
Measuring Entrepreneurial Skills and Sustainability in Small Business Enterprises Post-Pandemic: Empirical Study From Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

In an attempt to understand the underlying factors contributing to the high failure rate of small and medium-sized businesses in Nigeria, there is a need to focus on the extent to which the entrepreneurial skills of the operators impact the businesses. Therefore, the study aims to identify entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria. Two research questions were posed to guide the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, and multistage sampling techniques was observed. The stratified and accidental sampling techniques were used to arrive at the selected sample of four hundred (400) registered small business enterprises operating in Cross Rivers State. A structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire for Entrepreneurial Skills Required for Sustainable Small Business Enterprises in Calabar Metropolis" (QESRSSBECM) was used for data collection. The Cronbach Alpha Reliability test was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, which availed a high internal consistency of the instrument at 0.76 - 0.83. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data gathered for the research using SPSS version 21.0. The research findings revealed that risk management and ICT skills are required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis in the post-covid era. It was recommended, among others, that small business enterprise operators in Calabar Metropolis and Nigeria should be trained on developing their risk management practices and ICT capacities through advocacy, on-the-job training, seminars, and conferences.

Keywords: Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial skills, Risk management, Sustainability, SMEs

JEL Classifications: D63, L24, M10, O55, Q01

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1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, since its emergence in late 2019, it has impacted businesses negatively and all productive sectors of nations across the globe. Businesses have been exposed to various negative impacts and challenges during the global pandemic. More so, small business enterprises (SBEs) are known to be a major means of survival and sustenance for most families and individuals. A significant national and global economic development and sustainability player was no exception. Studies have shown that small business enterprises (SBEs) are confronted with various difficulties and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Olubiyi, 2022; Paolo & Galeotti, 2020)

SBEs are noted to be vibrant economic stimulants and drivers in achieving sustainable development of nations, including Nigeria. Thus, the significant roles played by SBEs in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be underestimated, but improved upon for effective realization of these goals: To end poverty by promoting inclusive economic growth for sustainable jobs and equality, through the establishment of viable SBEs; End hunger by involving in Agric Businesses that promotes food production and distribution (food and value chain); Provision of decent work and economic growth through promotion and establishment of decent and self-reliant household and personal businesses generating 95% jobs; Achieving industry, innovation and infrastructure by investing in inclusive and sustainable small business enterprises as a means of achieving and enhancing industrialization drive, together with innovation and infrastructure; and responsible consumption and production, utilizing SBEs as driving forces of both the national and global economy by creating a symbiotic interface between the business and physical (natural) environment (United Nations, 2020). That notwithstanding, the ugly trend of the new normal has posed a novel challenge in coping with the sharp changes and dynamics in the business ecosystem, putting SBEs in focus. This urgent and pungent challenge calls for seasoned, creative, innovative, dynamic, and skilled entrepreneurs in possession of requisite entrepreneurial skills or competencies to explore and utilize sustainable business practices to maximize enterprising opportunities in the phase of flexibility, uncertainty and disruption in the business world inherent with the COVID-19 realities (Jobo, 2020).

Observation has it that SBEs in Cross River State have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to a massive failure, and to the extent of degenerating to compounded problems of high business liability and liquidity rates, increasing unemployment and joblessness of youth, high crime and insecurity index, increasing poverty lines and illiteracy, hunger, increased number of street children phenomenon, among other socio-economic impacts. Similarly, KPMG (2020) “study availed that 94% of global and local businesses (SBEs in particular) have been impacted negatively and are presently battling with the negative effects of the pandemic.” The increasing mortality rate of SBEs in Cross River State occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic may be attributed to entrepreneurs' lack of relevant and requisite entrepreneurial skills and competencies

to operate sustainable SBEs to cope and stay afloat with the novel business challenges posed by the pandemic. “SBEs experience pronounced challenges in pursuing environmentally friendly businesses. These challenges include limited financial access, lack of business skills and unpleasant business environment” (Bymolt *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the underpinning question that prompted this study is, what are the entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable operation of SBEs in Cross River State in the COVID-19 era using Calabar Metropolis as a case study? Hence, the major thrust of this study is to identify the entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Cross River State, Nigeria with a particular focus on Calabar Metropolis.

