

Exploring How African Immigrant Entrepreneurs Acquired Skills That Prepared Them for Entrepreneurship in Host Countries: A South African Case Study

Bernard Lama Ngota^{1,*}, Elroy Eugene Smith², Ayanda Pamella Deliwe³

¹ Business Management, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0002-0767-4118

² Business Management, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0001-5567-1627

³ Business Management, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), South Africa, Orcid: 0000-0002-2897-8030

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Abstract

The importance of African immigrant entrepreneurial skills acquisition is understudied both globally and in South Africa. Hence, the current study aimed at investigating how African immigrant entrepreneurs learned entrepreneurial skills that prepare them for entrepreneurship in their host country, such as South Africa, using a qualitative research approach. An exploratory research design was used, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 African immigrant entrepreneurs who were specifically chosen to take part in the study. Content analysis was used to analyse the collected data. *Entrepreneurial skills from family business, entrepreneurial knowledge from traineeship/apprenticeship, entrepreneurial knowledge from school, and entrepreneurial skills from business space* emerged as four broad sub-themes. Aside from the themes that emerged, the demographic information of the African immigrant entrepreneur was also examined. The findings revealed that African immigrant entrepreneurs acquired entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and experience from family business, from apprenticeship, from school, and learning directly from the business environment. Based on the empirical findings, recommendations were made to help make African immigrant entrepreneurship more appealing, as this could benefit indigenous people through skill transfer.

¹Corresponding Author

* E-mail address: bencolam@gmail.com & s219238774@mandela.ac.za

² E-mail address: Elroy.Smith@mandela.ac.za

³ E-mail address: Ayanda.deliwe@madela.ac.za

“In a globalised world, people move from one country to another for many different reasons ... whether searching for jobs, opportunities, investments, knowledge, and a better quality of life, to build a life or even to retire ... immigrant entrepreneurship undertaken by immigrants in their host countries, constitutes a significant reality in different countries ... launching businesses to overcome job placement difficulties or as a result of entrepreneurs who immigrate to explore promising opportunities in different places, the phenomenon has generated positive impacts ... Immigrants are widely regarded as highly entrepreneurial and essential for economic growth and innovation ... sentiment commonly shared by policy-makers and reflected in immigration policies ... require more empirical studies about more varied contexts ... literature needs to develop empirical studies specifically addressing the strategic issues related to immigrant entrepreneurship ... further research should attempt to identify the strategies taken by immigrant entrepreneurs or their responses to the governmental and macro strategies that target them...” (Malerba & Ferreira, 2021).

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Problem Statement

Globally, the migratory trend is increasing, with people constantly crossing borders from one country to another and continent to continent (Perbady and Crush, 1998; Thomas and Inkpen, 2013; Fairlie and Lofstrom, 2015; McAuliffe and Ruhs, 2018). Thai and Turkina (2013) posited that immigrant entrepreneurship is a key driver of socioeconomic development in both host and home countries. Immigrants have demonstrated a proclivity for entrepreneurship, and their businesses make a significant contribution to employment creation and innovation. Some studies (Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development, 2013; Fairlie and Lofstrom, 2015a; Light, Bhachu and Karageorgis, 2018) claim that immigrant entrepreneurs are more likely to start new businesses than natives, however, their business failure rate is higher than that of natives. African immigrants are highly skilled, and they bring a variety of skills with them to South Africa, including artisan skills, home-based skills, entrepreneurial skills, and technological skills (Kalitanyi and Visser, 2014; Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ngota, Rajkaran and Mang’unyi, 2019). Furthermore, they put these skills to use, with the result being a business innovation and operation (Kalitanyi and Visser, 2014; Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). Some authors (Bogan and Darity, 2008:2004; Khosa and Kalitanyi, 2015) established that African immigrants turn to entrepreneurship in host countries such as South Africa due to difficulties entering the labour market, which is frequently discriminatory to immigrants. For instance, Khosa and Kalitanyi (2015:133) theorised that immigrant entrepreneurship is pursued for the sole purpose of survival and due to labour market discrimination.

However, the frequency with which studies on African immigrant entrepreneurship are conducted to understand their mode of operation and how they acquire the entrepreneurial skills that give them a competitive advantage when venturing into entrepreneurship in host countries is still in its infancy (Gebre, Maharaj and Pillay, 2011; Mudi-Okorodudu, 2011; Fatoki and Patswawairi, 2012; Radipere, 2012; Radipere and Dhiwayo, 2013; Tengeh and Lapah, 2013; Fatoki, 2014; Moyo, 2014; Tengeh and Nkem, 2017; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). Kuratko (2014) stated that entrepreneurship is becoming an important concept in the modern world today, with many scholars developing an interest in the field

of entrepreneurship. Barringer and Ireland (2010) also theorised that entrepreneurs are driven by their actions and will go to any length to achieve success in their entrepreneurial endeavours. However, identifying how African immigrant entrepreneurs acquired their entrepreneurial skills and how they can and transform these skills into growth-oriented businesses remains elusive. Scholars remain uncertain regarding how African immigrant entrepreneurs acquired their skills to be able to venture into businesses in the host country, despite the magnitude of research on growth firms. This paper seeks to identify how African immigrant entrepreneurs acquire the entrepreneurial skills required to establish a growth-oriented business in a host country and how these skills can be improved if possible.

This paper will cover aspects such as an introduction and background to the study, problem statement and research objectives. Thereafter, a literature review and the research design and methodology of the study will be outlined. The last sections will cover the empirical findings and main conclusions and recommendations of the study.

