

## Poverty Reduction in Awka Metropolis: The Role of Entrepreneurship Productivity

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### **Abstract:**

*The study examined the contribution of entrepreneurship productivity towards poverty reduction using trading SMEs in Awka South as cases of reference. Specifically, the study determined the extent to which entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skill acquisition and entrepreneurial innovation affect poverty reduction. Descriptive survey research design was deployed in the study. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered on a sample size of ninety-nine (99). The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach alpha statistic. Hypotheses testing was conducted with the aid of Spearman Ranked Order Correlation Coefficient at 5% level of significance. The results of the analysis revealed that: entrepreneurial education significantly contributes to poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South ( $\rho = 0.589$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ); entrepreneurial skill acquisition significantly influences poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South ( $\rho = 0.733$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ); and entrepreneurial innovation significantly helps in poverty reduction in Awka South ( $\rho = 0.591$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). Among others, it was recommended that the Anambra state government should invest more in massive entrepreneurial skill acquisition in order to help the citizens to learn various aptitudes that will enable them to be self-reliant.*

### **Keywords:**

*entrepreneurial education; entrepreneurial skill acquisition; entrepreneurial innovation; poverty reduction*

## **I. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The role of entrepreneurship productivity in poverty alleviation in relation to Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) has been a core element of research studies in recent times (Steven, Ahlstrom, Jiang & John, 2020; Adenuga, Kowo & Sabitu, 2019). In this period of globalization, through the engagement of SMEs in trading activities, it is well recognized that entrepreneurship productivity has an important role to play in poverty alleviation (Tavis, 2016; Bužavaitė, Ščeuļovs & Korsakienė, 2019). The SMEs in Nigeria, especially those in trading aspects, create job opportunities among the low skilled people and therefore hold the key to employment creation, income generation and poverty reduction, by extension (Sukkar & Menna, 2021). Entrepreneurship is considered a significant contributing factor to sustainable economic development and poverty reduction across the globe and in developing countries, including Nigeria. Entrepreneurship, which connotes an art of being an entrepreneur or one who undertakes innovations or introducing new things, finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations into economic goods, enables one to

perceive and undertake business opportunities, taking advantage of scarce resources utilization (Dialoke, Onyi & Edeh, 2017).

Entrepreneurship productivity is a term that refers to a situation whereby an entrepreneur and other facilitators trigger-off a process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort. The ultimate end of this engagement is to alleviate poverty. Meanwhile, World Bank (2011) averred that poverty is the economic condition whereby people lack sufficient income to afford certain minimal levels of health services, food, housing, clothing and education which are necessities for a standard of living. Poverty still remains a development issue that continues to capture the attention of the policy makers and international donor agencies especially in Nigeria where poverty level is in a terrible paradox in the views of Lame and Wan (2015). Poverty appears as a contradiction considering the country's immense wealth and a huge number of SMEs scattered all over the country. The situation has also worsened despite the huge human and material resources that have been devoted to poverty reduction by the past and present governments. For many, the power of entrepreneurship and its importance in maintaining a growing and thriving economy, poverty reduction and employment creation is unquestionable. In matters involving poverty alleviation, entrepreneurship productivity is seen as the engine driving the economy of most nations, creating new industries, employment and wealth. Thus, a sustained interest in entrepreneurship is more than just a fad (Lame & Wan, 2015) since policy makers and academics have recognized the very positive impact that new business creation brought about by entrepreneurship productivity can have on poverty reduction or alleviation (Ogunjimi, 2021). This is because entrepreneurship productivity is not just a mere skill acquisition for acquisition's sake: it is an acquisition of skills and ideas for the sake of creating employment for oneself and also for others.

Entrepreneurship productivity involves the identification of new business opportunities and the mobilization of economic resources to initiate a new business or regenerate an existing business, under the conditions of risks and uncertainties, for the purpose of making profits under private ownership (Halim, Abul, Jamaliah & Hussain, 2017). In the long run, entrepreneurship productivity which is achieved through entrepreneurial education, skill acquisition and entrepreneurial creativity eventually creates long-term value and regular cash flow streams on an individual or the group of individuals for the future through the process of imagination, initiative, professionalism and innovation for the purpose of maximizing profits and minimizing risk. Entrepreneurship productivity through entrepreneurial education seeks to provide apprentices with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings (Umaru & Ibrahim, 2019). Entrepreneurship productivity is a crucial attenuating factor in this condition since it enhances human capital development in terms of poverty alleviation, employment generation, wealth creation and economic vitality (Aamir, Habib, Khan & Ullah, 2020).

By entrepreneurial education, a specialized knowledge is inculcated in learners with the traits of risk-taking, innovation, arbitrage and co-ordination of factors of production for the purpose of creating new products or services for new and existing users within human communities. When this business opportunity is created, people that acquired such innovative and enterprising skills grasp the opportunities for starting new entrepreneurial activities, usually as SMEs involved in trading activities. This, of course, is one way of addressing poverty reduction, as there is strong empirical evidence suggesting that economic growth over time is necessary for poverty reduction. Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017) submitted that poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship productivity is one of the top priorities of the

United Nations nineteen (19) objectives for achieving Sustainable Development in developing economy (UNESCO, 2015). Developing countries of African continent most often hardly consider entrepreneurship as a significant way of achieving industrialization and therefore make insufficient efforts for developing indigenous entrepreneurs as an alternative measure for poverty reduction. Against this background created already, this study examines the empirical relationship between entrepreneurship productivity and poverty reduction using trading SMEs in Awka South as cases of reference.