However, SBEs, on the other hand, have varying definitions based on the different parameters it is approached by various scholars in terms of number of employees, investment, the volume of sales, output, and production technique, among others. Thus, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe (2014) defined a small business as a progeny of small-scale business to mean an enterprise whose capital investment does not exceed five million naira (5,000,000) (including land and working capital) or whose turnover is not more than twenty-five million (25,000,000) annually. Deducing from the above definition, one can define a small business enterprise (SBE) as the name implies as an enterprise with a small business structure, small management structure, small capital formation, small investment structure and small resource structure (human and material). In accordance, Sarokin (2019) stated that “a small-scale enterprise (small business enterprise) is one marked by a limited number of employees and a limited flow of finances and materials”. According to the author, a small business is viewed using global measures to be an enterprise having fewer than 50 employees and an annual sale below €10 million. Examples of small business enterprises operating in Calabar Metropolis of Cross River State including, but are not limited to, the following; provision shops and foodstuff businesses, adult and children wear businesses, dry cleaning businesses, service delivery outlets, phone accessories and repairs businesses, restaurants, and food vendors, newspaper distribution agents or vendors, computer repairs and accessories business, beauty salons and cosmetic shops, tailoring businesses, consulting firms, chemist shops, POS cash points, to mention but a few.

Undoubtedly, Mohammed (2012) noted that SBEs has a multiplier and value-added effects on the economic development and sustainability of Nigeria through creation of new jobs employing 64% of the industrial workforce of the nation. Therefore, efforts directed towards revamping and achieving sustainable SBEs in Cross River State and transforming them into viable economic hub to cushion the downplaying effects of the pandemic are worthwhile. According to Grover and Suominen (2014), SBEs are economic inputs with incremental value that enable countries that invest in it to enjoy a robust economy because of its capacity to employ and engage a larger percentage of unemployed individuals in society in responsible and productive living through entrepreneurship.

Despite the significant roles that SBEs play in achieving the economic objective of poverty eradication and its exponential benefits in line with the sustainable development goals (SDGs), it is obvious that SBEs in Nigeria and especially in Cross River State have not attained a sustainable status quo. Hence, this results in a high mortality rate when confronted with the devastating effects of the COVID-19 lockdown period and the resultant changing business strategies and skills required to cope with the disruption of COVID-19 crises. The study of Segal and Gerstel (2020) “forecast that the effects of the coronavirus dispensation will have a likely severe converse impact on small and medium-sized enterprises. Micro and small businesses are experiencing a larger decline in business activities than medium and large firms (Lakuma, Sunday, Sserunjogi, Kahunde

& Munyambonera, 2020). This may be because several micro and small businesses in the country stopped operations for a while due to their helplessness to undertake preventive health measures like ensuring physical distancing and providing sanitizers, water, and soap for customers”.

All the same, “factors such as lack of experience, insufficient capital, wrong location of the business, poor inventory management, over-investment in fixed assets, poor credit arrangements, personal use of business funds, unhealthy competition and low sales account for 50% of small business failure (Ames & Berle, 2014). SBEs operators hardly have time and resources to develop or retrain and update their skills and knowledge for effective and efficient business management, which does not give room for product or service innovation as key ingredients of business improvement and sustainability in a dynamic and vulnerable business environment today” (Tom, Basil & Alfred, 2016). Exploration into scholarly works cited above has pointed to the fact that SBEs cannot do well in the face of depleting coronavirus challenge because most small business operators lack a set of entrepreneurial or business skills ranging from poor management practices, poor accounting standards, lack of financial discipline, lack of ICT and risk management skills, and in a nutshell, lack of entrepreneurial skills. The dearth of these relevant, innovative, and resilient business skills by most entrepreneurs due to inadequate education, training and technical background has plunged SBEs into further crisis resulting to unsustainable SBEs that cannot stand the COVID-19 business wave. It is in the light of the above that this study delves into asking whether risk management skills and ICT skills are relevant entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable SBEs in Cross River State during COVID-19 era.