1.2. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to investigate how African immigrant entrepreneurs learned entrepreneurial skills that prepare them for entrepreneurship in their host country, such as South Africa. To achieve this, the following secondary objectives have been identified:

- To conduct a literature study regarding African immigrant entrepreneurship and skills acquirement.
- To explore how African immigrant entrepreneurs acquired skills that prepared them for entrepreneurship in host countries and put their entrepreneurial skills into productive ventures.
- To provide guidelines to African immigrant entrepreneurs on how to learn entrepreneurial skills that could prepare them for entrepreneurship in their host country.

2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of the existing research on African immigrant entrepreneurship, synthesizing the findings and insights of previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The review aims to identify key themes, debates, and gaps in the current knowledge base, setting the stage for the present study. By examining the theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and empirical findings of previous research, this review seeks to contextualise the current investigation and informs the research questions, methods, and analysis that follow.

2.1. Conceptualising the immigrant entrepreneur and immigrant entrepreneurship

An immigrant entrepreneur is defined as anyone who has moved from his or her home country to another country, is not a native of the host country, but establishes a business in the host country to

benefit economically (Vinogradov, 2008; Kahn, La Mattina, MacGarvie and Ginther, 2013; Aaltonen and Akola, 2014; Kahn, La Mattina and MacGarvie, 2017). Furthermore, Aaltonen and Akola (2014) defined immigrant entrepreneurs as agents who are more focused on driving entrepreneurial activities, pushing for invention and firm development, and pursuing gross revenue in a specific market segment. According to the researcher's review of another strand of entrepreneurship literature, an immigrant entrepreneur is an agent concerned with the shifting of vital economic resources (e.g., skills and capital) from low economic productive areas to areas of maximum yields and highest productivity (Herrington, Kew and Mwang, 2010). Additionally, Fatoki (2014) defined an immigrant entrepreneur as someone responsible for taking the risk of establishing a business, organising it, and managing its survival. Vinogradov (2008) concurs and regards immigrant entrepreneurs as people who migrate to another country to start or establish a business in order to survive economically.

According to the foregoing, studies that can clarify the definitional issues of the concept of immigrant entrepreneurship are necessary. The limitation in the definitional issue has created an opportunity for a more general and specific definition of immigrant entrepreneurship. Hence, some researchers (such as Vinogradov, 2008; Dalhammar and Brown, 2011) have used the terms immigrant entrepreneurship and ethnic entrepreneurship interchangeably; as a result, it is critical to understand what the terms actually mean. Immigrant entrepreneurship would thus be regarded as the process of economic growth and development in which the immigrant entrepreneur participates (Kahn *et al.*, 2013; Fairlie and Lofstrom, 2014; Fatoki, 2014; Crush *et al.*, 2017).

2.2. Perspectives regarding entrepreneurial skills transfer and acquisition

Ekpe (2017) noted that the global entrepreneurial skills acquisition programmes introduced into educational institutions were designed to provide the level of knowledge or education required to capitalise on entrepreneurial opportunities that could aid in the economic development of such nations. According to studies (Ekpe, Razak and Mat, 2012; Ekpe, 2017), the most important factor in utilising entrepreneurship opportunities for self-employment is skill acquisition. Entrepreneurial skills acquisition, according to some scholars (Chukwunye and Igboke, 2011; Amadi, 2012; Kalitanyi and Visser, 2014; Ngota *et al.*, 2019), is the process by which individuals acquire or learn specific entrepreneurial skills or behavioural types required for a business through training or education. Individuals with entrepreneurial skills can identify and capitalise on entrepreneurial opportunities that arise in their environment for self-employment (Chukwunye and Igboke, 2011; Amadi, 2012; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). According to some studies (Nieuwenhuizen, 2003; Kalitanyi and Visser, 2014; Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ngota *et al.*, 2019), some immigrants who migrate to South Africa have artisan skills, entrepreneurial skills, and managerial skills that enable them to establish, operate, and grow a business venture in their host country. As a result, Smith and Watkins (2012) believe that these immigrants who choose South Africa as a destination bring such skills with them and immerse

them in the economic environment, thereby reducing the South African skills shortage, albeit insufficiently. In contrast to other West African countries, Ezenwakwelu, Egbosionu, Ezezue and Okwo (2019) stated that there is no entrepreneurial culture in Southern African countries such as South Africa that teaches young people to be entrepreneurs from a young age. This gives African immigrants an advantage because most of them bring the skills they learned and acquired through apprenticeship to South Africa and put them to use by establishing business ventures that benefit the country's economy in some way (Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ezenwakwelu *et al.*, 2019; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, immigrant entrepreneurs bring these skills with them, and when they hire South Africans, they pass on these entrepreneurial skills that are lacking in the indigenous cultural behaviours (Nieuwenhuizen, 2003; Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). This is consistent with Cross' (2006) study, which found that small businesses in the informal category with migrants mentoring appear to be the most effective, far-reaching, and quickest skills-training programme.

Cornford (1996) further argued that there are nine distinct defining attributes of "skill" and "skilled performance" from a psychological standpoint, and that these are the most legitimate in accounting for individual skill acquisition and performance. The study contends that interactions with a corporation or business with strong entrepreneurial ties teach individuals values, attitudes, information, and skills (Kalitanyi and Visser, 2014; Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ezenwakwelu *et al.*, 2019; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). Strong connections with business-related knowledge, skills, and experience also provide access to specific information and resources required for business start-up (Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ngota *et al.*, 2019). Immigrant entrepreneurship has strong ties contributing to increased entrepreneurial intention by providing values, attitudes, information, and skills (Kalitanyi and Visser, 2014; Asoba and Tengeh, 2016; Ngota *et al.*, 2019).

