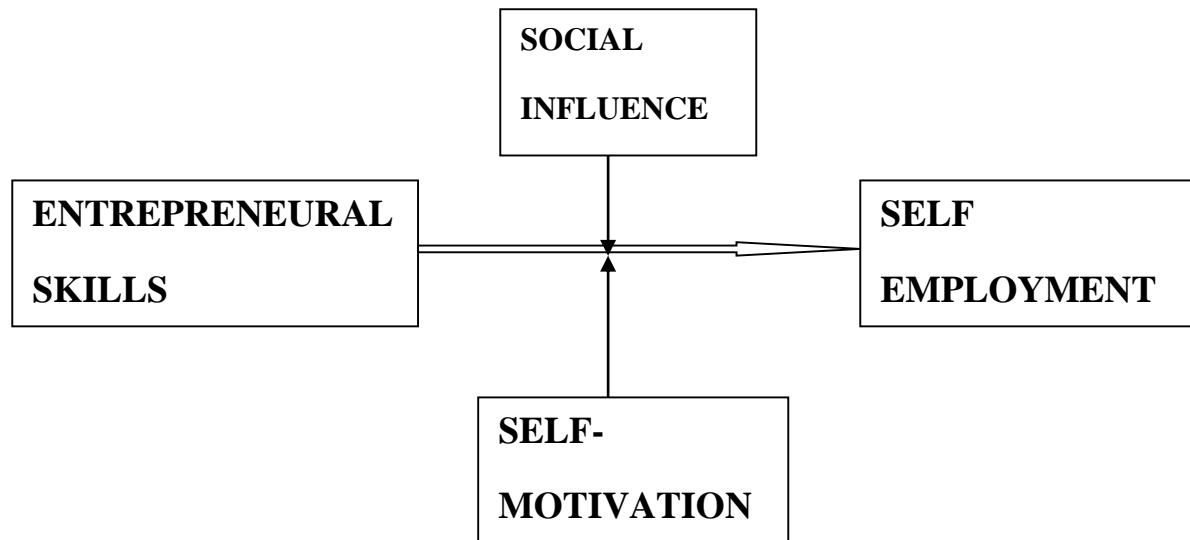
Social influence includes the influence of family and friends, social relations, role models, mentors and advisors. Ekpe (2017) and Asikhia (2010) averred that skills acquisition may not lead to self employment if there is a negative social influence. In developing economies, entrepreneurship is at very low ebb, because of poor perception of the possible low and rural start up of such ventures. Amaikwu (2011) posited that the poor perception mostly comes from peers, role models and other social networks, and can hinder entrepreneurial skills from leading to self employment practice. Allen (2000) investigated the effect of social network on self- employment. He anchored his study on the premise that “if one’s social network provides social support so as to reduce the cost of self

employment, those with mere effective social networks may possess a greater incentive to attempt self-employment, *ceteris paribus*". Allen's study found that self-employment intention of individuals is highly influenced by the size and composition of the social network. He also found that women are not influenced by social support for entrepreneurial activity than men; which explains reasons for gender differences in self employment. Allen (ibid) concluded that differences in male and female self-employment may be partially explained by differences in social networks between the sexes.

In a related study, Hout and Rosen (2000) found that young people from entrepreneurial families show interest and are more prone to take up self employment. Similarly, some theorists posit that entrepreneurship has positive relationship with family forces (Rogoff, 2003; Athayde, 2009; Fairlie & Robb, 2007). The family forces have two aspects: genetic inheritance (Zhang, Zyphur, Narayana, Arvey, Chaturvedi & Avolio, 2009) and pick-up forces (Hout & Rosen, 2000). The genetic effect comprises of the entrepreneurial inherited skills and parental attributes gained from exposure to self-employed parents. Such inheritance in most cases is not enough as the children have to be encouraged to achieve the pick-up effect. Tervo (2006) averred that the encouragement is consolidated by entrepreneurial skills training and education. Studies have also found that social networks are positively related to entrepreneurship and self-employment in Nigeria, UK and USA, respectively (Carter & Shaw; Lawal et al. and Shane; as cited in Ekpe, 2017). Social influence also had positive effect on students' entrepreneurial intentions in China (Yun & Yuan-qiong, 2010). On the inverse, a study in Malaysia by Nasurdin et al. (2009) indicated a significant negative relationship between entrepreneurial intention and social influence.

### **Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition Influences and Self-employment Initiatives**

Several scholars have established significant positive influences of entrepreneurial skills acquisition in tertiary institutions in Nigeria on self employment (Amadi, 2012; Ikegwu, 2014). In the process of entrepreneurial skills training, one learns some skills, behavior, attitudes needed for business; which is used to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunity for self-employment (Samiiian & Brutat, 2012). Entrepreneurial skills acquisition can lead to self employment especially when the individual is motivated and has positive influence of friends, relatives, advisors and mentors (Ekpe & Mat, 2012). Having stated that there is a positive influence between skill acquisition and enterprise creation; self-motivation and social influence can aid or hamper skill acquisition from leading to enterprise creation (Udida, Ukwaiyi & Ogodo; 2012; Ekpe et al, 2012). In this study, we propose a structural model that exposes the relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition and self employment initiative, moderated by psycho-social factors (self-motivation and social influence), as seen in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

**Source:** Adapted from Ekpe, Razak, Ismail & Abdullah, Z. (2015),

### Relevant Theories

This study investigates the relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition and self-employment; and roles of psycho- social factors (self- motivation and social influence) in mediating the aforementioned relationship. Nwosu (2019) averred that “undergirding a research study with theory contributes to useful contextualization of the research study”. The study, therefore is theoretically underpinned on; Human Capital Theory (HCT), Need for Achievement Theory (NAT) and Thomas Cochran’s Theory (TCT) of Entrepreneurship.