The significance of SBEs to the development of any economy in the 21st century cannot be over-emphasized as SBEs serve as pivots of socio-economic transformation. This is why the government, non-governmental agencies, foreign agencies, and solicitous individuals at various levels are rigorously assisting SBEs development and sustainability. In spite of all the effort mobilized at various levels to enhance SBEs to attain a sustainable position by strengthening its investment base and operational capacity development in Nigeria, it has been observed with dismay that SBEs in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State are not doing well owing to the fact that most of them lack the basic entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable operation of their small business enterprises in the face of COVID-19 disruptions. This accounted for their lack of growth, expansion, competitive advantage, and high mortality rate of SBEs in the area under study. Consequently, the progressive failure of SBEs observed in Calabar metropolis was because most small business operators are ignorant of the impact of entrepreneurial skills on their business performance and sustainability, and therefore, undermines the relevance of acquiring these basic business skills to sustain their small business enterprises. This situation directly or indirectly explains why most SBEs in Calabar metropolis are underperforming and most have gone out of business.

This ugly trend attracted concerted public concern in a bid to know the likely causal factors responsible for the high failure and consequent mortality rate of this significant sub-sector of the economy in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State. The attention of government agencies, organized private institutions, NGOs, business operators, citizens and researchers has been drawn to the problem, knowing that if no pragmatic steps are taken to remedy or salvage this palpable problem, it can degenerate to a worst state of gross failure of SBEs in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State resulting to high level of unemployment, crime rate, poverty levels and above all, the situation can lead to the collapse of the state economy at the long-run. Against this background,

the study sought to identify entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable SBEs in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State.

The main purpose of this study was to identify the entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis. Specifically, the study sought to: Identify the risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis, and Identify the ICT skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis

The following research questions were answered in this study: What are the risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis? What are the ICT skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis?

2. Literature Review

Sunday and Somoye, cited in Ukabi (2018) validated that the entrepreneur is the life wire of the business who ensures that the business performs up to expectation by putting all measures in place to guarantee the achievement of predetermined goals despite the odds. Accordingly, Ademiluyi, cited in Ukabi (2018), added that this essential function of the entrepreneur as the life wire of the business requires a level of knowledge and abilities in entrepreneurial skills to be able to function effectively and efficiently. In the views of Chileshe and Yirenkyi-Fianko (2012), enterprise operators must be equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and sensitivity toward risk management for sustainable SBEs. They further added that professional knowledge impacts on risk management process to a greater extent. Moreso, ICT skill is contextually defined as a business enterprise's ability to use a wide array of ICTs ranging from database programs to local area networks (Martin & Matlay cited in Ukabi, 2018). The skill involves using computers and other telecommunication equipment like telephone lines, wireless signals, social networking platforms, middlewares, software, storage, and audio-visual systems to create, access, store, transmit, and manipulate information. The world in which we live today has been described a global village, digital or E-world, due to the rounded impact of ICT in all walks of life, business inclusive. Given its inevitable relevance and prospects in a changing but competitive business world, ICT skill is an indispensable entrepreneurial skill required to establish and run sustainable SBEs in the pandemic era. Because only businesses that are ICT compliant and have online presence are thriving in this era of paradigm shift, where traditional buying and selling methods are replaced and improved through electronic business transactions (E-Business Transactions), viz online shopping, E-Commerce, E-Banking or E-Business. Focusing on this, Gregurec, Furjan and Tomicic-Pupek (2021) acknowledged that ICT professionals refer to this as a global disruption, which can be seen as an opportunity or a challenge to transform business models implement new ICTs as a support for business processes.

According to Walsh, cited in Gregurec, Furjan and Tomicic-Pupek (2021), regardless of their size, numerous business organizations; large, medium, and small, are, “succumbing to the effects of the coronavirus”. The period of total or partial lockdown and the social distancing owing to threat of the spread of the virus has made e-business through the utilization of the various ICTs more relevant, critical, and adaptable in transacting business activities during the COVID-19 dispensation. Therefore, the need to possess modern ICT skills by entrepreneurs, run sustainable SBEs, and compete favorably with counterparts in the globe during this era was indispensable. In a recent study by Oche, Ukabi, and Odey (2021) on the role of business education in repositioning

the ailing global economy caused by COVID-19, the study revealed that the world would have experienced a total shutdown both not for the presence and utilization of ICT skills during the COVID-19 disruption. The authors added that the pandemic affected so many business enterprises greatly and among them were SBEs that lacked ICT skills and online presence. Consequently, Oche, Ukabi, and Odey (2021) advocated for education and training to teach and develop proficiency in ICT skills appropriate for operating sustainable SBEs in the “new order of business”.