2.3. Theoretical underpinning of the study

According to Chaudhary (2015), immigrant entrepreneurship or self-employment is an alternative for immigrants who are unable to find work in their host countries. Sahin, Nijikam and Baycan-Levent (2006) claimed that most African immigrants rely on entrepreneurship to escape the harsh reality of unemployment in their host countries. Tengeh (2007) posited that several theories have been developed to explain why immigrants venture into entrepreneurship in host countries, with the scholar identifying that the block opportunity or push factor theory propels many immigrants into self-employment. As a result, the block opportunity or push factor theory serves as the foundation for this research.

Bonacich (1973) and Nestorowicz (2011) pioneered the idea of block opportunities in relation to immigrant communities and their role in the economic and social structures of receiving societies. This school of thought, also known as the theory of "middleman minority" or "push factors", contends

that immigrants become self-employed as a result of inevitable bias and discrimination in host labour markets (Kushnirovich and Heilbrunn, 2008). According to Van Tubergen (2005), in countries with high native unemployment rates, immigrants are pushed out of the labour market and into self-employment. Nee and Sanders (2001) argued that, on the one hand African immigrants pursue self-employment due to a lack of employment opportunities, and however, business ownership allows them to leverage their human capital and social capital. Although employment exclusion may work as a motivator for self-employment, Guzy (2006) warns that it can cause problems at various levels, particularly when starting a business and dealing with administration, business owners, distributors, customers, banks, and the like. According to Halkias, Abadir, Akrivos, Harkiolakis, Thurman and Caracatsanis (2007), while a specific generation of immigrants faces bias in labour markets as explained by the blocked mobility theory, their offspring and future generations face fewer biases as their human capital, particularly educational credentials, are recognised. In support of this viewpoint, Nee and Sanders (2001) observe that in the United States, immigrants with entirely foreign education have a higher rate of transition into self-employment than immigrants with some, or all, of their education in the United States.

Family members or other co-ethnics are frequently employed by immigrant entrepreneurs (Halkias *et al.*, 2007). Because the goal of the business and the family is to accumulate money, these employees are frequently paid little or no wages (Halkias, Harkiolakis, Thurman and Rishi, 2009). Nestorowicz (2011) supports this viewpoint by stating that middleman minority entrepreneurs may "hire" family members in the business or rely on low-cost co-ethnic to work for them in exchange for potential upward mobility, training opportunities, or assistance in starting one's own business in the future. Ethnic solidarity also aids in the initial business establishment process by providing resources such as capital or information. Close ethnic ties also aid in the regulation of internal competition using formal and informal guild-like institutions.

2.4. Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework of this study. It shows that the African immigrant entrepreneur requires some financial capital and previous business experience to acquire entrepreneurial skills mainly through four modes.

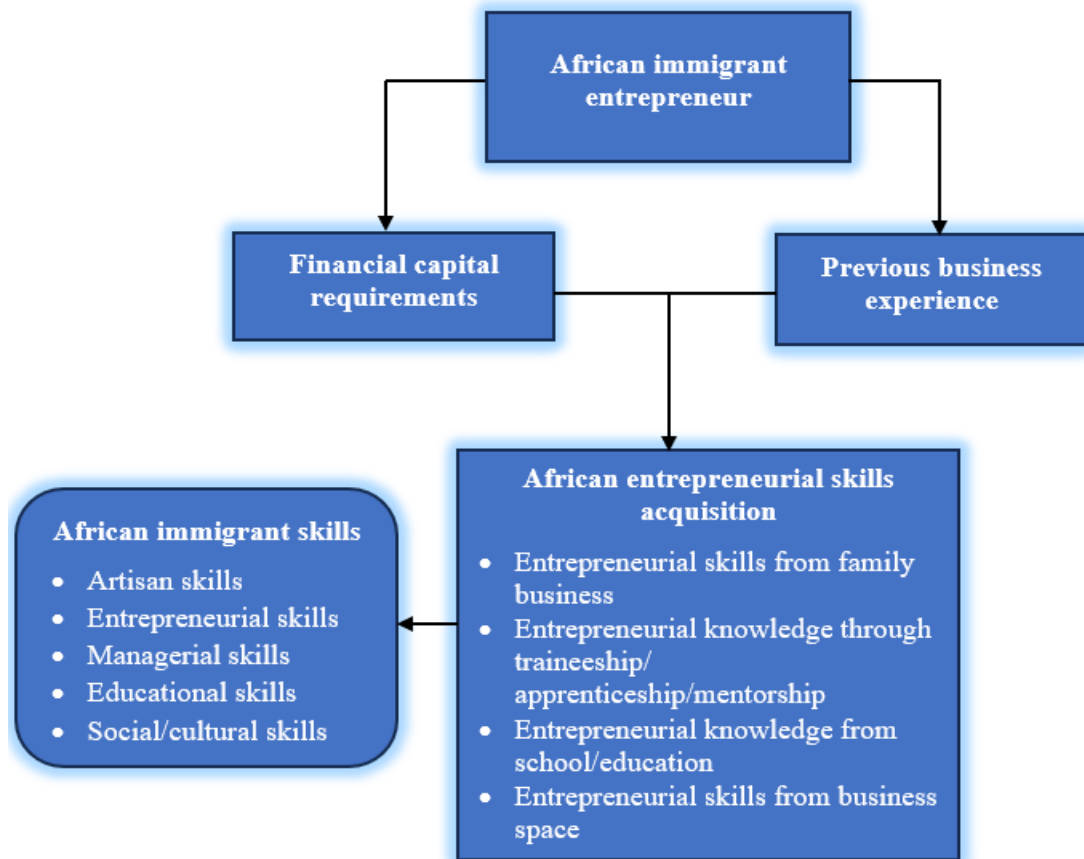


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

Source: Author's own construction

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 12 participants purposefully selected from African immigrant entrepreneurs. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives, and to explore the research questions in a nuanced and contextualised manner.

