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## Effect of Entrepreneurial Skills in the Operation and Success of Outdoor Catering Ventures in Nairobi, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*The catering and hospitality industry include businesses such as hotels, pubs and restaurants, contract caterers in various industrial and commercial premises, fast food takeaways, cafes and bistros. The industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in providing event-based food services. Outdoor catering is a sector in the catering and hospitality industry that has gained momentum as a new way of vending food in Nairobi. The purpose of this study was to determine effect of entrepreneurial skills in the operation and success of outdoor catering ventures in Nairobi, Kenya. The objectives of the study were to identify the entrepreneurial skills related to operation of outdoor catering and also to find out the effect of entrepreneurial skills on outdoor catering ventures in Nairobi, Kenya. The study was carried out in Nairobi where 30 outdoor catering MSEs were randomly selected from a population of 300 for the study. Data was largely quantitative and was analyzed using descriptive analysis such as frequency count and percentages describing the distribution of the findings. Findings from the study revealed that there was an indication of a high skill base involved in these business ventures. It emerged that attachment or on-the-job training was far the most common form of training in these enterprises. However, only a few of the respondents had business skills in accounting. In addition, majority of the respondents had benefited from their training. Further, all the respondents were of the opinion that training on entrepreneurship skills would improve their business management skills. Recommendations made from findings emphasize the need for propagation of the enterprise culture through the educational system, promotion of the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills within the MSEs sector, establishing a network of regional enterprise/ Business, workshops, conferences and resource centers to offer a platform for exchanging skills and experience. Finally, there is need to equip students in entrepreneurship with more practical skills as opposed to theory so that graduates can readily practice both in informal and formal employment.*

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial skills, operation, success, outdoor catering business ventures

### **1. Introduction**

The catering and hospitality industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in providing event-based food services. These establishments generally have equipment and vehicles to transport meals and snacks to events and / or prepare food at an off-premise site. Banquet halls with catering staff are also included in this industry. Examples of events catered for by establishments in this industry are graduations parties, wedding receptions, business or retirement luncheons and lunch shows (Alonso, O'Neill, 2011). Outdoor catering is a sector in the catering and hospitality industry that has gained momentum as a new way of vending food in Nairobi. One of its manifestations is in weddings, funerals, family dinner and various gatherings. It creates self-employment encompassing own account workers and employers (working proprietors of unincorporated enterprise). The entrepreneurs in this sector have raised hopes for self-employment which is a means of injecting new vitality into economies while creating employment, income and capital. One of the constraints facing self-employed professionals is relative neglect by policy makers. Self-employment in urban areas has not been given adequate attention as a method of alleviating the country unemployment problems (Simiyu&Sambu, 2012). The Sessional Paper No.4 of 2013 on employment policy and strategy for Kenya hardly looked at the role played by entrepreneurial skills in the growth of MSEs. Development of the MSE sector was highlighted as a means of improving Kenya's economy (Republic of Kenya, 2007). The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of entrepreneurial skills in the operation and success of outdoor catering ventures in Kenya.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) cut across all sectors of the economy and provide one of the most prolific sources of employment not to mention the breeding ground for medium and large industries which are critical for industrialization. Today these enterprises are found in every corner of Kenya and they have very great potential for creating a variety of jobs while generating widespread economic benefits. Small-scale enterprise offers many benefits and contributions towards national development. However, in the past four years most of them have been collapsing. Among the reasons that have caused the failure of MSEs are lack of entrepreneurial skills. Only a few enterprises have succeeded past the maturity age (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The country's economic growth rate has not been sufficient to create enough employment opportunities to absorb the increasing labor force of about 500,000 people annually (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). It is therefore the intent of this study to establish the extent to which entrepreneurship skills have contributed towards the growth of outside catering ventures in Kenya.

### 1.2. The Specific Objective of the Study

- To identify the entrepreneurial skills related to the operation of outdoor catering ventures in Kenya.
- To find out the effect of entrepreneurial skills on outdoor catering ventures.