An empirical study by Karajan, Muturi, Kabata, Wahome, and Kayogo (2013) on small business management in Kenya using descriptive statistics for data analysis revealed that a low level of technical skills leads to the failure of SMEs in using modern technology in business which has a negative effect on small business enterprises; 33.8% of the respondents agreed that low level of education lead to many SBEs failing to use modern technology because they do not understand their usability. Further, 26.4% and 25.4% not only “agreed” but they “very strongly” and “strongly agreed” respectively, with the above result. The study also shows that mobile phones are the most modern technology used by SBEs (50%), followed by computers (24%), and finally, calculators (17%), respectively. It implies that small business enterprises will achieve sustainability in the COVID-19 dispensation if their operators acquire a good mix of ICT skills. In strong support of the above results and views, Sajuyibe and Olabi (2012) validated that ICT skills are acquired for strategic day-to-day business management, communication and collaboration, customers access, managerial decision-making, data, and knowledge management, which helps to provide effective and efficient means of organizational productivity, service delivery systems for enterprise sustainability. In a related perspective, Duruamaku-Dim (2017) submitted that the internet constitutes the largest global market hub today, with the highest economic dividends of e-commerce and transactions. These availed online business opportunities can only be taken advantage of by those entrepreneurs who possess substantial skills in ICTs such as internet, e-cash transaction, social networking, and online shopping skills, which in turn gives one a competitive advantage in a turbulent and flexible business world.

Apparently, Risk Management Skills (RMS) has to do with the ability to identify risk components or factors and analyze them to ensure advantage is taken of calculated risk (Newman, Charity, Faith & Ongay, 2018). Generally, SBEs are failing at different phases due to risks that are not effectively managed. Adopting and sustaining a proper risk management technique is still challenging within the SBEs environment, irrespective of the industry (Mahembe, 2011). “This is due to a lack of risk management knowledge, insufficient resources, poor control environment, and risk management skills by management in capitalizing available funds for the well-being of the business. Compared to large enterprises, SBEs do not have sufficient resources; they lack knowledge on implementing structured risk management” (Jayathilake, 2012). Risk management (RM) is one of the major challenges confronting business enterprises during the COVID-19 era, and thus an indispensable factor in SBEs that must be planned for and effectively managed for business survival and sustainability in the new normal. Therefore, Enterprise Risk Management Skill (ERMS) is an essential business skill that every entrepreneur must possess to ensure sustainable SBEs and stay afloat during the COVID-19 disruption, as it confers on the entrepreneur the ability to set up well-structured and controlled strategies for enterprise risk evaluation and management (Chukwuka & Mma 2020; Watson, 2004). Notable among the core qualities or attributes that describe a successful entrepreneur is that of a ‘risk-taker’. Thus, the use of enterprise risk management skills (ERMS) can be viewed as an essential business competency

enabling entrepreneurs of SBEs to optimize opportunities associated with risk in the pandemic dispensation (Hofmann, 2009). It, therefore, implies that small business enterprise sustainability amidst the challenges of the pandemic cannot be achieved in a vacuum or isolation of business skills, instead, it requires knowledge, possession, and application of a set of entrepreneurial skills, of which risk management skill is paramount. Accordingly, the Actuarial Association of Europe (AAE) (2016) stated that risk management is a significant skill and capability contributing to business improvement, growth, and sustainability. Some of these skills inherent in RMS include assessment skills, technical skills and communication skills (AAE, 2016). In the views of Ping and Muthuveloo (2015), profit or loss are key performance indicators (KPIs) that determine the performance level, success, and sustainability of the enterprise. They supported that an enterprise's level of performance can be sustained through the adoption of an effective enterprise risk management system (ERMS), that promotes enterprise value, enhances business sustainability, minimize uncertainty, and enhances customer satisfaction in changing consumption patterns. Also, "Risk Management Skill" is a broad term for the business discipline that protects the assets and profits of an organization by reducing the potential for loss before it occurs, mitigating the impact of a loss if it occurs, and executing a swift recovery after a loss occurs. It involves a series of skills that involve risk identification, the measurement and evaluation of exposures, exposure reduction or elimination, risk reporting, and risk transfer and/or financing for losses that may occur, which makes the acquisition of its skills imperative in operating successful and sustainable small business enterprises in the phase of COVID-19 challenges. All organizations practice risk management in multiple forms, depending on the exposure being addressed (Calderon & Cheh, 2002; Risk and Insurance Management Society, 2008). According to Plourd (2009), the importance of risk management skills is now escalated above issues such as long-term and short-term financing constraints. Proclaiming the existence of a risk management strategy is insufficient, enterprises need to actively engage in risk management practice to address the convergence of major risks as experienced in the current economic climate where the credit crisis risk, fluctuating commodity prices, increased government debt, rising unemployment, and declining consumer spending are impacting individually and combined, on enterprises.