3.1. Research paradigm

The study employed an interpretive research paradigm (phenomenological research), using a qualitative research methodology to achieve the research objectives. Hammersley (2013) stated that the interpretivism paradigm is founded on the assumption that the way the world comprehends knowledge in social sciences is unique, and humans cannot be the same as those used in physical sciences because people interpret their environment, and then act on that understanding, while the world does not. Creswell (2013) theorised that qualitative research starts with assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks/interpretive that inform the study of the research problems, addressing the sense groups, human or social phenomenon. A qualitative research approach was the appropriate and most effective method in addressing the research question of the study by acquiring data from African immigrant entrepreneurship regarding their operations in South Africa. From previous research

studies and the nature of the study, it was clear that the central research question demanded a qualitative answer. As such, cases of African immigrant entrepreneurs were selected, and then personal interviews were conducted to gather rich data.

3.2. Research approach

The main research approach adopted for this study is exploratory research. Exploratory research refers to the critical exploration of investigating phenomena to seek new insights by assessing and asking questions of the phenomenon in a new direction (Robson, 2002). This study investigated a new problem that have not previously been researched and thus and semi-structured personal interviews was used to collect data from selected cases of African immigrant entrepreneurs (owners/managers).

The research strategy most suitable for this study was a case study strategy. Yin (2018) regard a case study as the description of associations that occur in a real-life situation of one or more cases. As per Yin's (2002) advice, this study assumed a multiple embedded case study approach in which African immigrant entrepreneurship was studied through the investigation of African immigrant businesses. A multiple, embedded case study approach was well suited for the present investigation, because, according to Yin (2014, 2018), the convincing nature of the design and analysis would give the study more rigour. This study aimed to have a deep understanding of African immigrant entrepreneurship by developing a conceptual framework through the collection of in-depth data from African immigrants operating in SA.

3.3. Time horizon of the study

The time horizon for the study is regarded as a cross-sectional study in which data was collected as a whole to analyse the phenomenon under investigation at a single point in time (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009).

3.4. Population and sampling

The population of this study could be regarded as all African immigrant entrepreneurs operating in South Africa. As there is no readily available database of all African immigrant entrepreneurs in SA, non-probability sampling, namely convenience and purposive sampling was used in selecting a sample of 12 African immigrant entrepreneurs (owners/managers) in South Africa's Eastern and Western Cape provinces.

3.5. Secondary and primary data collection

Both secondary and primary data were collected. Secondary data included books, journals and the Internet. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect primary data from African immigrant entrepreneurs who have established and successfully run a business in South Africa. The research instrument was created to collect information from African immigrant entrepreneurs about

how they acquired entrepreneurial skills that allowed them to successfully venture into entrepreneurship in the host country. The data collection process included in-depth semi-structured interviews to extract expectations and realities about African immigrant entrepreneurship skills acquisition. The themes and questions were validated by key entrepreneurship experts and supported by literature. The researcher administered the semi-structured interviews to the participants. A pilot study was conducted among three immigrant entrepreneurs regarding the semi-structured interview schedule and protocol. The data were collected from the participants from the month of June 2023 and September 2023. The participants were immigrant entrepreneurs from African countries other than South Africa who are running businesses, have been in business for at least one year, are of any gender regardless of the type of business, and are at least 18 years and older. This was done to cover a broader range of issues that entrepreneurs face in their businesses. As a result, it provides a foundation for future research to narrow the purpose to specific areas of interest.

3.6. Data analysis

The data that were collected from the semi-structured in-depth interviews from African immigrant entrepreneurs were reduced, and coded. The researcher created a coding framework that included a list of themes, categories, and preliminary codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Khoa, Hung and Hejsalem-Brahmi, 2023). The coding was done manually to allow the researchers to engage with the rich data collected. The data was then analysed using the qualitative content analysis method, which allows the researcher to investigate the “occurrence, meanings, and associations of specific themes, words, or concepts” (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Khoa, Hung and Hejsalem-Brahmi, 2023). Content analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns and themes in the data.

3.7. Trustworthiness

To evaluate the credibility of the data obtained and to ensure trustworthiness, the four criteria proposed by Johnson and Rasulova (2016) were used, namely confirmability, credibility, transferability and dependability.

Tobin and Begley (2004) noted that this confirmability is focused on demonstrating that the researcher interpreted and presented the findings as being clearly derived from the data, as well as for the investigator to demonstrate how the interpretations and conclusions were achieved. This study was presented logically, with justification for the theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions made throughout. To establish confirmability, audit trails were provided that highlighted all the steps that were used in the process of analysing the data for research, to provide the basis for the results. Johnson and Rasulova (2016) defined credibility as the appropriateness of the researcher's representation of the participants' views. This study ensured data credibility through persistent observations, prolonged engagement, data collection triangulation, and member checks.

Transferability refers to the generalisability of the study. The researcher ensured that the qualitative data collected and transcribed were transferable by subjecting the phenomena under study to undergo adequate thick description; this was to permit the readers to appropriately understand the phenomena (Tobin and Begley (2004)). For researchers to achieve dependability, they should ensure that the research procedure is documented, logical and traceable. The qualitative data that was collected went through an inquiry audit to establish dependability (Shenton, 2004). Hence, the researcher employed the services of another experienced researcher to assist with the review and examination of the study's procedures and the method used to analyse the data to guarantee consistencies in the findings and to ensure that it could be repeated.