### 1.3. Research Questions

- What entrepreneurial skills are required by successful outdoor catering micro small enterprises?
- What are the effects of entrepreneurial skills on outdoor catering micro and small enterprises in Kenya?

### 1.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows the study variables. The independent variable is entrepreneurial skills. The dependent variables are growth of outdoor catering.

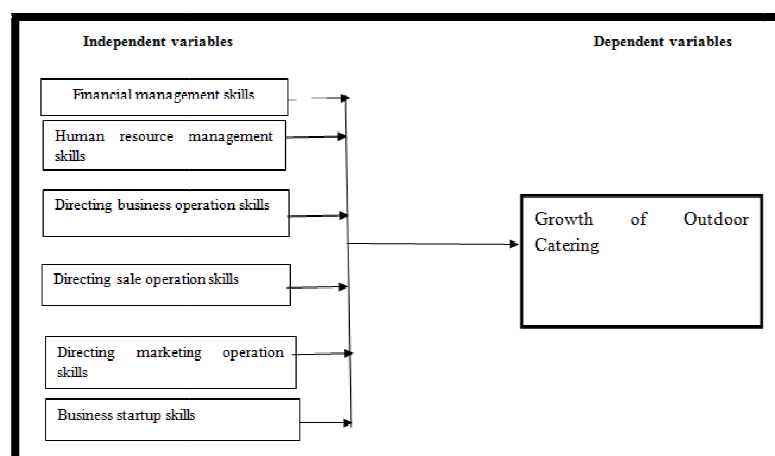


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

#### 1.4.1. Financial Management Skills

The nature of entrepreneurship within the catering industry is that financial management of a new business in the sub sectors within is extremely challenging. Business rarely operate in some kind of steady state. The implication is that the entrepreneurial business will frequently swing from financial plenty, to famine and hopefully back again. Raising money to start up the business is frequently a major challenge. However, effective continuous financial planning and control is essential (Grinblatt & Titman, 2012). Consequently, the ongoing support and experience of an entrepreneur with skills in accountancy contributes to the growth of outdoor catering ventures.

#### 1.4.2. Human Resource Management Skill

This is clearly an important area for business. However, an entrepreneur may not be particularly well skilled in dealing with employees. Entrepreneurial skills are important the offering of wages, stipulation of working hours. A skilled entrepreneur knows that the human resource is very important for growth of his venture (Tambur, & Vadi, 2012).

#### 1.4.3. Directing Business Operation Skills

Wu (2010) found that managerial inadequacy, incompetence, inefficiency and inexperience to be a consistent theme in explaining the failure of entrepreneurial business failure to be of managerial expertise. Directing is a managerial function. In outside catering ventures this skill is important. An entrepreneur with this skill is able to direct all business function's through pre-start up stage to the maturity stage (all stages of business growth).

#### 1.4.4. Directing Marketing and Sales Skills

Demand and supply equation in the catering industry can vary significantly, geographically from place to place. For the outside caterer this result into a challenging business environment that is in perpetual motion. Entrepreneurial

skills in sales operation play a significant role in business management (Bryman& Bell, 2011). These skills enable him identify different customer needs and meet them appropriately ensuring that he meets his costs and also involves others to do the same successfully. From the marketing perspective, there is a complete web of factors to consider when developing new product/ service concepts. Entrepreneurs with skills have an intensive affinity with the needs of the market and know what will work and go ahead to put together a concept offering which has potentially strong market appeal. The entrepreneur applies market theories and principles and expertise ensuring a positive growth of his enterprise.

#### 1.4.5. Business Startup Skills

For many people, starting a business is the result of identifying an opportunity following experience as a consumer or through identifying a gap in the market. The success and growth of the business will depend on entrepreneurial skills in selection of locations, purchase of materials, equipment, planning of business cash flow, identifying appropriate business ownership (Nguyen, & Mutum, 2012). It will also be important that entrepreneurs have skills on legal requirements and that they maintain proper accounts right from the start up stage.