3. Methodology

This study identified entrepreneurial skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria. The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey design. The use of this design was predicated on the work of Olubiyi, Egwakhe, and Akinlabi (2019), Olubiyi, Egwakhe, Amos, and Ajayi (2019), Olubiyi (2019), Olubiyi, Lawal, and Adeoye, (2022), Olubiyi, (2022) and Olubiyi, Jubril, Sojinu, and Ngari, (2022), Uwem, Oyedele, and Olubiyi, (2021). The study population comprised all registered SBEs operators in Calabar metropolis totaling 2,860, obtained from Department of Investment Promotion, Business Registration Unit, Calabar, Cross River State, 2017. Using stratified and accidental sampling techniques a sample of 400 respondents representing 14% of the entire population were selected and used for the study. The instrument used in eliciting responses from respondents was a validated researcher's designed questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Entrepreneurial Skills Required for Sustainable Small Business Enterprises in Calabar Metropolis" (QESRSSBECM). The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of simple frequency, percentages, and bar charts with the help of SPSS version 21.0.

4. Results and Discussin

Research question 1:

What are risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis?

To answer this research question, data were collected from the respondents using the items contained in the instrument. Here, respondents were asked to rate the instrument's items whether risk management skills are "required" for sustainable small business enterprises or "not required". Frequency and percentages were used to analyze the risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis.

The remark (Required or Not Required) in Table 1 was based on the respondent's choice in each item. A benchmark of 50 per cent (%) and above shows the representativeness at which risk management skills were required for sustainable small business enterprises, while below 50 percent shows that the skills were not required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis?

Table 1. Summary of respondents' views on the risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis N = 400

S/ N	Item Statement	Required		Not Required		Remark
		Freq	Percentage %	Freq	Percentage %	
1	Able to determine risk management strategy.	276	69.0%	124	31.0%	Required
2	Able to identify and assess risk.	230	57.5%	170	42.5%	Required
3	Able to prioritize and manage risk.	255	63.8%	145	36.3%	Required
4	Able to adopt the right risk avoidance and risk management strategies.	257	64.3%	143	35.8%	Required
5	Able to deliberately make and observe safety rules.	199	49.8%	201	50.3%	Not Required
6	Able to plan how to tackle risk.	256	64.0%	144	36.0%	Required
7	Able to take calculated risk.	208	52.0%	192	48.0%	Required
8	Able to control losses.	247	61.8%	153	38.3%	Required
Grand Total			60.25%		39.75%	

Source: Researchers' result, 2023

The result in Table 1 above reveals the respondents' views on the risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises. The result shows that, able to determine risk management strategy (69.0%), Able to identify and assess risk (57.5%), Able to prioritize and manage risk (63.8%), Able to adopt the right risk avoidance and risk management strategies (64.3%), Able to plan how to tackle risk (64.0%), Able to take calculated risk (52.0%), Able to control losses (61.8%), with the required percentages of above 50% and a total percentage of

60.25% for “Required” while only item five, Able to deliberately make and observe safety rules (49.8%) indicated “Not Required” and has a total of 39.75% percent. This implies that the identified risk management skills are required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis because seven (7) out of the eight (8) risk management skills were identified as required for the improvement of small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis except for Able to deliberately make and observe safety rules which is item five. A Bar chart to show the flow at which the skills were required is presented on figure 1 below.