3.8. Ethics

Ethics were ensured through informed consent from participants who freely participated in the study and had the right to withdraw at any time. Respondents' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were also ensured. Full ethical clearance was obtained from the Nelson Mandela University's Research Ethics Committee and the ethical protocol was followed throughout the duration of the study.

4. Empirical Findings and Discussion

The study's findings are summarized in this section based on an analysis of data collected from the study's 12 participants. According to the study, African immigrant entrepreneurs learn entrepreneurial skills that prepare them to start businesses in their host country. The study examined into how African immigrant entrepreneurs learn the entrepreneurial skills needed to start their own businesses. The study will begin with a presentation of the participants' demographic information.

4.1. Demographic profile of participants

African immigrant entrepreneurs who took part in the study were business owners/managers. They were of African descent other than South Africans, had been in business for at least a year, and were at least 18 years old. Table 1 outlines the demographical results.

Table 1: Demographical characteristics of African immigrant entrepreneurs

ID	Gender	Age	Nationality	Sector	Duration	Qualification
P1	Male	40 - 50	Cameroonian	Service	4 years	Postgraduate
P2	Male	40 - 50	Congolese	Service	10 years	High School
P3	Male	40 - 50	Ghanaian	Service and trading	7 years	High School
P4	Male	30 - 40	Cameroonian	services	9 years	Post high school
P5	Male	40 - 50	Nigerian	Service and trading	2 years	Postgraduate
P6	Male	40 - 50	Nigerian	Trading	4 years	Postgraduate
P7	Male	40 - 50	Cameroonian	Service and trading	11 years	Post high school
P8	Female	30 - 40	Cameroonian	Service	10 years	Post high school
P9	Male	30 - 40	Cameroonian	Service and agricultural	3 years	Post high school
P10	Male	30 - 40	Nigerian	Service and trading	8 years	High school
P11	Male	40 - 50	Nigerian	Service	12 years	Postgraduate
P12	Male	40 - 50	Ghanaian	Service and trading	20 years	Post high school

Source: Author's own construction

Table 1 shows that there is a difference in the number of males and females who participated in the study. The findings revealed that males outnumbered females, as 11 of the 12 participants were males and one (01) was a female. According to the findings, the oldest male entrepreneurs were between the ages of 40 and 50, the oldest female entrepreneur was between the ages of 30 and 40, and the youngest male and female entrepreneurs were between the ages of 30 and 40. Most African immigrant entrepreneurs were from Cameroon (05), followed by those from Nigeria (04), about two (02) entrepreneurs were from Ghana, and very few were from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (one). The findings revealed that most African immigrant entrepreneurs operated their businesses in the trading and services sectors, with most of the businesses operating for more than a decade and the most recent businesses only being in operation for about two (02) to four (04) years. Most African immigrant entrepreneurs had some academic experience, with the majority having studied to the post-high school level and a few to the postgraduate and high school levels, respectively.

4.2. Empirical findings regarding financial capital requirements

Having a brilliant business idea is not enough without the necessary financial capital to get it a business off the ground (Hallberg, 2000; Basu and Parker, 2001; Beck, 2007; Fairlie, 2012, 2013). As a result, the study determined that it was necessary to investigate the financing used by African immigrant entrepreneurs to start their businesses. Starting a business requires financial capital, particularly in a host country, Participant #1 stated that “... *it was between ninety (R90,000) to hundred thousand rands (R100,000)*”. Furthermore, Participant #12 stated, “... *I started this business around 2011, when things were still going well, so it didn't cost me too much money.*” Hence, “... *I spent approximately 20,000 rands and nil cents (R20,000).*” Additionally, Participant #11 comments: “... *the start-up capital that I needed to get the business operational was about R165,000.*” And Participant #11 added that this “*was just the minimum amount of cash that I needed and which I had at that moment in time.*” Along the same line, Participant #7 comments: “*the amount I used to start-up this business was approximately R50,000.*” According to Participant #6, “*the amount of funds that I used to start-up my business was about R2000.*” Participant #8 also remarks that “*I needed about R30,000 to start-up my business.*” Participant #9 noted that “*I started the business with approximately R35, 000.*” Some of the entrepreneurs needed more financial capital but could only raise a portion of what they needed as noted by Participant #10: “*The amount of capital I needed was approximately R300, 000 but at the time I only had raised up to R120, 000.*” Participant #10 further explains this by saying: “*I can say that the money I needed at the time to get the right materials or tools, as well as the vehicle to help me run the business, was around R250, 000, but I didn't have that kind of money. So, with only about R150, 000, I was able to get some of these things, and I also chose a cheaper car.*” Moreover, Participant #12 explains: “... *I needed a lot of money to start this*

business, and if I wanted to start it on a high note, it would have cost around R350, 000. Sadly, I didn't have that kind of money, so I had to make use of the little I had, which was about R200, 000 if I include the money, I used to pay the three-month rents in advance.” Participant #5 comments: “... I had about R13,000 in my possession, which I used as capital. I started the restaurant business with about R45,000.” Participant #4 clarifies this: “We started the business with about R40, 000.” Participant #9 continues by mentioning that: “... Although, if the money had been more, it would have been much better because it would have allowed us to have a larger space and more customer catering spaces.”