## **2. Methodology**

The research design used was a descriptive research design where data was collected without altering any variable in the study area. This design was selected for this study because the study was exploratory in nature aimed at understanding the role of entrepreneurial skills in the growth of outdoor catering SMEs in Nairobi, Kenya. It was exploratory in that a major emphasis was on finding out and getting more information on the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the growth of outdoor catering. The target population consisted of all the 3,000 MSEs in Nairobi registered by the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA). The researcher used simple systematic random sampling procedure where she picked 40 outdoor caterers for the study. A number was given to each population of entrepreneurs in outdoor catering in Nairobi. A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed but only 30 responded. This area was selected as it is a vibrant commercial center cosmopolitan by nature where many outdoor catering MSEs are concentrated. In-depth information was collected through interviews since the open nature of the questions allowed the respondents to give their insights regarding the study area. Using observation schedules, the researcher observed and noted what happened at outdoor catering functions from food and utensils storage, food preparation, packing, transport and service. Secondary data were obtained from journals and magazines and past research reports. Analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Data was presented using frequency distribution tables and histograms used where appropriate.

## **3. Findings**

This section presents and discusses the findings of the current study. First data on sample characteristics were collected. Gender information indicates that there were more women entrepreneurs (n=30, 63.3 %) than there were males (n=30, 36.7) of micro and small catering enterprises. Descriptive results indicate that outside catering ventures studied were started between two years and five years. The findings also suggest that age is a factor in the running of the outside catering ventures of micro and small catering enterprises. It emerged that most respondents (36.7 per cent) in the outside catering ventures studied were of the ages 36-45 followed by ages 26-35 which constituted 26.7 per cent of the respondents. It is generally argued that enterprises are most likely to succeed when their entrepreneurs have built up networks, experience and capital. On marital status, majority of the respondents were married constituting 73.3 per cent of the respondents. The singles group was mainly from respondents of age brackets 15-30 group expressed optimism and flexibility in terms of trying new skills but also expressed concern that their capital base was weak. Results presented in the study showed that Education levels of the respondents in the sampled enterprises were high 50 per cent, of all respondents had reached the diploma level. Further to this 26.7 per cent had attained education of up to degree level. Indeed, all respondents had attained form four qualifications. This was an indication of a high skill base involved in these business ventures. The study revealed that 43.3 per cent of the enterprise studied made an income of 20-29 thousand as shown in table 6. In addition, 33.3 per cent of the enterprises had an income of 40-59 thousand. These figures were grossly inaccurate due to the fact that few businesses had a proper accounting and financial management system. This indicated a rather low scale of operation for MSEs serving a city like Nairobi. There are strong reasons for thinking that improvements in skills and knowledge would facilitate better enterprise performance and better incomes. It is also widely accepted that Kenya is particularly weak in skills development and that MSEs are particularly affected by this. The trend in income was also consistent with that depicted by sales made by these outdoor catering enterprises. Most enterprises (40 per cent) made sales of up to 40-56 thousand while 33.3 per cent of the enterprises made sales of up to 20-39 thousand. It however emerged that over six MSEs were making sales of between 100,000 and 2.5 million largely due to their capital base as well as the education level of the entrepreneur.

In addition, descriptive statistics regarding the variables under consideration was presented and discussed. The objective of this study was to determine the effect of entrepreneurial skills in the operation and success of outdoor catering ventures in Kenya. The study analyzed descriptive statistics involving entrepreneurial skills for outdoor catering. First information on on-the job training was by far the most common form of training in these enterprises. This information is presented in Table 1.