### **1.2 Statement of Problem**

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has become very popular entity in Nigeria because of the important role they play in terms of reducing unemployment rate among people. However, there are assorted worrisome challenges faced by SMEs globally and these thwart the role of entrepreneurship productivity towards alleviating or reducing poverty in the country (Ezeanyeji, Imoagwu & Ejefobihi, 2019). Challenges such as dearth of access to finance or loan, inadequate financial services, poor governmental attention and policies, unhealthy business environment, etc. have been some of the most pervasive obstacles faced by SMEs in both developed and developing countries. Despite the fact that entrepreneurial productivity has brought far reaching transformation on the economy (Anekwe & Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2018), it is still neglected and therefore constrained to fully develop to its full potential.

As a consequence, the country has increasing rate of poverty both at the regions and at the national level, high unemployment rate, high income inequality, low quality human capital, high percentage of population on welfare and high out migration in the face of high economic growth measured by GDP. Thus, the need for the pursuit of poverty reduction through entrepreneurship productivity is highly essential for growth and structural transformation of an economy and the attainment of economic development through poverty alleviation. Previous studies on the subject matter of this study such as Steven, Ahlstrom, Jiang and John (2020); Aamir, Habib, Khan and Ullah (2020); Adenuga, Kowo and Sabitu (2019); Eneji, Dom and Odey (2019); Ezeanyeji, Imoagwu and Ejefobihi (2019); Umaru and Ibrahim (2019); Anekwe and Ndubuisi-Okolo (2018); John-Akamelu and Muogbo (2018); Agri, Dalut and Odey (2017); Mohammed and Ndulue (2017); Halim, Abul, Jamaliah and Hussain (2017); Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017); Abd, Mahrani, Hajar and Zainuddin (2016); Ibitoye, Atoyebi and Sufian (2015); Abul, Hussain and Rosni (2014); Oba and Onuoha (2013); Abubakar (2012) have all determined the extent to which entrepreneurship productivity affects poverty alleviation. Most of these empirical researches were conducted in Nigeria. And so represent the local realities obtainable in Nigerian business environment. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no empirical study of this nature has focused on SMEs that are located in Awka South and are also involved in trading business.

More so, no empirical study of this nature has used the indicators of entrepreneurship productivity outlined by Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017) to predict the relationship between entrepreneurship productivity (proxies by entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skill acquisition and entrepreneurial innovation) on poverty reduction. To address this gap in knowledge, this study examines the degree to which entrepreneurship productivity (proxies by entrepreneurial productivity, entrepreneurial skill acquisition and entrepreneurial innovation) contributes to poverty reduction using trading SMEs in Awka South as cases of reference.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine the degree to which entrepreneurship productivity contributes to poverty reduction using trading SMEs in Awka South as cases of reference. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1. To examine the extent to which entrepreneurial education contributes to poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South.
2. To determine the degree to which entrepreneurial skill acquisition influences poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South.
3. To ascertain the extent to which entrepreneurial innovation helps in poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South.

## 2.1 Conceptual Review

### a. Entrepreneurship Productivity

Entrepreneurship productivity is a term that refers to a situation whereby an entrepreneur and other facilitators trigger-off a process of creating something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort assuming the accompanying financial, psychic and social risk and reserving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence (Aamir, Habib, Khan & Ullah, 2020). Entrepreneurship productivity involves the identification of new business opportunities and the mobilization of economic resources to initiate a new business or regenerate an existing business, under the conditions of risks and uncertainties, for the purpose of making profits under private ownership (Halim, Abul, Jamaliah & Hussain, 2017). In the long run, entrepreneurship productivity which is achieved through entrepreneurial education, skill acquisition and entrepreneurial creativity eventually creates long-term value and regular cash flow streams on an individual or the group of individuals (Steven, Ahlstrom, Jiang & John, 2020).

Entrepreneurship development refers to increase in the ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities, to establish and to run an enterprise with a demonstrated level of success. Entrepreneurship productivity entails ingenious and innovative forms of business enterprises. Entrepreneurship productivity can as well be seen as the effective manipulation of human intelligence which is shown through creative performance in combining economic resources for the production of goods and services (Ezeanyej, Imoagwu & Ejefobihi, 2019). Entrepreneurship productivity encompasses the recognition of business opportunities, the mobilization of resources and the persistent exploitation of that opportunity. It is evidenced in the increase in the supply of entrepreneurs or even in adding to the stock of existing SMEs and big enterprises that are available in the country. Productivity in entrepreneurship creates and promotes many competent entrepreneurs that are capable of running innovative enterprises, nurturing them to grow and sustaining them for a long-term prospect. Entrepreneurship productivity is a result of combining entrepreneurial skill, education and innovation in a way that brings about production of goods and services. One of the most common ways is regular entrepreneurship which means opening a new organization such as starting a new business through micro, small & medium). Alternatively, other approaches could be encouraging innovation or introducing new products or new services or new markets in existing firms. Present day entrepreneurship productivity is often shown by and designed to be community development and self-sustaining services coupled with doing good works that improve the economic wellbeing of the affected members.

Productivity in entrepreneurship is recognised as the key driver of economic growth and development of local industries as entrepreneurship development contributes to the conversion of local raw materials into finished and semi-finished goods for both the foreign and domestic markets (Olaore, Adejare & Udofia, 2020). Entrepreneurship productivity promotes the use of cost-effective and improved technology among SMEs which ultimately enhances higher productivity at the local level more particularly in low-income economies where the traditional rural economy is more pronounced. This is one of the major reasons entrepreneurship is considered to be self-employment. The researcher wishes to add, however, that there is a current consensus among scholars in business management, finance and entrepreneurship that entrepreneurship is not just running a small business

which already exists but entrepreneurship encompasses creative thinking, change management, opportunity seeking, and innovativeness (Halim, Abul, Jamaliah & Hussain, 2017; Man, 2015).

