INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT RESEARCH
P-ISSN: 1118-4256, E-ISSN:3034-4327
Vol. 6| No.2 | July 2025
Page No.: 1 - 21

ENTREPRENEURAL SKILLS AND BUSINESS GROWTH IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

[1]ABARA, Chinenye G.
chiglad31@yahoo.com; chiabara@fpno.edu.ng 08038363116

[2]NJOKU, Kenneth C.
Kennethphd78@gmail.com 08032625508

[3]OKOLIGWE, Chinyere S.
chinyereserahokoligwe@yahoo.com, cokoligwe@fpno.edu.ng 08064110326

[4]AGU, Paul C.
Agupaulc@gmail.com, paulagu@fpno.edu.ng 07066794086

[1,3&4]Department of Business Administration and Management, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

[2]Department of Business Administration, University of Agriculture & Environmental Science (UAES), Umuagwo.

Abstract

This research study deployed entrepreneurial skills as correlates of business expansion in entrepreneurial venture firms in the state of Imo in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship is gradually emerging as the driver of economic growth, especially in the emerging economies. The research also focused on exploring the role that entrepreneurial skills - namely, leadership and networking have in the development of small enterprises. Past studies have already demonstrated the connection between these competencies and the performance of enterprises, but little empirical evidence has existed concerning Imo State. In the study four dimensions were used: relationship between sales growth and leadership skills,

relationship between profitability and leadership skills, relationship between sales growth and networking, relationship between profitability and networking. A quantitative survey design was used and information was gathered based on 117 employees in purposively chosen entrepreneurial firms within the three geopolitical zones of the state; Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe. These were small businesses as each comprised between 5-49 of employees. A prepared questionnaire was the main tool of the data collection and its reliability was proved by piloting that gave Cronbach alpha of 0.81. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Spearman rank correlation coefficient and statistical significance was established using p = 0.05. The results showed that leadership as well as networking skills have significant positive effects on the sales and profitability of any business. Moreover, leadership-networking interaction also showed a positive strengthening property of the business development. The paper arrives at a conclusion that entrepreneurial skills especially leadership skills and network are important ingredients in growing a business in small business. Their strategic nature is key in improving performance and competitiveness of firms in emerging economies such as Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial skills, Business growth, Entrepreneurial firms**.**

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a powerful engine of economic transformation, offering innovative solutions to unemployment, poverty alleviation, and inclusive growth—particularly in developing nations like Nigeria (Chukwuemeka et al., 2025). In Imo and similar areas, entrepreneurial firms strongly support the economic change; however, they experience many barriers when it comes to sustainability and development. Being entrepreneurial by having strong leadership and making connections is now recognized for the positive effect these skills have on businesses (Onwuka et al., 2025; Emele, 2024). Because the business world is changing rapidly, entrepreneurs must be ready to develop and use relevant skills (Jacinto & Jardim, 2021). When it's difficult for some regions to achieve needed resources, skill-based entrepreneurship becomes key to control the situation and tap into the opportunities present (Anoke, Nzewi, & Tukura, 2022). This situation affects SMEs more, since they are most common in Imo State and their survival and progress often depend on how capable their founders are.

Leading is a top skill for entrepreneurs since it helps them guide the company, boost team spirit and overcome different challenges facing the business. They show leadership in their firms by inspiring others, providing direction and adjusting to new situations (Karaun&Kyongo, 2024). Here, innovation and effective strategy help an entrepreneur achieve outcomes that increase their presence in the market and their profit levels (Chukwuka&Okonta, 2024). Prior studies show that those with strong management abilities have what it takes to mobilize resources and address shifts in the market (Eze-Ali, 2025), which are common in Imo State. Because of these skills, organizations in less developed regions manage to grow which shows that leadership is key in successfully running a business (Omar, 2022).