4.3. Empirical findings regarding previous business experience

Entrepreneurial experience comes from being around a business environment as stated by Participant #1 “I have grown up in a business environment throughout my life.” Participant #1 believes that assisting in their family business was a significant tool for developing entrepreneurial skills, and he says, “... I was staying with my uncle, who was a trader; he had a retail store, and I spent most of my time there helping him.” Being involved in a family business interaction has a significant impact on entrepreneurial abilities as highlighted by Participant #11, “furthermore, my late mother was a trader who sold goods from one village market to another, so when I was in high school, I used to help her sell her items from one village to another as well.” Participant #2 comments on how owning a business was as a result of skills learned while working in his family business: “... before moving to South Africa, I spent a few years running my own business.” Participant #2 explains: “Let me say that I was a part of the family business, assisting the family, but I also had my own.” According to Participant #3, “back at home, I ran a clothing store.” He adds: “I usually travel internationally to Togo, where I buy my stock and then return to my home country to sell it.” According to Participant #4, some entrepreneurs gained entrepreneurial experience in the agricultural sector, “... back in my home country, I was involved in an agriculture business dealing with livestock farming.” He further explains: “I had a poultry farm where I raised chickens, as well as a pig farm.” Participant #6 added: “I had a retailing business that was made up of various provisions.” Moreover, Participant #7 explains: “I was involved in the purchase and sale of both new and slightly used mobile phones, as well as all their gadgets and accessories.” In contrast to trading and agricultural businesses, Participant #10 noted that entrepreneurial skills were gained through service apprenticeship: “Back in my home country, I ran a motor mechanic shop.” He further explains: “After finishing my apprenticeship as a qualified motor mechanic, I opened my own workshop where I repaired cars brought to me by customers.” Participant #6 explains: “I was working as an apprentice where I was taught and trained on how to fix all these electronic devices.” He added that: “Although I didn't own the same kind of business, I was working in the business.” Some entrepreneurs got involved in businesses for self-employment purposes to gain entrepreneurial skills. For example, according to Participant #9, “... I needed to find work for myself.” She stated, “that's when I thought to myself,

why can't I start a restaurant?" She explains: "Because people are always hungry and need food to eat."

4.4. Empirical findings regarding entrepreneurial skills acquisition

The acquisition of skills is an important component of the entrepreneurship process that an entrepreneur must have. The entrepreneur is the person who is responsible for developing a business idea and taking the necessary risks to establish a business venture (Kor, 2003; Timmons and Spinelli, 2009). As a result, the entrepreneur must have the necessary skills and experience to run a business. According to the study, African immigrant entrepreneurs could gain entrepreneurial skills through the following:

- Entrepreneurial skills from family business.
- Entrepreneurial knowledge through traineeship/apprenticeship.
- Entrepreneurial knowledge from school.
- Entrepreneurial skills from business space.

4.4.1 Entrepreneurial skills from family business

Because of the set of skills, knowledge, and experience that African immigrant may have possessed from being around a family business (Barroso, Sanguino and Bañegil, 2013), the study believes that African immigrant entrepreneurs could gain entrepreneurial skills necessary to venture into entrepreneurship from a family business. According to Participant #4, *"... my entrepreneurial training came from my family background."* According to Participant #5, *"although I did not receive formal business training from my parents, I can say that they provided me with some informal business training."* Likewise, Participant #6 comments: *"I actively assisted my parents in selling in their business by accompanying them to the market."* Participant #2 indicated that, *"my parents taught me how to sell each of the food items, and I could sell them even when they weren't present."* Participant #1 explains that *"all I know is what I've learned, which I may have gathered from my family."* He explains: *"this is because I was always around my uncle's business, assisting him whenever I had free time."* The family business environment fostered the transfer of entrepreneurial skills as noted by Participant #8 who stated that, *"I was observing how they [my uncle and my mother] ran their businesses, and I learned from my every day spent in those businesses assisting my family."* Assisting family members provided opportunities to learn new skills. Participant #3 comments: *"I learned because I was also assisting my mother, who was a businesswoman."* Some entrepreneurs have been *"trained on how to run a provision store business from the family business background"* As noted by Participant #7. Some entrepreneurs' business destinies were shaped by their entrepreneurial lineage as highlighted by Participant #7 who stated that, *"my late father too was a businessman who owned a business, so I come from a business family."* Participant #11 stated that, *"I learned a lot from my mother because she had to teach me how to sell goods to customers, how to*

deal with customers, and how to run the business completely.” Moreover, Participant #9 stated that, *“when I came to South Africa to join my brother, he took me to his business site and introduced me to his business.”* He added that: *“we started working together where he was teaching and training me on what to do and how to do everything in the business.”* To complement this, Participant #10 explains that *“it took me at least four years of being around my brother's business to truly master the skills and knowledge of how it operates.”* This finding is consistent with the findings of Ezenwakwelu *et al.* (2019), who found that family business is a traditional (informal) source of training that is most common in countries, aside from formal training and vocational academic system.

4.4.2 Entrepreneurial knowledge from apprenticeship

According to the study, entrepreneurship knowledge, skills and experiences can be obtained through apprenticeship or traineeship. Participant #11 noted that while working as an apprentice in his home country, *“I learned entrepreneurial skills.”* The entrepreneur added that: *“I learned this business and the training to operate this type of business in my home country through a traineeship.”* Additionally, Participant #3 pointed out that, *“these skills that I possess were developed over a five-year period of training.”* He concludes that: *“so, I learned these skills through a traineeship in my home country.”* Similarly, another participant agreed with this viewpoint, claiming that entrepreneurial skills can be learned by working as an apprentice in a similar business (Adams, DeSilva and Razmar, 2013; Ezenwakwelu *et al.*, 2019), as highlighted by Participant #12, *“... I was serving in as an apprentice under somebody for about 5 years after I finished school.”* Apprenticeship is a pathway for many poor families to educate their children in West African countries (Adams, DeSilva and Razmar, 2013; Ezenwakwelu *et al.*, 2019). As Participant #6 comments: *“my parents decided that I should go learn entrepreneurial skills with someone who had a very big business.”* Participant #6 adds that, *“So, throughout the time I was an apprentice with my boss, he was teaching me the skills that were involved in the business.”* Participant #11 clarifies that, *“...that is how I was trained in business, although it wasn't in anyway formal that I had a certificate.”* Some entrepreneurs gain entrepreneurial skills as employees in another business as noted by Participant #2, *“I was trained and mentored to operate this line of business by someone who took me in as an employee.”* He explains: *“... it took me like two years before I could own my own business, so, I learnt from another business.”* Participant #5 recalls that *“as an apprentice in another mechanical workshop, I received about 5 years of training.”* He adds: *“I learnt the skills that would allow me to start my own business in both my home country and my host country.”* Participant #4 noted that, *“my parents sent me to go and train as an apprentice with someone who had a big electronic workshop.”* Participant #4 further explains, *“my former boss was teaching me every aspect of the work on how to repair the different types of electrical appliance especially cell phones, desktop computers and laptops.”* The entrepreneur indicated that, *“my apprenticeship empowered me in this type of business.”* This findings, is in line with the idea of Barroso *et al.*, (2013) who believe that, the knowledge and skills