### **b. Poverty Reduction**

Ezeanyej, Imoagwu and Ejefobihi (2019) submitted that poverty is a situation that is characterized by low-income or low consumption. Poverty refers to the inability of someone to attain a minimum standard of living. The poor lack command over basic consumption needs. This means that poverty presupposes there is an inadequate level of consumption which gives rise to insufficiency in food security, clothing and/or shelter. Thus, people are said to be poor if their measured standard of living in terms of consumption or income is below poverty line. The poor have no access to the basic necessities of life such as food, clothes and economic obligation. Poverty reduction therefore is a means by which people's purchasing power is increased. Poverty reduction presupposes that there is increase in the income rate and consumption rate of the people over time. According to Oba & Onuoha (2013), poverty alleviation, which is also called poverty reduction, refers to the improvement in the living condition in which an entity is enabled to overcome economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivation with an increase in his/her level of income. The nature of poverty in Nigeria is multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary. The economy of Nigeria heavily relies on the oil sector, which contributes about 95% of export revenue, about 76% of government revenues, and about a third of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nigeria is naturally blessed with a large reserves of human and natural resources, which could be utilised in building a prosperous economy where poverty is significantly reduced (Ezeanyej, Imoagwu & Ejefobihi, 2019). In spite of the above, there is still a teeming number of people living in abject poverty. The extreme poverty in which such people live in has led to structural, social, economic and cultural deprivation that continue to exhibit a vicious cycle while accounting for the recurring decimal of poverty that is widely spread in Nigeria and other economies of Africa. Poverty is not only dehumanizing but comes with a number of attendant social problems. Anekwe and Ndubuisi-Okolo (2018) conceptualized poverty as lack of access to basic need/goods and lack of access to productive resources, while poverty reduction is a sustained development and improvement of the living conditions of an entity.

Poverty reduction manifests in increase in the level of income and productive resources which are basically sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood, eliminate hunger and prevent malnutrition, while poverty is manifested in ill health, limited access to education, increase morbidity and more mortality from illness, lack of means of livelihood, inadequate housing, environmental insecurity, social exclusion and discrimination. When poverty is reduced, there is often an increased level of participation in decision and in social, civil, and cultural life. According to Mohammed and Ndulue (2017), poverty alleviation refers to a short-hand for promoting economic growth which will permanently lift as many people as possible over a poverty line. The aim of poverty reduction is to improve the quality of life for people who currently live under a poverty line. In poverty reduction, a number of conscious efforts are exerted with the aim of reducing the magnitude of poverty which is defined in terms of the proportion of the population who live below the poverty line. Poverty reduction entails a set of measures whether economic or humanitarian which are aimed at lifting people out of poverty, permanently. Poverty still remains a development issue that continues to capture the attention of the policy makers and international donor agencies especially in Nigeria where poverty level is in a terrible paradox in the views of Lame & Wan (2015). Poverty appears as a contradiction considering the country's immense wealth and a huge number of SMEs scattered all over the country. The situation has also worsened despite the huge human and material resources that have been devoted to poverty reduction by the past and present governments. For many, the power of entrepreneurship and its importance in maintaining a growing and thriving economy, poverty reduction and employment creation is unquestionable. In matters involving poverty alleviation, entrepreneurship productivity is seen as the engine driving the economy of most nations, creating new industries, employment and wealth.

### **c. Development of Hypotheses**

People that have high entrepreneurial spirit usually mobilize some resources to start up business and ensure the business grows over time. Such strong entrepreneurial spirit coupled with positive orientation among people forms a motivational force for economic progress in a country (Steven, Ahlstrom, Jiang & John, 2020). The market succeeds more as a result of the entrepreneurial spirit of some people who continue to develop new technologies and new products that meet changes in customers' taste and preferences. Low income in conjunction with fewer network confronts the poor incessantly. However, there are a number of highly spirited entrepreneurs that demonstrate their entrepreneurial skills and competence by doing something, perhaps something small. In fact, among those living with poverty, there is this necessity in them to seek for alternative ways by which they can survive especially in a place where getting a paid employment is extremely difficult. Through entrepreneurial education, innovation and skill acquisition, poverty is gradually being reduced among productive entrepreneurs more because they have something to offer to the society who in return pays for either their goods or for their services (Steven, Ahlstrom, Jiang & John, 2020).