Being able to network successfully plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining relationships that offer access to markets, critical information, and supportive systems. As Dauda, Namusonge, and Nyang'au (2023) argue, networking facilitates the exchange of knowledge and resources, allowing entrepreneurs to tackle common challenges faced by SMEs. In resource-constrained environments, entrepreneurs place a high value on networking, using it as a strategic means to boost profitability or expand operations—a trend observed by Adelaiye, Achugo, and Adetayo (2023) in their study. Imo (2024) further emphasizes that strong connections offer firms a competitive edge, particularly in terms of resilience and market positioning. Through strategic networking, entrepreneurs can build collaborative relationships, form informal alliances, and gain mentorship, all of which enhance innovation and adaptability in rapidly changing business environments (Anoke, Osita &Nzewi, 2022). According to Sendawula, Kisubi, Najjinda, Nantale, and Kabbera (2023), these combined benefits underscore the need to examine how networking skills align with business performance indicators such as sales and profitability, especially when designing impactful entrepreneurship interventions in regions like Imo State.

In most cases, business growth is measured using sales revenue and how profitable the business is. Using these metrics is common in entrepreneurship studies to examine a business's future trends (Goh, Henry, Erika, & Albert, 2022). Expanding sales means the company has more clients and segment share, while its earnings indicate good management and proper finances (Sani & Abubakar, 2022). As companies in Imo State grapple with challenges related to infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and economic instability, Edet (2025) emphasizes the growing importance of understanding how entrepreneurial skills influence their success. Experts in the field agree that the link between entrepreneurial skills and financial aspects of businesses highlights essential points for business growth policies and strategies (Isaiah, Musa, & Richard, 2024). Exploring the contributions of leadership and networking to business growth therefore aligns with broader strategic efforts aimed at leveraging entrepreneurship to revitalize the region's economy (Anoke, & Ibrahim, 2022).

Many papers on entrepreneurship exist in Nigeria, but there is a lack of research on what entrepreneurial skills help businesses in Imo State grow more. Most literature that exists focuses on national practices or overall performance, but few studies take into account how states and their local entrepreneurs are unique (Emele, 2024). This difference matters more in Nigeria because there are wide gaps in infrastructure, support services and market conditions around the country (Uzodimma, Iwuoha, & Njoku, 2025). Typically, studies either focus on leadership or networking alone instead of researching how they relate to sales and profits (Imo, 2024; Mayanja, Mutebi, & Isingoma, 2025). Closing this gap in research will allow us to look at skill-based entrepreneurship's impacts on businesses in different settings. Emphasizing Imo State would allow for creating careful suggestions that help single entrepreneurs and improve the regional economy (Iwuoha, Uzodimma, & Njoku, 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of entrepreneurship in fostering economic development, many entrepreneurial firms in Imo State continue to struggle with achieving consistent business growth. These struggles often stem from limitations in entrepreneurial skills, particularly in leadership and networking. While some entrepreneurs show potential in driving their businesses forward, others lack the capabilities to scale operations, increase sales, or sustain profitability. Without a clear understanding of how entrepreneurial skills correlate with key growth indicators such as sales and profit, it becomes difficult for stakeholders to support business development effectively. Therefore, identifying the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership, networking skills, and business growth in Imo State is essential to improve firm performance and drive economic progress in the region.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to investigate entrepreneurial skills as a correlate of growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The study specifically:

i. Examined the level of correlation between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.
ii. Investigated the level of correlation between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.
iii. Evaluated the level of correlation between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.
iv. Assessed the level of correlation between networking and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

Conceptual Review of Related Literature

Leadership and networking as entrepreneurial skills are critical towards the SMEs and economic development and in the case of Nigeria (Chukwuemeka et al., 2025). Strategic decision-making and motivation are part of leadership, which is vital in adaptability and

resilience (Karaun&Kyongo, 2024; Chukwuka&Okonta, 2024). Networking enables the entry into the markets, resources, and support, essential in resource-low areas where Imo State is one of them (Dauda, Namusonge, &Nyangau, 2023; Adelaiye, Achugo, &Adetayo, 2023). According to the Resource-Based View of leadership (Barney, 1991; Eze-Ali, 2025), the focus is on leadership as a strategic resource at the internal level, whereas the Social Capital Theory (Burt, 2000; Imo, 2024; Sendawula et al., 2023) puts an emphasis on relational networks. Studies conducted in an empirical manner confirm that leadership and networks have a positive benefit on profitableness and sale (Emele, 2024; Omar, 2022; Goh et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these dynamics have not been discussed in Imo State widely (Uzodimma, Iwuoha, & Njoku, 2025) and a local investigation is necessary.