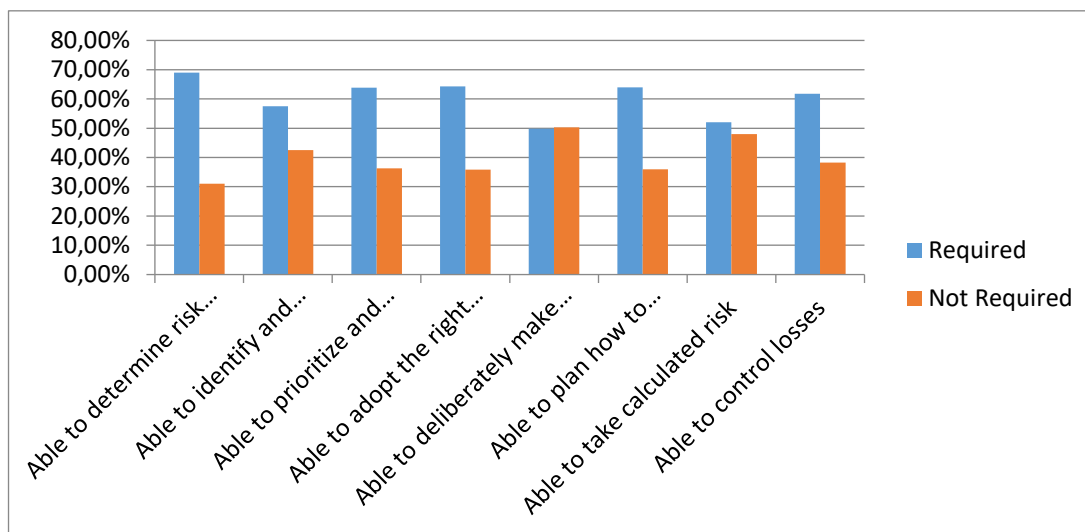


Figure 1: Chart illustration of risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises (2023)

Figure 1 shows that all the risk management skills identified are required for sustainable SBEs except for item five. However, the result of the analysis revealed that the respondents rated the skills differently according to their order of importance as follows; Able to determine risk management strategy (69.0%), Able to adopt the right risk avoidance and risk management strategies (64.3%), Able to plan how to tackle risk (64.0%), Able to prioritize and manage risk (63.8%), Able to control losses (61.8%), Able to identify and assess risk (57.5%), Able to take calculated risk (52.0%), while Able to deliberately make and observe safety rules (49.8%) was the only skill rated Not Required.

Research question two

What are the ICT skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis? To answer this research question, data were collected from the respondents using the items contained in section “B” of the instrument. Here, respondents were asked to rate the instruments' items whether ICT skills are “required” for sustainable small business enterprises or “not required”. Frequency and percentages were used to analyze the ICT skills required for sustainable business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis. The remark (Required or Not Required) in Table 2 was based on the respondent’s choice in each item. A benchmark of 50 percent (%) and above shows the representativeness at which ICT skills were required for sustainable small business

enterprises, while below 50 percent shows that the skills were not required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis.

TABLE 2. Summary of respondents' views on the ICT skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis N = 400

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	REQUIRED		NOT REQUIRED		REMARK
		Freq	Percentage %	Freq	Percentage %	
1	Ability to set up a business web page.	231	57.8%	169	42.3%	Required
2	Able to do e-transactions.	235	58.8%	165	41.3%	Required
3	Able to use social media to communicate effectively with customers and business counterparts.	223	55.8%	177	44.3%	Required
4	Able to do online advertisement and business networking.	240	60.0%	160	40.0%	Required
5	Able to use different ICT gadgets to improve customer services.	194	48.5%	206	51.5%	Not Required
6	Knowledge of internet security to protect business and customers' confidential information.	237	59.3%	163	40.8%	Required
7	Using ICT knowledge for good record keeping.	223	55.8%	177	44.3%	Required
8	Using ICT knowledge for effective processing of business documents.	230	57.5%	170	42.5%	Required
Grand Total			56.66%		43.34%	

Source: Researchers' result, 2023

The result in Table 2 above reveals the respondents' views on the ICT skills required for sustainable small business enterprises. The result shows that the ability to set up a business web page (57.8%), Able to do e-transactions (58.8%), Able to use social media to communicate effectively with customers and business counterparts (55.8%), Able to do online advertisement and business networking (60.0%), knowledge of internet security to protect business and customers' confidential information (59.3%), Using ICT knowledge for good record keeping (55.8%), Using ICT knowledge for effective processing of business documents (57.5%), with the required percentages of above 50% and a total percentage of 56.66 for "Required" while only item five, Able to use different ICT gadgets to improve customer services (48.5%) indicated "Not Required" and has a grand percentage total of 43.34. This implies that the identified ICT skills are required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis because seven (7) out of the eight (8) ICT skills were identified as required for improvement of small business

enterprises except for ‘Able to use different ICT gadgets to improve customer services’ which is item five. A Bar chart to show the flow at which the skills were required is presented in figure 2.