Entrepreneurship productivity is believed to contribute to poverty reduction because it helps to create employment through the establishment of new entrepreneurial enterprises or the expansion of existing ones which altogether increases social wealth by creating new industries, new markets, new technology, new jobs, new institutional forms, and net increase in real productivity (Halim, Abul, Jamaliah & Hussain, 2017). Furthermore, entrepreneurial productivity tends to increase income which ultimately translates in higher standards of living for the population thereby making the argument that increase in entrepreneurship productivity significantly reduces poverty level and vice versa logically valid. Verily, the jobs which are created through entrepreneurial activities in turn leads to equitable distribution of income that increases the standards of living for the populace. It has been proven that one of the best approaches towards reduction of poverty is through entrepreneurial skill acquisition, training (Anekwe & Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2018) and innovation. In corporate literature, entrepreneurship has been widely considered to be a pivotal driver of economic development of any nation, while entrepreneurship productivity has been globally recognized as a major strategic tool for alleviating poverty. This is achieved more because entrepreneurship skills and knowledge when well nurtured among the potential and nascent entrepreneurs, helps in solving unemployment and poverty issues through increase in income generation and production of goods and services. Entrepreneurship productivity as a recognized as a strategic tool for addressing extreme poverty, boosts entrepreneurial capabilities, helps to foster employment opportunities and increases the standard of living of the people (Aamir, Habib, Khan & Ullah, 2020). When countries want to alleviate poverty, they promote entrepreneurship productivity more by emphasizing on entrepreneurial innovation, creativity, skill acquisition and entrepreneurial training. However, there are some factors that impede the achievement of these objectives. Factors such as lack of necessary infrastructure and dearth of expertise to support the attainment of such objectives. Be that as it may, entrepreneurship productivity still remains a strategic tool in the fight of overcoming these deficiencies via enhancing capacity building. For the very fact that entrepreneurship productivity helps to create employment opportunities, increase international trade and reduce the rate of poverty within an economy, lack of entrepreneurial skills, education and innovation are few of the possible reasons for poverty in Nigeria. It is in view of this that the present study proposes that entrepreneurship productivity (measured by entrepreneurial skill acquisition, entrepreneurial innovation and entrepreneurial education) could contribute towards eradication of poverty, or at least to alleviation of poverty.

### **d. Entrepreneurial Education**

Entrepreneurial education refers to a specialized knowledge that inculcates in the learners the qualities of risk-taking, arbitrage, innovation, and co-ordination of factors of production with the end goal of creating new products or services for new and existing users within the human communities. It is the cognitive processes of gaining and structuring entrepreneurial knowledge and ideas in order

to equip learners effectively with theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are required in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial education entails knowledge acquisition from past experience and from combining all that is learnt from various sources in order to engage maximally in entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial education contextually develops the key competencies that enable individuals in organization to perform current and future job through planned learning activities (Okoye & Ezejiofor, 2013). It is the organized activities that are arranged in order to improve performance and/or perform general growth for the purpose of improving the jobs, the individual/or the organization. In other words, entrepreneurial education refers to the extent to which an entrepreneur acquired the requisite training that allows him or her stimulate actions and processes that brings about higher levels of production of goods and services. Entrepreneurship education helps to create awareness about entrepreneurship opportunities which also improves entrepreneurship skills (Ibitoye, Atoyebi & Sufian, 2015). These are factors that help in boosting the productivity of entrepreneurs to the extent that poverty level will be significantly reduced. Therefore, for an entrepreneurial firm to be productive there is need for proper use of individuals, providing individual and group progress in a way that makes it possible to develop individuals through training methods that increase the competence and confidence in staff so as to increase the entrepreneurial productivity levels of the entity. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1: Entrepreneurial education significantly contributes to poverty reduction.

#### **e. Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition**

According to Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017), entrepreneurial skill acquisition refers to the ability of an entrepreneur to competently carry-out a task either mental or manual. It is the expertise or the ability which is developed in the course of training and experience. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition builds up or works out series of actions and process into a consolidated progression (Ozobu, Sofoluwe & Omale 2011). Through the process of entrepreneurial skill acquisition, individuals learn various aptitudes that will enable them to be self-reliant, to become more useful to the society by embarking on various productive and profitable entrepreneurship programme. Among all the factors of production, only the human factor is capable of acquiring learnable skills and adapting to changes in terms of innovation and creativity.

When entrepreneurial skills are acquired by an entity, one gets imbibed by entrepreneurial spirit that enables one take advantage of various entrepreneurship programs that are capable of bringing about increase in income generation and improved standard of living. The skills that are acquirable cut across psychological, organizational, community, social, economic and cultural. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition being one of the indicators of entrepreneurial productivity is a systematic process of training and growth, by which individual gain more and apply better professional know-how, insight and attitude in the discharge of her/his duty. This lays much emphasis on the opportunity to apply ones experience and need to learn and grow by so doing. Competence of an entrepreneur is relative to the years of experience which the entrepreneur has. This is because entrepreneurial knowledge is meaningless unless there is opportunity to apply it and this is achieved through exposure over the years. While developing entrepreneurial skill, entrepreneurs become more familiar with the execution of a particular task, by creating a framework for the expansion of human capital in order to boost the productivity of such entrepreneur. Entrepreneurial skills are acquired by way of training in order to sharpen and develop the competence of entrepreneurs with the view to facilitating work accuracy and work speed of the entrepreneurs. The end goal of this is that the entrepreneur that acquires more competence and improved skills often produce higher quality goods and services than the entrepreneurs who does not. Thus, we hypothesize that:

H2: Entrepreneurial skill acquisition significantly influences poverty reduction.

## **f. Entrepreneurial Innovation**

Entrepreneurial innovation connotes the aspect of entrepreneurship productivity that involves entrepreneur's use of imagination, initiative and creativity to create a long-term value and better work flow streams for the purpose of maximizing the value of the entrepreneurship enterprise. Entrepreneurship productivity disposes one to inculcate the art of creativity that enables the entrepreneur to possess positive attitude towards innovation so as to promote new sets of attitudes and culture for overcoming future challenges and for the attainment of his/her objectives (Agba, 2021).