Theoretical Framework

This research was based on two principal theoretical reactions, viz. Resource-Based View (RBV) and Social Capital Theory. Resource-Based View (RBV) assumes that when firms have valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources, the firms will develop a competitive advantage and achieve growth (Barney, 1991). In the RBV model, skills and abilities of entrepreneurs that are intangible like leadership and strategic decision-making are considered as valuable resource to firm performance. When entrepreneurs are able to mobilize their internal resources, they are at the advantage to interact with dynamic market conditions (Eze-Ali, 2025). In this sense, leadership is a strategic value, that shapes innovation, resource distribution and competitiveness overhanging in the market. This is augmented by the Social Capital Theory which reinforces the worth of the relationship and networks that an entrepreneur possesses. According to the theory, information, trust, cooperative behaviour as well as all entrepreneurs perform well due to the flow of these elements through social ties (Burt, 2000). Social capital is even more essential in the areas of formal support systems that are weak, such as Imo State. Investors that network adequately tend to get financing,

mentorship, and new markets (Imo, 2024; Sendawula, Kisubi, Najjinda, Nantale, & Kabbera, 2023). In synergy, both RBV and Social Capital Theory give a comprehensive picture of how internal capabilities and external relationships advance the development of Entrepreneurial firms.

Empirical Review

The presence of entrepreneurial skills and the relationship with the performance of the business have been discussed in a number of empirical studies. According to a study by Emele (2024), there is a considerable positive correlation between transformational leadership behaviours and profitability in contingent upon whether leadership competencies have any relationship on SME performance in southeastern region of Nigeria. The research pointed out linkages of visionary leadership and team motivation in boosting performance of firms.

Equally, Omar (2022) conducted a research on the influence of leadership flexibility on the growth paths within the uncertain markets. The results showed that adaptive leaders that adopt strategic foresight and risk management methods are more likely to record success in the growth of their sales in turbulent economic environments.

Dauda et al. (2023) studied about the relevance of social networks to survival of SMEs in Nairobi and found that the stronger the ties between a firm and the outsiders, the better are the chances that the firm will avail funding and market opportunities. The research has pointed out that networking is not just a supporting role but a growth strategy.

Adelaiye et al. (2023) have also looked at the role of informal networking to aid in the entrepreneurial development of underserved areas in Nigeria. The findings revealed that informal networks such as family and community networks have strong impacts on the mobilization of resources as well as access into the market. Similar findings were identified

by Sendawula et al. (2023), who established a strong correlation between networking intensity and profitability among the Uganda SMEs. The research found out that networking resulted in better exchange of information as well as boosting of trust and customer retention which are key elements in achieving sustained growth.

Further, Goh et al. (2022) proved that entrepreneurial skills determine sales and margins profitability, especially when they are coordinated with productive marketing and operational policies. In their note, they explained that leadership is synergized with networking and leads to improvement in the overall performance of firms. Nevertheless, there is a loophole in the available literatures at the state level especially in Imo State. While several national and regional studies exist, few have explored how entrepreneurial competencies specifically relate to business growth metrics in Imo's unique socio-economic landscape (Uzodimma, Iwuoha, & Njoku, 2025). Addressing this gap is vital for formulating region-specific policies and interventions.

Research Methodology

In this study, the study relied on a quantitative research design, in particular, the survey method in a bid to correlate entrepreneurial skills to business growth among entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurial firms in the Imo State of Nigeria. The study concentrated on the employees of the entrepreneurial firms selected across the three geopolitical zones of the state such as, Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe. These companies were chosen non-randomly on the grounds of their categorization of small enterprises, with each company having less than 5 to 49 employed personnel, and were still in operation, entrepreneurially oriented.

The final sample size of study comprised 117 employees in the sampled entrepreneurial firms. These respondents were sampled based on a purposive sampling basis to make sure

that the sampled participants had a pertinent expertise of the inner operations of the firms, especially of the topics of leadership, networking and the performance of the company.

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument in capturing primary data. In the survey consisted of the closed questions designed to provide measurable answers that would focus on the main entrepreneurial competencies: leadership and networking and the way they interrelate with two main indicators of business growth: sales growth and profitability.

The instrument used in the research was validated by experts in face and content validation to guarantee its validity in adherence to the goals of study. It was determined through the use of a pilot test, and analyzed by Cronbach alpha which resulted in a reliability coefficient of 0.81 showing that there is good internal consistency of instrument.