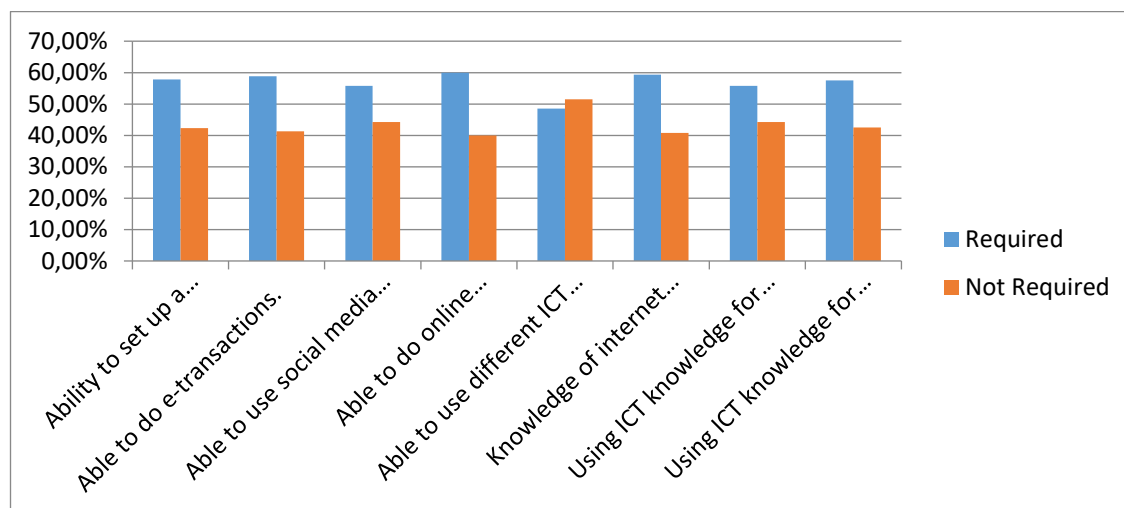


Figure 2: Chart illustration of ICT skills required for sustainable small business enterprises(2023)

Figure 2 above shows that all the ICT skills identified are required for sustainable SBEs except for item five. However, the result of the analysis revealed that the respondents rated the skills differently according to their order of importance as follows; Able to do online advertisement and business networking (60.0%), knowledge of internet security to protect business and customers' confidential information (59.3%), Able to do e-transactions (58.8%), ability to set up a business web page (57.8%), Using ICT knowledge for effective processing of business documents (57.5%), Able to use social media to communicate effectively with customers and business counterparts (55.8%), Using ICT knowledge for good record keeping (55.8%), while Able to use different ICT gadgets to improve customer services (48.5%) was the only skill rated Not Required.

4.1. Results and Discussions

The findings on risk management skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis showed that the respondents agreed that the ICT skills identified are required for the improvement of small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis because seven (7) out of the eight (8) ICT skills were identified as required for sustainable small business enterprises except for Able to deliberately make and observe safety rules. The findings were supported by the Actuarial Association of Europe (AAE) (2016) study, which stated that risk management is a significant skill and capability contributing to business improvement, growth, and sustainability. Some of these skills inherent in RMS include assessment skills, technical skills, and communication skills (AAE, 2016). Another study that supports this finding is that of Ping and Muthuveloo (2015), who found that profit or loss are key performance indicators (KPIs) that determine the enterprise's performance level, success, and sustainability. They supported that an enterprise level of performance can be sustained by adopting an effective enterprise risk

management system (ERMS) that promotes enterprise value, enhances business sustainability, minimizes uncertainty, and enhances customer satisfaction in changing consumption patterns. Thus, several scholars are in support that “Risk Management Skill” is a broad term for the business discipline that protects the assets and profits of an organization by reducing the potential for loss before it occurs, mitigating the impact of a loss if it occurs, and executing a swift recovery after a loss occurs to ensure the sustainability of the business. It involves a series of skills that involve risk identification, the measurement and evaluation of exposures, exposure reduction or elimination, risk reporting, and risk transfer and/or financing for losses that may occur, which makes the acquisition of its skills imperative in operating successful and sustainable small business enterprises in the phase of COVID-19 challenges. All organizations practice risk management in multiple forms, depending on the exposure addressed (Calderon & Cheh, 2002; Risk and Insurance Management Society, 2008).