The demands of present-day entrepreneurial business require individuals that are driven by creativity and innovation. Besides the dynamism associated with market environment, customers are often unpredictable and can behave in unexpected manners at any point in time. In addition, functions and tasks that are carried out by entrepreneurs nowadays often follow a flexible pattern that requires the application of entrepreneurial creativity and innovation which represents an introduction of one's ingenuity and novelty in solving problems, for a financial return. In many occasions, entrepreneurs productively deploy their creativity to exploit opportunities at the expense of the existing policies in order to engage in activities that are not yet socially and economically viable. In this study, entrepreneurial creativity is operationalized as the use of one's learning, and skill to introduce something unique in the production process. Entrepreneurial innovation combines some elements of creativity and natural ingenuity in solving social problems by bringing out a product or rendering a service that meets customer requirements and market demand (Aamir, Habib, Khan & Ullah, 2020). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H3: Entrepreneurial innovation significantly helps in poverty reduction.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **a. Human Capital Theory**

Human Capital Theory originated from the emergence of classical economics in 1776 (Odhong, Were & Omolo, 2014) and thereafter developed as a scientific theory by the seminal work of Robert (1991). Adam Smith theorized that in the *Wealth of Nations*, the apparent differences between the ways of individual working which is as a result of different levels of training, acquired skills and education are reflected differences in the returns that are necessary to defray the costs of acquiring those training and skills. The Theory of Human Capital is basically focused on the quality, not quantity, of the labour supply. It presupposes that once someone is with the requisite skill, competence, training and knowledge, the person will have improved standard of living through the income generated from the development of one's potentials. One of the fundamental postulations of the theory is that education, training and skill acquisition are all what that determine earning power. In other words, one is poor or rich depending on the trainings or level of education one has attained, or depending on one's proficiency in a skill (Anekwe & Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2018). The theory further emphasizes that competences, skills, knowledge and abilities of entrepreneurs contribute to competitive advantage which some persons enjoy more than others. Human Capital Theory is an approach that values resourcing, human resource development, entrepreneurial productivity, entrepreneurial development, reward practices and reward system (Umaru & Ibrahim, 2019). The theory believes that entrepreneurial training, skill acquisition and development are investment that can bring about future economic benefits and financial returns to both the entrepreneur and the national economy at large.

Furthermore, the theory of Human Capital believes that an entrepreneur who is more skilled, experienced, trained and possesses the relevant skills have the tendency to increase his or her entrepreneurship productivity levels (Anekwe & Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2018), and thus is more predisposed to making it easier for his/her business enterprise to attain its objectives such as



increased income generation, better corporate performance, sustainability and firm growth. According to Emerole, Ibeh and Sampson (2016), Human Capital Theory believes that the ability and competence of human capital in entrepreneurship influences how much income one generates and of course determines the extent to which the entrepreneur will live above poverty lines. In the light of these postulations that show the contribution of entrepreneurship productivity towards poverty alleviation, the present study is theoretically anchored on the Human Capital Theory.

### 2.3 Empirical Review

Ogunjimi (2021) evaluated the role of SMEs in tackling unemployment in Nigeria. Annual time-series data were sourced from World Development Indicators (2019) for the period between 1991 and 2018. The result of the Dynamic Ordinary Least Square (DOLS), Fully Modified Ordinary Least Square (FMOLS) and Canonical Cointegrating Regression (CCR) showed that the employment generated by SMEs in Nigeria was not enough to solve the unemployment problem in Nigeria. Oluremi (2021) examined how entrepreneurship development is related to employment generation in Nigeria using a sample size of 336 SMEs from 2,690 registered SMEs in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The result of the multiple regression analysis revealed that there is a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurship development and employment generation in Nigeria. Shehu (2021) examined the effect of entrepreneurship development on employment generation in Jigawa state, Nigeria. Primary data were collected through a 20-item questionnaire administered on a sample of 10 respondents from Hadejia Local Government Area in Jigawa state. The result of the Pearson Correlation analysis showed a very strong positive correlation between entrepreneurship development and employment generation.

Shettima, Sharma and Banerji (2020) examined the impact of small and medium enterprises on employment generation in Kaduna state, Nigeria. Primary data were obtained from a sample size of 1,000 respondents. The correlation matrix indicated that SMEs significantly affect employment generation in Kaduna state, Nigeria. Aamir, Habib, Khan and Ullah (2020) analyzed the influence of entrepreneurship education on poverty alleviation. Primary data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire among participants using simple random sampling. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents. The analysis of the data was conducted using regression analysis and correlation analysis which showed that entrepreneurship education does not significantly affect poverty reduction. Umaru and Ibrahim (2019) investigated entrepreneurship as a viable tool for poverty reduction in Nigeria. Primary data for the study were collected from a sample of size of 335 entrepreneurs using a questionnaire. Path modeling and bootstrapping were deployed in order to examine the standard error of the estimate and t-values. The findings suggest that entrepreneurship education is positively associated with poverty reduction. Ezeanyeji, Imoagwu and Ejefobihi (2019) examined the effect of entrepreneurship on poverty reduction in Nigeria. The methodology employed for this study was the narrative–textual case study (NTCS) method. Secondary data for the study were obtained with the use of text content analysis. The study concluded that the reduction of poverty is the most difficult challenges facing any country in the developing world, where on the average, majority of the population are considered poor.

Eneji, Dom and Odey (2019) analyzed the causal relationship between entrepreneurship, growth and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Time series data on the key variables were extracted from reliable secondary data sources covering 37 years. The results of the ordinary Least Square found that there is a causal relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Adenuga, Kowo and Sabitu (2019) examined the role of small and medium enterprises on poverty eradication in Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered on a sample size of 142 employees of SMEs registered in Lagos Nigeria. The regression analysis carried out showed that SME development affects poverty alleviation in Lagos Nigeria. John-Akamelu and Muogbo (2018) examined the role of small and medium enterprises in poverty eradication in Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered on a sample

size of 150 respondents. Hypotheses were tested with Chi-Square(X<sup>2</sup>) which showed that small and medium enterprises provided employment opportunities, training ground, and harness utilization of local resources. Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017) evaluated the impact of entrepreneurship on poverty reduction using Industrial Layout in Coal Camp Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was a survey research with 248 respondents (N=3242). Primary data collected were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis. The results showed that Skill Acquisition, Entrepreneurship Training and Youth Creativity positively affect Youth Empowerment, Job Creation and Wealth Creation in Industrial Layout Coal Camp, Enugu State Nigeria.