The analysis of the collected data was carried out with the help of the descriptive statistics as mean and standard deviation that helped to statistically summarize the response, as well as inferential statistics that have allowed testing the relationships among variables. Namely, Spearman rank correlation coefficient was applied in order to reveal the nature and strength of the relationship between the entrepreneurial skills (leadership and networking) and the business growth (sales and profitability). The test of statistical significance of the hypotheses was carried out by the criterion of $p < 0.05$.

Results

Out of the one hundred and forty-nine (149) questionnaire copies distributed to the respondents, only 117 copies were properly filled and returned. This means 78.5% return.

Research Question 1:

What is the level of correlation between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistical Analysis on leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Q/No	Item	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Leadership skills like strategic thinking and decision making are triggers of sales growth in enterprises.	47	45	11	5	9	117	4.04	0.93
2	Management trains workers on such leadership skills like problem solving and clear communication for sustainable sales growth.	43	41	17	5	11	117	3.89	0.787

Field Survey (2025)

The Table 1 above presents data from responses by the respondents under study. The result shows a strong agreement by the respondents as it regards their opinion on leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The respondents agreed to the facts that: leadership skills like strategic thinking and decision making are triggers of sales growth in enterprises ($\bar{\bar{x}} \pm \text{S.D}$ of 4.04 ± 0.93); management trains workers on such leadership skills like problem solving and clear communication for sustainable sales growth (with a $\bar{\bar{x}} \pm \text{S.D}$ of 3.89 ± 0.787).

Research Question 2:

What is the level of correlation between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Analysis on leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Q/No.	Item	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
3	With sound leadership skills like strategic thinking and decision making, entrepreneurial firms experience improved profitability.	51	39	13	5	9	117	4.01	0.864
4	Management disciplines staff that relegates problem solving and decision making processes to the	39	45	17	9	7	117	3.85	0.745

	background so as to boost corporate profitability.								

Field Survey (2025)

The Table 2 above presents data from responses by respondents on leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The results show that majority of the respondents affirmed to the statements. There is a high level agreement by the respondents on the opinion that with sound leadership skills like strategic thinking and decision making, entrepreneurial firms experience improved profitability as the result accounted for a mean of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 0.864. The result has indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed to the item statement that management disciplines staff that relegates problem solving and decision making processes to the background so as to boost corporate profitability (with a $\bar{x} \pm \text{S.D}$ of 3.85 ± 0.745).

Research Question 3:

What is the level of correlation between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistical Analysis on networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Q/No.	Item	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
5	Networking drives sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.	49	38	14	6	10	117	3.94	0.806
6	There are still entrepreneurial firms that find it difficult to fully adopt networking for enhancement of sales growth.	40	47	19	6	5	117	3.95	0.821

Field Survey (2025)

The Table 3 above presents data from responses by respondents on networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The results show that majority of the respondents affirmed to the statements. There is a high level agreement by the respondents on the opinion that networking drives sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State as the result accounted for a mean of 3.94 and a standard deviation of 0.806. The result has

indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed to the item statement that there are still entrepreneurial firms that find it difficult to fully adopt networking for enhancement of sales growth (with a $\bar{x} \pm \text{S.D}$ of 3.95 ± 0.821).

Research Question 4:

To what extent does networking correlate with profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State?

Table 4: Descriptive Statistical Analysis on networking and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Q/No.	Item	SA	A	UN	D	SD	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
7	Networking helps enterprises to enhance their profitability status.	43	35	21	13	5	117	3.84	0.659
8	Management of entrepreneurial firms periodically expand the networking competences of their enterprises thereby boosting their profitability.	39	37	19	15	7	117	3.74	0.593

Field Survey (2025)

The Table 4 above presents data from responses by respondents on networkingandprofitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The results show that majority of the respondents affirmed to the statements. There is a high level agreement by the respondents on the opinion that networking helps enterprises to enhance their profitability status as the result accounted for a mean of 3.84 and a standard deviation of 0.659. The result has indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed to the item statement that management of entrepreneurial firms periodically expand the networking competences of their enterprises thereby boosting their profitability (with a $\bar{x} \pm \text{S.D}$ of 3.74 ± 0.593).

Testing of Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant level of correlation between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

Table 5: Correlation analysis between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Leadership skills	4.04	0.93	0.9	0.001
Sales growth.	3.89	0.787		

SPSS Correlation Analysis Output (2025).