Experience	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	25	83.3	83.3
No	5	16.7	100
Total	30	100	

Table 1: Hands on Experience before Starting Venture

It is clear that the needs of small and micro enterprises are diverse and typically, very different to those of medium and large size companies. Their needs are often more immediate and not included in formal learning curriculum. Furthermore, most formal curricula tend to emphasize on theory with little emphasis on practical. Therefore, for most of this entrepreneur skills acquired through informal or on-the-job training were highly regarded. Formal training was also an important way of acquiring skills as indicated in Table 2.

Experience	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	22	73.3	73.3
No	8	26.7	100
Total	30	100	

Table 2: Entrepreneurs Education before Starting Ventures

Indeed, 73.3 per cent of all entrepreneurs had personally been on some form of training in the past year. In spite of their historical and contemporary skills and knowledge acquisition strategies many respondents indicated that they had insufficient skills to improve their business performance. The skills required varied by enterprise although in almost all of them here was considerable concern about the adequacy of entrepreneurs' business skills. Several entrepreneurs realized that they needed additional skill in managing finances, and business planning. Information presented in Table 3 indicated that 63.3 per cent of the respondents had business plan writing skill.

Business Plan Writing Skills	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	19	63.3	63.3
No	11	36.7	100
Total	30	100	

Table 3: Business Plan Writing Skills

Those who lacked these skills mainly hired experts on contract or did it themselves. MSEs with lesser income tended not to have these skills yet they did the planning themselves since they could not afford to consult experts. These businesses could also somehow manage due to lack of sophistication of most of the enterprises under examination. However, the respondents expressed need for their skills to be upgraded through an organized workshop which they requested the government or other stakeholders to facilitate. Table 4 shows data on purchasing skills.

Purchasing skills	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	21	70	70
No	9	30	100
Total	30	100	

Table 4: Purchasing Skills

The study also indicated that 70 per cent of the respondents reported that they had had purchasing skills. This was however interpreted as the ability to buy low cost quality products so as to reduce the cost of operation and maximize on profits. Only 30 per cent of the respondents accepted that they lacked adequate skills in purchasing, occasionally hiring people with such expertise or still doing it themselves. Since purchase represent a big percentage of any business expenditure, catering MSEs who go wrong in planning their purchases may find it hard to break even and make good profit. Accounting skills were also important in outdoor catering business as presented in Table 5.

Accounting Skills	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	19	63.3	63.3
No	11	36.7	100
Total	30	100	

Table 5: Accounting Skills

Respondents who reported having business skills in accounting were 63.3 per cent. This was the same per cent as those with business planning skills discussed earlier and was reflected in aspects like lack of record of all financial transactions and lack of adequate monitoring and control of expenditures. Entrepreneurs with families and dependents admitted diverting business capital funds to meet personal and family demands. Since the majority of MSEs studied reflected a weak capital base resulting to sales of less than 50,000 per month, poor skills in accountability of fund could

have a serious clipping effect on the outdoor catering business. The study analyzed descriptive statistics to determine the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the growth of outdoor catering ventures in Kenya. It emerged however that 80 per cent of the respondents had an accounting system. Table 6 sows this information.

Accounting Skills	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	24	80	80
No	6	20	100
Total	30	100	

Table 6: Accounting System

However, observation on the ground indicated poor recording and classification of all transactions such as revenue received, expenditure incurred, assets owned and liabilities incurred. There was also lack of accurately and completeness in the available records, often sketched on paper and not proper books for future analysis. This confirmed the lack of skills reported earlier by the respondents and indicated a poor state of financial management among these outside catering MSEs. This hinders their development through poor sale and low profits.

The research question yielding this data was designed to solicit data on perceived strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship training system currently in place, and provide suggestions for its improvement. The respondents were asked whether they had benefited from entrepreneur skills they had already acquired throughout their training. It emerged that 90 per cent of the respondents had benefited from their training as indicated in Table 7.