### Human Capital Theory

The human capital theory (Becker, 1964) was premised on two primary factors: education and training. The theory suggests that knowledge acquired through experience and education is resourceful and divergently dispersed amongst people. This according to Shane and Vankataraman (2000) informs the basis for understanding the disparities in identifying and exploiting opportunities. Davidson and Honig (as cited in Nwosu (2019) concluded that human capital factors impact positively on emergence of nascent entrepreneurs. Shane and Vankataraman (opcit) argued that human capital factors (education and experience) are invaluable to opportunity recognition, idea generation and business planning; which are sine qua non to entrepreneurial activities. Furthering the assertion in the context of this study, Schumpeter (1934) opined that entrepreneurship training is responsible for creative destruction. This implies that education helps in creating new ideas, improved techniques, new technologies and new products. In a related study, Van- Den- Berg (as cited in Afolabi et al., 2017) found a tight correlation between education and



new product (NPD) in knowledge- based economies that invested enormously in education, technology and related growth elements.

### **McClelland Need for Achievement Theory (NAT)**

In the context of this study, McClelland (1965) need for achievement theory is a psychological theory that explains a functional tight relationship between need for achievement (n- achievement), entrepreneurial activities and economic development. In his acquired need theory, McClelland averred that needs of individuals are acquired over time and shaped by our culture and life experience. These needs he classified to include: need for achievement (nach), need for affiliation (naff) and need for power (npow). These needs influence individuals' motivation and how well he/she perform in the work place. This motivational theory can also be referred to as three need theory or the learned needs theory. McClelland pointed out that these motivators are learned and so can be thought. The trio is explained below:

**Need for Achievement (nach):** High need for achievement points at individuals that avoid low-risk and high- risk ventures. This is because easily attained (low risk) ventures are not genuine achievement; and ventures one can attain by chance (high- risk) is deemed not achieved through one's effort. Hence achievers prefer ventures with moderate probability for success (50% chance). Such achievers need regular feedback for progress monitoring and prefer lone work or working with other high achievers.

**Need for Affiliation (naff):** High need for affiliation (naff) is associated with need for cordial relationship and acceptance by other people; while conforming to the norms of the organization. High naff individuals are good in customer relationship as they prefer working where there is opportunity for personal interaction.

**Need for Power (npow):** High need for power is categorized into two: personal power and institutional power. Personal power is associated with people that want to direct others, and as such seen as undesirable in organizations. Institutional power or social power is associated with people that want to organize the efforts of others in furtherance of the needs of the organization. Individuals with high need for institutional power perform better than those with high need for personal power.

The implication of these three needs is that managers should identify the dominant needs (motivators) and motivate individuals accordingly. McClelland pointed out that these needs are not inherent but are developed through culture and life experiences. He formulated the Thematic Apperception Test for understanding the needs and so jobs that suits different individuals. He also affirms that there is tendency for high entrepreneurial activity in a society where the average need for achievement is relatively high. This however suggest that motivation of would be entrepreneurs is essential as it increases the tendency to set up their own businesses. McClelland rightly pointed out in his book "The Achieving Society", that the drive towards achievement is the basis of activity for most entrepreneurs" (Chiekezie et. al, 2016).

### **Thomas Cochran's Theory of Entrepreneurship (TCT)**

Cochran (1971) theory is under girded by: cultural values, role expectations and social sanctions. He sees an entrepreneur as representing a model of a society, molded by child- rearing, schooling and prevailing culture where the individual grew up. Cochran stressed that 'social institutions, cultural attitude, family background, practices and values play important role in shaping and developing the future entrepreneur'; where performance is influenced by:

- i. His own attitude towards his occupation;
- ii. The role expectations held by the sanctioning group;
- iii. The operational requirements of the job (Cochran, 1971)

The theory affirms that society's norm influences behavioral patterns of individuals. These norms are rooted from tradition of the family and the community where he or she finds him/ herself. In this sense, Pawer (2013) averred that 'some communities are business communities from gore'. Children born into such families from childhood upbringing, automatically develops business acumen and hence get co-operation and support from family members and community. Cochran laid emphases on social sanctions, role expectations and cultural values as important factors that lead to formation of entrepreneurs in a society. Hence Cochran's theory is also termed theory of entrepreneurial supply.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper was a theoretical exposition of relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition and self- employment; and the mediating effects of psycho-social factors in the relationship. Concerted effort was also made at defining the relevant terms and theories in entrepreneurship literature. The paper found that the proxies of entrepreneurial skills and the mediators as espoused in the literature were closely knitted with enterprise creation. The study concluded that with adequate motivation and positive social influence, entrepreneurial skills acquisition will metamorphose to self employment.

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