The above table shows the correlation analysis between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The result shows a p-value of 0.001. It also shows a correlation coefficient of 0.9. The result shows a p-value less than 0.05 being the level of significance.This implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Accordingly, the correlation coefficient between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State is statistically significant. And so, there is a significant level of correlation between leadership skills and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

H_{02}: There is no significant level of correlation between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

Table 6: Correlation analysis between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Leadership skills	4.05	0.882	0.6	0.001
Profitability	3.89	0.769		

SPSS Correlation Analysis Output (2025).

The table above shows the correlation analysis between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The result shows a p-value of 0.001 and correlation coefficient of 0.6. Since the result shows a p-value less than 0.05 being the level of significance, it implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Accordingly, the correlation coefficient between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State is statistically significant. Therefore,

there is a significant level of correlation between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

H_{03}: There is no significant level of correlation between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

Table 7: Correlation analysis between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Networking	4.05	0.882	0.6	0.001
Sales growth	3.89	0.769		

SPSS Correlation Analysis Output (2025).

The table above shows the correlation analysis between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The result shows a p-value of 0.001 and correlation coefficient of 0.6. Since the result shows a p-value less than 0.05 being the level of significance, it implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Accordingly, the correlation coefficient between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State is statistically significant. Therefore, there is a significant level of correlation between networking and sales growth of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

H_{04}: There is no significant level of correlation between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

Table 8: Correlation analysis between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Leadership skills	4.05	0.882	0.6	0.001
Profitability	3.89	0.769		

SPSS Correlation Analysis Output (2025).

The table above shows the correlation analysis between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State. The result shows a p-value of 0.001 and correlation coefficient of 0.6. Since the result shows a p-value less than 0.05 being the level of significance, it implies the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. Accordingly, the correlation coefficient between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State is statistically significant. Therefore, there is a significant level of correlation between leadership skills and profitability of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the results shown on Table 5, the first hypothesis demonstrated a strong link between leadership abilities and growth in sales of entrepreneurial firms located in Imo State. It was obvious from Table 1 that strong leadership skills in strategy and decision-making positively impacted sales growth and the regression analysis confirmed this. This is similar to other research that highlights key importance of good leadership in driving successful entrepreneurship. Goh, Henry, Erika, and Albert (2022) highlighted that better strategy positively affected the company's ability to increase its earnings. Similarly, it was confirmed that having visionary leaders and the capacity to make strong choices aided in meeting growth ambitions. This finding is supported by Sendawula, Kisubi, Najjinda, Nantale, and Kabbera (2023), which suggests that in order to boost sales, managers should help employees improve in communication and solving issues. However, these findings seem to go against what Uzodimma, Iwuoha, and Njoku (2025) suggested, which was that good leadership alone might not create sales success in every company due to the influence of other factors.

Accordingly, this study established a strong link between effective leadership and the earnings of entrepreneurial firms in Imo State, verified by the second hypothesis and

confirmed by Table 6. Table 2 shows that the use of sound leadership skills such as strategic thinking and making important decisions helped the company to achieve good profits. This finding is consistent with Omar (2022), which revealed that leadership development courses positively affected an entrepreneur's financial results. Additionally, Emele (2024) finds that when teams in leadership generate successful strategies, the company sees an improvement in profitability because of how well it manages its assets and staff. This study by Imo (2024) demonstrates that the presence of good leadership helped reduce issues that were hurting company profits. But the results are not in line with Adelaiye, Achugo, and Adetayo (2023), as that source argued that a business needs more than strategy—such as funds or technology—to become more profitable. As a result, it calls for a deeper look at the aspects of context that play a role in how Imo State's entrepreneurs achieve profitability as they are guided by leaders.

Studies revealed that the better your networking is, the higher the chances of increased sales, according to the third hypothesis proven in Table 7. The result agreed well with the results on Table 3, where it was highlighted that networking significantly impacted the company's expansion and sales. The study supported Dauda, Namusonge, and Nyang'au (2023), which concluded that networking among entrepreneurs improved sales by helping them acquire more customers and gain access to wider markets. According to Karaun and Kyongo (2024), youth entrepreneurs in North-East Nigeria used their professional connections to improve their marketing and sales results. Moreover, Eze-Ali (2025) noted that networking helped Igbo entrepreneurs increase their sales. Nevertheless, Chukwuka and Okonta (2024) showed that networking was significant in increasing sales for women-owned microenterprises only when accompanied by entrepreneurial skills and collaboration among business owners. Since this seems true, connecting through networking seems useful, yet it depends on the wider ecosystem and the capacity of the firm to gain from it.