derived from a family business is a competence that should be spread across all the family members to develop and experiment new systems of knowledge ideas.

4.4.3 Entrepreneurial knowledge from school

Traditionally, entrepreneurship has been taught in schools as a way of equipping students with knowledge in the field. As a result, education could have been used to shape African immigrant entrepreneurial ventures by providing these entrepreneurs with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to venture into entrepreneurship in the host country (Ngota *et al.*, 2019), as indicated by Participant #7, “... *I have received formal training in school because I am a qualified chartered ship broker.*” Participant #4 support this sentiment by further stating that, “... *I studied economics in the high school.*” The entrepreneur (Participant #4) explains that “*because economics is involved with business, what I studied in school and the business that I ran back in my home country, as well as the coaching I received from friends who were already in the business environment, all played a role in shaping my entrepreneurial skills.*” This findings affirms Nieuwenhuizen (2003) study that stated that individuals who have been noted for entrepreneurial success, owes it to the direct connection to education, signifying that entrepreneurship skills and abilities can be learned. As such, the study suggests that valuable entrepreneurial abilities can be improved when African immigrant attend tertiary education (Nieuwenhuizen, 2003). Some entrepreneurs, on the other hand, believed that, while education can play a role in shaping someone's skills toward entrepreneurship, culture, on the other hand, plays a more significant role in preparing an individual for future entrepreneurial endeavours. Participant #9 comments: “... *according to my culture, learning how to cook is very important because it is considered as one of the ways that prepares you for your future marriage.*” she explains: “*This cooking ability gave me an advantage that prepared me to open my own restaurant.*” However, Participant #9 elaborates: “*But knowing how to run a business, it has always been in the family because my parents usually sell farm produce, and I always actively involved in the running of the business.*”

4.4.4 Entrepreneurial skills from business space

Entrepreneurial skills can be learned within the business environment. Participant #6 comments: “... *I can say I have learned everything that I know about business from the business itself that I was involved.*” Participant #7 remarks: “*The business has been my teacher because I have been learning from it.*” Nevertheless, Participant #7 indicated that, “*however, I have not received any formal business training from any institution as of yet.*” Moreover, Participant #4 describes that “*the coaching I received from friends who were already in the business environment*” capacitated his businesses skills and gave him the experience of venturing into business in South Africa. Being in the business environment for a long time provides an individual with the necessary experience to operate a similar business in the future. Participant #6 comments: “... *I have been into this business for a long*

time so I can say it is my dream career.” Participant #3 remarks that *“I was trained in this business for about five years.”* Participant #3 notes that *“during the time of my training I learned a lot of things about the business, and it gave me an opportunity to have the skills necessary for the business.”* Participant #2, on the other hand, observes that *“the skills that I had learned and the knowledge I have about this business gave me a better chance to choose this business compared to other type of business that I hardly know how to operate.”* As a result, it was evident that African immigrant entrepreneurs chose to venture in specific businesses because of the unique skills that they already possessed. Being an employee of a business allows an individual to develop entrepreneurial skills as noted by Participant #1, *“I chose this line of business because I learned the skills and techniques of the business while working as an employee for two years.”* Additionally, Participant #6, a restaurant owner points out that *“I decided to choose the business because I already knew more about the business.”* As a result, Participant #10 affirmed that *“I venture into the business that I had already gained more knowledge and skills, rather than going to start another new business that I will have to learn it from scratch.”*

5. Discussion

The study showed in terms of the gender disparities, there was a gender imbalance where most males turn to migrate out of their home countries than females. This gender disparity may be a cultural factor, as African males are more open to high-risk ventures than females. This concurs with Rogerson (1999), who pointed out that immigrant businesses are run by single, young male entrepreneurs who work long hours (64 hours) per week, six days a week, and if they have employees, they also work similar hours. Moreover, that most of immigrant entrepreneurs who run businesses in South Africa are young, ranging in age from 20-30 to 30-40 years old. This could be likened to some studies (Fatoki, 2016; Ngota and Rajkaran, 2016; Ngota, Rajkaran and Mang’unyi, 2018) that claims that more young people than older people choose to embark on risky adventures such as traveling in search of a better life. Furthermore, the study claims that older people are at the centre of most family and cultural responsibilities in most African societies (Fatoki, 2016; Ngota and Rajkaran, 2016; Ngota, Rajkaran and Mang’unyi, 2018). According to the study, most African immigrant entrepreneurs start trade and service businesses rather than other types of businesses. This finding is comparable to the findings of some scholars (Peberdy and Rogerson, 2000; Kalitanyi, 2007), who discovered that South African-Mozambique border crossing immigrant entrepreneurs sell predominantly textiles products on the other side of the border on a daily basis. The study showed most of the African immigrant entrepreneurs had at least completed a higher school certificate. The higher qualification of the owner contributes to better business performance, possibly because an educated person will first conduct research into the business he or she wishes to establish before beginning operations (Radipere, 2012). Education is another important factor in raising one's skill level (Radipere, 2012). According to the GEM (2010) and Radipere (2012), a healthy and educated

workforce is critical to a growth of any business and productivity. This finding about the education of African immigrants is consistent with the findings of Ngwema (1998) and Kalitanyi (2007), who discovered that 80 percent of South African immigrants have a minimum of 10 to 12 years of education, with at least 30 percent having completed tertiary education.