The finding in this aspect of the study revealed that the respondents agreed that the ICT skills identified are required for the improvement of small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis because seven (7) out of the eight (8) ICT skills were identified as required for improvement of small business enterprises except for Able to use different ICT gadgets to improve customer services. These findings on ICT skills required for sustainable SBEs in Calabar metropolis are supported by the study of Oche, Ukabi, and Odey (2021) who acknowledged that the world would have experienced a total shutdown not for the presence and utilization of ICT skills during the COVID-19 disruption. The authors added that the pandemic affected so many business enterprises greatly, and among them were SBEs that lacked ICT skills and online presence. Consequently, Oche, Ukabi and Odey (2021) advocated for education and training that will teach and develop proficiency in ICT skills appropriate for operating sustainable SBEs in the “new order of business”. Another empirical study that supports this finding was that of Karajan, Muturi, Kabata, Wahome, and Kayogo (2013), that conducted a study on small business management in Kenya using descriptive statistics for data analysis. The study revealed that low level of technological skills leads to the failure of SMEs in using modern technology in business which has a negative effect on small business enterprises; 33.8% of the respondents agreed that low level of education lead to many SBEs failing to use modern technology because they do not understand their usability. Further, 26.4% and 25.4% not only “agreed” but they “very strongly” and “strongly agreed” respectively, with the above result. The study also shows that mobile phones are the most modern technology used by SBEs (50%), followed by computers (24%), and finally, calculators (17%), respectively. It implies that small business enterprises will achieve sustainability in the COVID-19 dispensation if their operators acquire a good mix of ICT skills. Also, in strong support of the above findings, Sajuyibe and Olabi (2012) validated that ICT skills are acquired for strategic day-to-day business management, communication and collaboration, customers access, managerial decision-making, data and knowledge management, which helps to provide effective and efficient means of organizational productivity, service delivery systems for enterprise sustainability. In a related perspective, Duruamaku-Dim (2017) submitted that the internet constitutes the largest global market hub today, with the highest economic dividends of e-commerce and transactions. These availed online business opportunities can only be taken advantage of by those entrepreneurs who possesses substantial skills in ICTs such as internet, e-cash transaction, social networking, and online shopping skills which in turn gives one a competitive advantage in a turbulent and flexible business world. It also provides the small business operators with the skills of effectively serving their customers at convenience, ensuring

high accuracy, and with high utilization of customers' value, which in turn increases the sales index and profit margin of the business. People transact businesses at ease today with the internet, computers, mobile phones, social networks, electronic cash transaction machines, etc. Therefore, any small-scale business that anticipates making tangible growth and development in the present digital world and during and after the COVID-19 era must commit both tangible and intangible resources to ensure its operators acquire the necessary ICT skills. In support of these findings, Sajuyigbe and Alabi (2012) stressed that ICT skills are basic requirements for strategic management, communication and collaboration, customers access, managerial decision-making, data management, and knowledge management since ICT helps in providing an effective and efficient means of organizational productivity, service delivery, and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

From the study findings, it was concluded that the identified entrepreneurial skills of risk management and ICT competencies are imperative skills required for sustainable small business enterprises in Calabar Metropolis. However, most SBE operators in the area ignore and lack the knowledge of these essential business skills, undermining its relevance and impacts on their small business enterprises' performance and sustainability in the COVID-19 crisis. Consequently, resulting to slow expansion, growth, and a high failure rate of SBEs in Calabar Metropolis. The lack of these skills also has some implications on why the state is still lagging economically as a civil service state, instead of developing and transforming into an industrial hub by leveraging on the economic potentials of sustainable SBEs. It, therefore, implies that entrepreneurs' acquisition of risk management and ICT skills in the disruption will lead to the sustainable operation of SBEs and enjoyment of enormous socio-economic benefits that accrue.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to ensure sustainable small business enterprises. Small business enterprise operators should be trained on how to develop their risk management and ICT capacities through on-the-job training, seminars, and conferences. Periodic ICT training sections should be organized for SBE operators in Calabar metropolis through the ICT training centers or computer self-instruction programmes. The media, especially electronic media, should be used consistently and massively to create awareness of risk factors that affect sustainable SBEs and how to mitigate them.

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