Benefit	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	27	90	90
No	3	10	100
Total	30	100	

Table 7: Benefits from Entrepreneur Skills

They cited areas like ability to mobilize employees to reach higher levels of productivity, ability to deal with customers, suppliers and competitors effectively and improved financial management skills. Some respondents reported that through the acquired entrepreneur skills they were able to plan their business, carry out market research and to take advantage of the laws of supply and demand in increasing their business productivity. Table 8 Indicates that almost all of the respondents (93.3 per cent) were of the opinion that training on entrepreneurship skills would improve their business management skill.

Training	Frequency	Per Cent	Cumulative Per Cent
Yes	28	93.3	93.3
No	2	6.7	100
Total	30	100	

Table 8: Effects of Entrepreneurship Training on Business Improvement

The respondents reported that entrepreneurship skills they had already acquired had improved their productivity, and sales. They expressed interest for a learning opportunity to improve their skills. It appeared that there was a powerful positive attitude towards training and skills acquisition within the outdoor catering MSEs. This appears to be something that the government through its national skills development strategy can build upon. As discussed earlier, training should include more practical lessons as there was a general feeling that this mode of teaching was much preferred than theory.

#### 4. Discussion

The growth of outdoor catering is influenced by entrepreneurial skills (Hisrich& Peters, 2002). These skills enable one to operate the business successfully. Possession of these skills can ensure entry and success in outdoor catering. Hisrich and Peters (2002) identified the skills as financial management skills, human resource management skills, directing business operation skills, directing sales operation skills, directing market operation skills, and business startup skills. From the research findings, entrepreneur skills acquired through informal or on-the-job training are highly regarded. For instance, 73.3 per cent of all entrepreneurs had personally been on some form of training in the past year. In spite of their historical and contemporary skills and knowledge acquisition strategies many, respondents indicated that they had insufficient skills to improve their business performance. The skills required varied by enterprise although in almost all of them here was considerable concern about the adequacy of entrepreneurs' business skills. For many people, starting a business is the result of identifying an opportunity following experience as a consumer or trough identifying a gap in the market. The success and growth of the business will depend on entrepreneurial skills in selection of locations, purchase of materials, equipment, planning of business cash flow, identifying appropriate business ownership (Nguyen, &Mutum, 2012). It will also be important that entrepreneurs have skills on legal requirements and that they maintain proper accounts right from the start up stage. Those who lacked these skills mainly hired experts on contract or did it themselves. MSEs with lesser income tended not to have these skills yet they did the planning themselves since they could not afford to consult experts. In addition, study indicated that 70 per cent of the respondents reported that they had had

purchasing skills. This was however interpreted as the ability to buy low cost quality products so as to reduce the cost of operation and maximize on profits. Only 30 per cent of the respondents accepted that they lacked adequate skills in purchasing, occasionally hiring people with such expertise or still doing it themselves. Wu (2010) found that managerial inadequacy, incompetence, inefficiency and inexperience to be a consistent theme in explaining the failure of entrepreneurial business failure to be of managerial expertise. Since purchase represent a big percentage of any business expenditure, catering MSEs who go wrong in planning their purchases may find it hard to break even and make good profit. Accounting and financial skills were also important in outdoor catering business (Grinblatt & Titman, 2012). Respondents who reported having business skills in accounting were 63.3 per cent. This was the same per cent as those with business planning skills discussed earlier and was reflected in aspects like lack of record of all financial transactions and lack of adequate monitoring and control of expenditures. Entrepreneurs with families and dependents admitted diverting business capital funds to meet personal and family demands. Since the majority of MSEs studied reflected a weak capital base resulting to sales of less than 50,000 per month, poor skills in accountability of fund could have a serious clipping effect on the outdoor catering business. The study analyzed descriptive statistics to determine the effect of entrepreneurial skills on the growth of outdoor catering ventures in Kenya. There are many benefits associated with Entrepreneur Skills (GoK, 2009). They cited areas like ability to mobilize employees to reach higher levels of productivity, ability to deal with customers, suppliers and competitors effectively and improved financial management skills. Some respondents reported that through the acquired entrepreneur skills they were able to plan their business, carry out market research and to take advantage of the laws of supply and demand in increasing their business productivity. Majority of respondents indicate that almost all of the respondents (93.3 per cent) were of the opinion that training on entrepreneurship skills would improve their business management skill