Agri, Dalut and Odey (2017) evaluated the role of entrepreneurship in poverty reduction and sustainable development in Nigeria. This study used representative sample survey of private enterprises in North-Central Nigeria. The percentage analysis and chi-square statistics showed that entrepreneurship plays a significant role in poverty alleviation. Mohammed and Ndulue (2017) evaluated the impact of social entrepreneurship on poverty reduction in Lagos state. The study was focused on Wecyclers social entrepreneurship Ltd (WCSEL), Lagos State. The findings of the ordinary least square regression conducted showed that there is a positive significant relationship between social entrepreneurship and poverty reduction. Abd, Mahrani, Hajar and Zainuddin (2016) determined the effect of entrepreneurship productivity on poverty reduction among firms in Indonesia. The sample size in this study was 120 business units from the cities of Kendari, Bau-Bau, Kolaka, Konawe and Bombana. The result of the Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis showed that poverty reduction can be significantly achieved through the development of entrepreneurship. Oba and Onuoha (2013) examined the role of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises in poverty reduction in Nigeria, with the use of secondary data obtained from the Central Bank of Nigeria statistical bulletins from 2001 – 2011. The regression analysis conducted showed that SMEs' income has a significant effect on poverty reduction.

### III. Research Methods

The study deployed survey descriptive research design to determine the effect of entrepreneurship productivity on poverty reduction in Awka South. The population of the study comprised one hundred and thirty-two (132) registered SMEs in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State. The study deployed the Yamane (1967) to obtain the SMEs that formed the sample size of the study. The formula for sample size determination is stated thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \text{Sample Size} \\ N &= \text{Population of the Study} \\ E &= \text{Error Term} \end{aligned}$$

Substituting the values in the formula, where  $e = 5\%$

$$N = 132$$

$$n = \frac{132}{1 + 132(0.05)^2}$$

$$\text{Sample size} = 99 \text{ firms}$$

Structured questionnaires were distributed to 99 employees in the selected 99 SMEs in Awka South for further analysis. The questionnaire was developed in line with five (5) point Likert scale that were

ranked “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neutral”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”. The reliability test of the instrument was conducted using Cronbach’s alpha reliability estimates for as shown in *Table 1* below:

**Table 1.** Reliability Estimates for the Constructs

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach’s alpha
1. Entrepreneurial Productivity	5	$\alpha = .81$
2. Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition	5	$\alpha = .74$
3. Entrepreneurial Innovation	5	$\alpha = .84$
4. Poverty Reduction	5	$\alpha = .82$

**Source:** *Researcher’s Computation, (2022)*

The reliability coefficients of the constructs that are given in *Table 1* show that all the variables have a considerably high reliability coefficients that are greater than 0.7 which is the minimum benchmark (Zikmund, 2013). The descriptive analysis of the study was carried out using mean and standard deviation. Since the data that were collected were ranked or ordered, the study deployed Spearman Ranked Order Correlation Analysis in testing the three null hypotheses of the study. The Spearman’s Ranked Order Correlation Coefficient was carried out using 5% level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis will be rejected while the alternate hypothesis will be accepted if the p-value is less than 0.05. Otherwise, the null hypothesis will be accepted while the alternate hypothesis rejected.

## IV. Discussion

### 4.1 Data Analysis

#### a. Data Presentation

The primary data for the study were collected from the questionnaires that were distributed to the respondents. After the questionnaires were retrieved, they were coded into a statistical software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 22. Out of the 99 issued questionnaires, 81 questionnaires representing 81.82% of the total questionnaires distributed were returned fully completed, while 18 questionnaires were not retrieved. The unreturned questionnaires represent 18.18% of the total questionnaire distributed to the respondents. It can be inferred that the response rate of 81.82% was good enough to be used for inferential purpose.

The questionnaire items that measured the variables of study, namely, entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skill acquisition, entrepreneurial innovation and poverty reduction were analysed using mean response and frequency as shown below. Note: SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = Neutral; A = Strongly Agree; SA = Strongly Agree.

**Table 2.** Presentation of Mean Scores for Entrepreneurial Education

S/N	Statements Covering the Variable of Study	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	An entrepreneur who has the ability to competently carry-out a task either mental or manual is productive	31	37	0	10	3	4.02	Accept
2	Entrepreneurial education enables one take	36	32	0	8	5	4.06	Accept

	advantage of various entrepreneurship programs							
3	Entrepreneurial education enhances poverty reduction by creating employment through the establishment of new enterprises	1	44	0	36	0	3.12	Accept
4	A person becomes more useful to the society by embarking on various productive entrepreneurship programme	12	62	0	7	0	3.98	Accept
5	Entrepreneurial education brings about an increase in income generation and improved standard of living of an entrepreneur	12	35	0	34	0	3.31	Accept

Source: Field Survey, (2022)

In Table 2 above, all the statements that measured Entrepreneurial Education were generally remarked “Accepted”. The statements were remarked “Accepted” because their mean rating met the minimum acceptance score of 3.0.