The study revealed that some participants developed entrepreneurial skills, allowing them to start a business in the host country from a family business. This was supported by Barroso, Sanguino and Bañegil (2013), who stated that family business knowledge is defined as wisdom and skills acquired and developed by an individual in a family through experience and education within the family business (Chirico, 2008). Cabrera-Suárez, Saá-Pérez, García-Almeida (2001) recommend that in a family business, the knowledge concept, which includes frame experience, contextual information, expert insight, values, and beliefs, as well as the skills to perform activities and know-how, should be encouraged (Barroso *et al.*, 2013). Hence, the study believed that these skills gained from within the business environment are important for enhancing an African immigrant's entrepreneurial endeavours in the host country.

The most common way that African immigrant entrepreneurs indicated they were gaining business experience, knowledge, and skills was through apprenticeship they had completed either in their home country or in the host country. This practice is uncommon in Southern African countries, giving young people an advantage in developing entrepreneurial skills that will prepare them for future entrepreneurship. To corroborate this finding, Adams, DeSilva and Razmar (2013) noted that informal apprenticeship significantly contributes to youth empowerment and employment, ensuring productivity and decreasing youth restlessness. Ezenwakwelu *et al.* (2019) buttressed that, apprentices are individuals who have decided to pursue informal apprenticeship training rather than formal education. Furthermore, authors (such as Adams *et al.*, 2013; Ezenwakwelu *et al.*, 2019) stated that apprentices are typically those who cannot afford formal secondary, technical, or tertiary education. As a result, apprentices gain these apprenticeship skills, which will enable them to become self-employed in society (Adams *et al.*, 2013; Ezenwakwelu *et al.*, 2019).

In contrast to acquiring entrepreneurial skills through apprenticeship, some participants stated that they obtained their entrepreneurial knowledge through formal education, which they are now putting to use in the host country. This finding supports Nieuwenhuizen's (2003) study, which stated that individuals who have been recognized for entrepreneurial success owe it to a direct link to education, indicating that entrepreneurship skills and abilities can be learned. As a result, the study suggests that when African immigrants attend tertiary education, they can improve their valuable entrepreneurial abilities (Nieuwenhuizen, 2003). Therefore, the finding is consistent with the findings of Nieuwenhuizen (2003), who believes that entrepreneurial success can be attributed to an individual's educational background.

Some of the participants stated that they learned entrepreneurial skills from the business itself, which was an incredible discovery for the study. This can be explained as a situation in which these African immigrant entrepreneurs have never been involved in any type of business, have never been exposed to a family business, and have never owned a business in their home country before relocating to a host country. In the host country, these immigrants are compelled to engage in entrepreneurship to survive, possibly due to a lack of available employment opportunities. Thus, this study discovered that these participants learn the necessary entrepreneurial skills in the business itself through trial and error, with the business serving as a teacher and mentor.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study identifies entrepreneurs as individuals with specific attributes, behaviours, and skills. According to Stokes, Wilson and Mador (2010), people are endowed with attributes, skills, and behaviours that can be developed through learning. Participants in the study stated that they learned entrepreneurial skills from their families' businesses, entrepreneurial knowledge through apprenticeship, entrepreneurship knowledge from school, and business skills. Consistent with Timmons and Spinelli (2009) posits, entrepreneurs are problem solvers, ratiocinators, and actors who are opportunity-obsessed, holistic in approach, and leadership-balanced to capture and create value. According to the study, the result of an entrepreneurial obsession is the creation, realization, renewal, and enhancement of value for all stakeholders and participants, not just the business owners (Timmons and Spinelli, 2009).

It is also recommended that government should create a favourable environment for new African immigrant entrepreneurship by financing them and providing them with training and development. In this manner, an environment will be created in which these ethnic indigenous entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, experiences, and cultural values related to entrepreneurship can be passed on to the host populations. Entrepreneurship can be an effective way to include immigrants in local economies, by sharing their knowledge, unique acquired skills and entrepreneurial spirit, thus creating possible new market opportunities and cross-border networks. Entrepreneurship can also be part of the long-term solutions needed to address the consequences of forcibly displacement of communities and to cope with the immediate effects of humanitarian crises. The creation of economic opportunities for all should be among the top priorities of the sustainable development agenda of many international organisations and the one mechanism to achieve this could be through the promotion of immigrant entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial policies and programmes should play an important role in supporting entrepreneurial activity by immigrants in addressing the barriers they face to engaging in economic activity in the host country. Although various seemingly unsurmountable obstacles can be identified preventing immigrants from working or hindering their ability to access startup financing,

solutions should be found by various key stakeholders to overcome this. Governments, public institutions, non-governmental organisations and the private sector should effectively support entrepreneurial activity by immigrants, with meaningful contributions to their well-being and with a positive social impact. It is thus important to acknowledge the role of immigrants as an integral part of a globalised world aimed at enhancing their contribution to sustainable development.

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2021-0306

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