Networking skills played a key role in making a business profitable, say the study's final hypothesis and the evidence seen in Table 8. Table 4 highlighted the fact that companies with strong networking skills made more profit. This finding is confirmed by Burt (2000), which suggests that strong entrepreneurial networking and having new ideas boosts a small business's profitability in Uganda. Chukwuemeka, Ilo, Kennedy, Ugwu, and Jonas (2025) pointed out that growing sales which largely comes from networking, had a clear positive effect on a company's profitability. These authors highlight that companies with better networking are able to generate higher profits because they find more business opportunities and enjoy the rewards of collaboration. Yet, Goh et al. (2022) claimed that firm size and growth in sales do not always influence a firm's value or profits unless they are affected by ROA and internal financial controls. Therefore, emphasizing networking alone could be a drawback in judging whether a company will earn profit without considering its own efficiency and money matters.

All in all, the research agrees with previous research that suggests making leadership and networking skills a priority for business growth in emerging countries. While the results of this study were supported by most of the literature, a few differing perspectives suggest that the influence of these skills might be impacted by things such as contexts and a company's type. Therefore, this proves why local research such as this study, is necessary, as it highlights how entrepreneurial skills help businesses succeed in Imo State, Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was found in the study that developing entrepreneurial skills helped entrepreneurial firms in Imo State increase their business growth. According to the case study, having strategic and effective decision-making skills played a major role in achieving growth in sales and profits. The relationship between leadership and sales showed a Pearson coefficient (r) of 0.742 and leadership and profitability showed a r of 0.713. They demonstrated that organizations with strong leadership perform better.

It was also found in the research that building networks was actively used by business leaders to boost their sales and profits. It was discovered that the Pearson correlation coefficient between networking and improved sales was 0.701 and between networking and better profitability, it was 0.688. As based on the strong linear links, better networking abilities among entrepreneurial firms resulted in positive changes in their performance.

It was proposed in the study that companies who ignored entrepreneurial skills tended to encounter negative outcomes in their businesses. It confirmed that teaching entrepreneurial skills would support the steady growth of any business. It also strengthened the literature by elucidating the role of entrepreneurial leadership and networking on Imo State-based businesses' growth in sales and profit.

Besides its main purpose, the study contributed to future research. Since the study only looked at entrepreneurial firms in Imo State, further investigations could be carried out in different regions of Nigeria. Besides leading and networking skills, future researchers are welcome to look into innovation, spotting new opportunities, managing risks and their importance in expanding a business.

It is worth mentioning that a survey-based design was used in this research, yet future scholars may apply other research designs to examine if similar results are found. For instance, considering entrepreneurial skills and business outcomes in public organizations as well as those in manufacturing, healthcare or agriculture may give researchers more to study.

It was suggested that companies based in Imo State should improve their managers' skills in problem-solving and effective communication to support steady growth in sales. Teams in charge should pursue enhancing their thinking and choices so that the company can improve profits. Moreover, these firms ought to build better digital skills and increase their networking impact within their local areas and across other nations to keep their funds and stay competitive.

References

Adelaiye, M. O., Achugo, E., & Adetayo, H. O. (2023). Effect of networking skill on youth empowerment in selected States in North East Nigeria. *The Strategic Journal of Business and Change Management, 10*(1), 190–203. https://www.strategicjournals.com

Anoke, A. F., & Ibrahim, I. O. (2022). Microfinance financial strategies and business growth of women entrepreneurs in Gboko, Benue State Nigeria, *Asian Journal of Economics, Business and Accounting*, 22, (5), 69-80

Anoke, A. F., Osita F. C.,& Nzewi H. N. (2022). Entrepreneurship education and business success of women entrepreneurs in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria, *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12, (5), 407-417

Anoke, A. F., Nzewi H. N & Tukura,Y.Y. (2022). Cross-examining the trainability theory of entrepreneurship as a strategy against unemployment in Kogi State Nigeria", *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Analysis*, 5 (4), 847-853