**Table 3.** Presentation of Mean Scores for Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition

S/N	Statements Covering the Variable of Study	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Remark
6	Entrepreneurial skill acquisition helps an individual to be self-reliant	69	2	3	1	6	4.57	Accept
7	Entrepreneurial skill acquisition helps an individual to gain more professional know-how	14	28	8	25	6	3.23	Accept
8	Entrepreneurship makes one have the expertise to be financially independent	5	37	3	36	0	3.14	Accept
9	While developing entrepreneurial skill, entrepreneurs become more familiar with the execution of a particular task	6	59	0	16	0	3.68	Accept
10	Entrepreneurial skill acquisition enables an entrepreneur apply better insight and attitude in the discharge of her/his duty	12	34	9	26	0	3.40	Accept

Source: Field Survey, (2022)

In Table 3 above, all the statements that measured Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition were generally remarked “accepted” because each of their mean ratings met the minimum acceptance score of 3.0. This implies that, on average, the respondents agree to each of the statements in the constructs.

**Table 4.** Presentation of Mean Scores for Entrepreneurial Innovation

S/N	Statements Covering the Variable of Study	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Remark
11	Entrepreneurial business requires individuals that are driven by creativity and innovation	13	61	0	7	0	3.99	Accept
12	Entrepreneurs use their initiative to create a long-term value and better work flow streams	4	56	0	21	0	3.53	Accept
13	Having a positive attitude towards innovation promotes new sets of	16	65	0	0	0	4.20	Accept

	attitudes for business success							
14	Entrepreneurial innovation helps to develop new technologies that satisfy customers' taste	69	2	3	1	6	4.57	Accept
15	Entrepreneurial innovation helps to develop new products that meet changes in customers' preferences	7	31	13	27	3	3.15	Accept

Source: Field Survey, (2022)

In Table 4 above, all the statements that measured Entrepreneurial Innovation were generally remarked "accepted" because each of their mean ratings met the minimum acceptance score of 3.0. This implies that, on average, the respondents agree to each of the statements in the constructs.

**Table 5.** Presentation of Mean Scores for the Variable: Poverty Reduction

S/N	Statements Covering the Variable of Study	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Remark
16	Increase in the level of income and productive resources reduces poverty	4	60	0	17	0	3.63	Accept
17	Entrepreneurial innovation improves the living condition of a person	16	29	0	34	2	3.28	Accept
18	Entrepreneurial education helps SME owners to attain a good standard of living	66	5	3	1	6	4.53	Accept
19	Entrepreneurial skill acquisition enables a person to increase his/her income rate over time	66	0	0	15	0	4.44	Accept
20	Operating SME business improves the quality of life of people economically	6	41	0	34	0	3.23	Accept

Source: Field Survey, (2022)

Tables 5 indicates the item-by-item analysis of the research variable: Poverty Reduction. The questions show the extent to which the respondents agree to the constructs. Each of the questions whose mean score met the benchmark of 3.0 were accepted and also used in the test of the hypotheses. All the questions met the criterion; thus, they were all utilised for the purposes of testing the hypotheses.

## 4.2 Test of Hypotheses

From Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 which indicate the item-by-item analysis of the research variables of the study, the data for the test of hypotheses were collected and analysed using Spearman Ranked-Order Correlation Coefficient.

### a. Test of Hypothesis I

For the test of the first hypothesis, the information on Table 2 and Table 5 were deployed to test the statistical association between entrepreneurial education and poverty reduction. The hypothesis to be tested is restated as follows:

***H<sub>01</sub>:*** *Entrepreneurial education does not significantly contribute to poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South.*

The test of the hypothesis produced the following output.

**Table 6.** Correlation Result for Hypothesis I

			Entrepreneurial Education	Poverty Reduction
Spearman's rho	Entrepreneurial Education	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.589**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	81	81
	Poverty Reduction	Correlation Coefficient	.589**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	81	81

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**Source:** Researcher's Computation, (2022) using SPSS Version 23

The result shown in *Table 6* above is the result of the test that determines whether entrepreneurial education significantly contributes to poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South. The coefficient of correlation,  $\rho = 0.589$ , reveals that there is a moderately strong significant association between entrepreneurial education and poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South. The coefficient of entrepreneurial education, 0.589, implies that a marginal increase in entrepreneurial education by 1 unit will significantly increase the chances of poverty reduction by about 58.9%. The null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted since the p-value of the test is less than 0.05. Therefore, entrepreneurial education significantly contributes to poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South ( $\rho = 0.589$ ,  $p$ -value = 0.000).

### b. Test of Hypothesis II

For the test of the second hypothesis, the information on *Table 3* and *Table 5* were deployed to test the statistical association between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and poverty reduction. The hypothesis to be tested is restated as follows:

**$H_{02}$ :** *Entrepreneurial skill acquisition does not significantly influence poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South.*

**Table 7.** Correlation Result for Hypothesis II

			Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition	Poverty Reduction
Spearman's rho	Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.733**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	81	81
	Poverty Reduction	Correlation Coefficient	.733**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	81	81

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**Source:** Researcher's Computation, (2022) using SPSS Version 23

The result shown in *Table 7* above is the result of the test that determines whether entrepreneurial skill acquisition significantly influences poverty reduction. The coefficient of correlation,  $r_{ho} = 0.733$ , reveals that there is a very strong significant association between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and poverty reduction. The coefficient of entrepreneurial skill acquisition, 0.733, implies that a marginal increase in entrepreneurial skill acquisition by 1 unit will significantly increase the chances of poverty reduction by about 73.3%. The null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted since the p-value of the test is less than 0.05. Therefore, entrepreneurial skill acquisition significantly reduces poverty level among selected SMEs in Awka South ( $r_{ho} = 0.733, p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ).