## 5. Summary

Evidence exists from the results of findings that entrepreneurial skills are important in the growth and performance of outdoor catering micro and small enterprises in Kenya. It emerged that attachment or on-the-job training was far the most common form of training in these enterprises. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents had business plan writing skills while many had purchasing skills. Lack of these skills was reflected in aspects like lack of record of all financial transactions and lack of adequate monitoring and control of expenditures. It also emerged that majority of the respondents had benefited from their training. They cited areas like ability to mobilize employees to reach higher levels of productivity, ability to deal with customers and suppliers and competitors effectively and improved financial management skills. Almost all of the respondents were of the opinion that training on entrepreneurship skills would improve their business management skills.

## 6. Conclusions

It was clear that the outdoor catering MSEs sector in Nairobi is populated by skilled and well-educated group of entrepreneurs. The majority had completed schooling with at least 10 years of education. Many had post-school qualifications as well as undergraduate and graduate degrees and additional training on skills like business management. The most common source of skills acquisition amongst owners and managers was through previous work experience. It was clear that the needs of the outdoor catering MSEs were diverse and, typically, very different to those of medium and large size companies. MSEs in this sector appeared to understand the benefits of training, in skills acquisition. MSEs were unable to operate to their full capacity to the extent they would wish as a result of a number of constraints, largely related to lack of access to credit and poor financial management skills that makes MSEs tend to stagnate in growth and have limited participation in new skills development system. Some conclusions such as were made by Cauri and Namusonge (2004) are in agreement with this and suggest that in order to effectively utilize existing researches and incentives in the creation and development, there is need to make deliberate and concentrated efforts geared towards the development and enhancement of enterprise culture. This will also guarantee a long-term supply of enterprising people and encourage in the short-term better people such as graduates to build economic base through business.

## 7. Recommendations

From the study, it emerged that entrepreneurial skills contribute a lot to the development of MSEs. Further to these, it was apparent that informal training was widely used in the sector to acquire entrepreneurial skills. Therefore, it becomes important to explore ways in which the quality of informal training can be improved and built upon with more formal interventions. There is need for propagation of enterprise culture through the educational system. Education provides an effective means of effecting social change and indeed of altering the outlook of the people. Curie Adam (1963) argued that education was the medium through which ideas were produced and transformed society, leading to social and economic revolution. In agreement with the recommendations of Cauri and Namusonge (2004) polytechnics and higher institutions of learning should be equipped to provide more practical skills as opposed to theory so that graduates from these institutions can readily be absorbed in the sector. Students who show interest in entrepreneurship should be encouraged to specialize. Entrepreneurship should be made available to the highest level of education for these students. Both formal and informal training at all levels should integrate entrepreneurship education in their curriculum and focus on acquisition of entrepreneurship skills. These should include personal development skills that enable the entrepreneur to set the enterprise goals towards the success of the enterprise and business development skills to enable the entrepreneur to set out a critical path for the enterprise success from pre start-up, start-up, responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements and profitability. It also deals with identifying, analyzing and predicting

customer needs. Financial skills are vital for an entrepreneur to provide the ability to calculate the start-up needs, ability to evaluate sources of finances of both internally and externally generated funds. The skills also enable the entrepreneur to deal with cash flows.

The government should assist by building structures for establishing a network of regional enterprise/ business, workshops, conferences and resource centers. These would act as forums for exchanging information and experience since amidst the growth constraints experienced by the enterprises studied, some appeared to perform fairly well. The government should promote the acquisition of skills and development within the MSEs sector. Systems will be developed to encourage private sectors participation in skill up-grading within the MSEs Sector.

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