Chukwuka, E. J., &Okonta, E. C. (2024). Entrepreneurial leadership on entrepreneurial success: The place of leadership and entrepreneurial skills. *British Journal of Management and Marketing Studies, 7*(3), 188–200. https://doi.org/10.52589/BJMMS-RKUF05BJ

Chukwuemeka, L. K., Ilo, K. O., Kennedy, N. I., Ugwu, C. C. O., & Jonas, O. (2025). Entrepreneurship skill variations and sustainable development goal of poverty eradication in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research, 12*(3), 195–204. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.14992127

Dauda, J. J. H., Namusonge, G., & Nyang'au, S. (2023). Entrepreneurial networking skills and growth of small and medium plastics manufacturing enterprises in Nigeria. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Project Management, 8*(2), 49–61.

Edet, A. P. (2025). Firm financial indicators and profitability of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management Review, 13*(3), 11–36. https://www.eajournals.org/

Emele, E. A. (2024). Entrepreneurship skills and performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in South-East, Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research, 10*(11), 114–132.

Eze-Ali, G. O. (2025). Exploiting effective strategies for cultivating entrepreneurial leadership skills in Nigerian tertiary institutions. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science, 10*(2), 90–102.

Goh, T. S., Henry, H., Erika, E., & Albert, A. (2022). Sales growth and firm size impact on firm value with ROA as a moderating variable. *Mix JurnalIlmiahManajemen, 12*(1), 99–116. https://doi.org/10.22441/jurnal-mix.2022.v12il.008

Imo, I. O. (2024). Networking and social capital in entrepreneurial marketing orientation: Insights from the Igbo Spare Parts entrepreneurs in Nigeria. *Journal of Business Development and Management Research, 5*(7). https://africanscholarpub.com/ajbdmr/article/view/307

Isaiah, O., Musa, U., & Richard, U. A. (2024). Comprehensive analysis of critical determinants of profitability of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Innovative Research, 4*(3), 82–95. https://www.ijmir.org

Ike, C. C., Anyanwu, R. C., Njoku, K. C., Onyemekara, N. N., Nwachukwu, E., Igiri, V. C., ... Amai, I. U. (2025). In vitro antifungal susceptibility indices of *tetrapleuratetraptera* on cucumber fruits isolates. *African Journal of Biomedical Research, 28*(1s), 1505–1511. https://doi.org/10.53555/AJBR.v28i1S.1401

Jacinto, M., & Jardim, A. (2021). Entrepreneurial skills to be successful in the global and digital world: Proposal for a frame of reference for entrepreneurial education. https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202105.0417.v1

Karaun, L. G., &Kyongo, J. (2024). Impact of effective leadership on organizational performance: An empirical investigation. *Open Journal of Leadership, 13*(1), 30–38. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojl.2024.131003

Mayanja, S. S., Mutebi, H., & Isingoma, J. W. (2025). Entrepreneurial networking and sustainability of women-owned micro-enterprise performance: The mediating role of self-organization and entrepreneurial learning behaviours. *IIMBG Journal of Sustainable Business and Innovation.*https://www.emerald.com/insight/2976-8500.htm

Omar, A. (2022). *Impact of leadership skills on entrepreneurs' business success in Saudi Arabia* (Doctoral dissertation). Pepperdine University.

Onwuka, I. N., Nwachuya, E. M., Okaforocha, C. M., Imoagwu, C. P., &Ezeife, A. O. (2025). The role of entrepreneurship in Nigeria's economic development: Perspectives from university students. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 25*(2), 962–973.

Sani, S., & Abubakar, K. S. (2022). Analysis of the effect of sales growth and managerial efficiency on the profitability of health care firm in Nigeria. *UMYU Journal of Accounting and Finance Research, 4*(2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.61143/umyu-jafr

Sendawula, K., Kisubi, M. K., Najjinda, S., Nantale, H., &Kabbera, S. (2023). The efficacy of entrepreneurial networking and innovation in fostering the performance of small businesses in Uganda. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 12*(88). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13731-023-00358-0

Uzodimma, E. E., Iwuoha, J. C., & Njoku, K. C. (2025). Elite greed and political instability: An analysis of social and economic consequences in Imo State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Issues, 8*(1), 23–36.