### c. Test of Hypothesis III

For the test of the third hypothesis, the information on *Table 4* and *Table 5* were deployed to test the statistical association between entrepreneurial innovation and poverty reduction. The hypothesis to be tested is restated as follows:

***H<sub>03</sub>:*** *Entrepreneurial innovation does not significantly help in poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South.*

The test of the hypothesis produced the following output.

**Table 8.** Correlation Result for Hypothesis III

			Entrepreneurial Innovation	Poverty Reduction
Spearman's rho	Entrepreneurial Innovation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.591**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	81	81
	Poverty Reduction	Correlation Coefficient	.591**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	81	81

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** *Researcher's Computation, (2022) using SPSS Version 23*

The result shown in **Table 8** above is the result of the test that determines whether entrepreneurial innovation significantly helps to reduce poverty level among selected SMEs in Awka South. The coefficient of correlation,  $r_{ho} = 0.591$ , reveals that there is a moderately strong significant association between entrepreneurial innovation and poverty reduction. The coefficient of entrepreneurial innovation, 0.591, implies that a marginal increase in entrepreneurial innovation by 1 unit will significantly increase the chances of poverty reduction by about 59.1%. The null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted since the p-value of the test is less than 0.05. Therefore, entrepreneurial innovation significantly helps in poverty reduction among selected SMEs in Awka South ( $r_{ho} = 0.591, p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ).

### 4.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study confirm the postulations of the theory of Human Capital which posits that an entrepreneur who is more skilled, experienced, trained and possesses the relevant skills have the tendency to increase his or her entrepreneurship productivity levels, and thus is more predisposed to making it easier for his/her business enterprise to attain its objectives such as

increased income generation, better corporate performance, sustainability and firm growth. The findings of this study equally attest that entrepreneurship productivity helps to create employment opportunities and reduce the rate of poverty within an economy. Thus, lack of entrepreneurial skills, education and innovation are some of the possible reasons for poverty in Nigeria. Entrepreneurial education was revealed to have a significant effect on poverty reduction in SMEs in Awka South. The *rbo* statistic indicated that an increase in entrepreneurial education results in a 58.9% increase in the chances that poverty will be reduced. The *rbo*<sup>2</sup> value of 0.347 indicates that about 34.7% variations in poverty reduction in SMEs in Awka South can be explained by changes in entrepreneurial education. That is to say that there is a statistical evidence that supports the assumption that more entrepreneurial education programmes imply better chances for improved economic wellbeing of an entity. Put in other words, entrepreneurial education brings about an increase in income generation and improved standard of living of an entrepreneur. This research finding is consistent with those of Adenuga, Kowo and Sabitu (2019); Eneji, Dom and Odey (2019); Ezeanyej, Imoagwu and Ejefobihi (2019); and Umaru and Ibrahim (2019).

Entrepreneurial skill acquisition was revealed to have a significant effect on poverty reduction in SMEs in Awka South. The *rbo* statistic indicated that an increase in entrepreneurial skill acquisitions leads to a corresponding 73.3% increase in the chances that poverty will be reduced. The *rbo*<sup>2</sup> value of 0.537 indicates that about 53.7% variations in poverty reduction in SMEs in Awka South can be explained by changes in entrepreneurial skill acquisitions. That is to say that there is a statistical evidence that supports the view that the more entrepreneurially skillful an individual is, the better chances for economic wellbeing. Put in other words, entrepreneurial skill acquisition helps an individual to learn various aptitudes that will enable him/her to be economically self-reliant. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017); Agri, Dalut and Odey (2017); Mohammed and Ndulue (2017).

Finally, entrepreneurial innovation was revealed to have a significant effect on poverty reduction in SMEs in Awka South. The *rbo* statistic indicated that an increase in entrepreneurial innovation leads to a 75.7% increase in the chances that poverty will be alleviated. The *rbo*<sup>2</sup> value of 0.349 indicates that about 34.9% variations in poverty reduction in SMEs in Awka South are as a result of changes in entrepreneurial innovation. That is to say that there is a statistical evidence that supports the thesis that the more entrepreneurially creative an individual is, the better the chances for improved economic wellbeing for such person. Put in other words, entrepreneurial innovation contributes to improvement in the quality of life for people who currently live under a poverty line. This result agrees with those of Aamir, Habib, Khan and Ullah (2020); and John-Akamelu and Muogbo (2018).

#### 4.4 Originality and New Insights

Previous studies on the subject matter of this study such as Steven, Ahlstrom, Jiang and John (2020); Aamir, Habib, Khan and Ullah (2020); Adenuga, Kowo and Sabitu (2019); Eneji, Dom and Odey (2019); Ezeanyej, Imoagwu and Ejefobihi (2019); Umaru and Ibrahim (2019); Anekwe and Ndubuisi-Okolo (2018); John-Akamelu and Muogbo (2018); Agri, Dalut and Odey (2017); Mohammed and Ndulue (2017); Halim, Abul, Jamaliah and Hussain (2017); Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017); Abd, Mahrani, Hajar and Zainuddin (2016); Ibitoye, Atoyebi and Sufian (2015); Abul, Hussain and Rosni (2014); Oba and Onuoha (2013); Abubakar (2012) have all determined the extent to which entrepreneurship productivity affects poverty alleviation. Most of these empirical researches were conducted in Nigeria. And so represent the local realities obtainable in Nigerian business environment. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no empirical study of this nature has focused on SMEs that are located in Awka South and are also involved in trading business.



More so, no empirical study of this nature has used the indicators of entrepreneurship productivity outlined by Dialoke, Onyi and Edeh (2017) to predict the relationship between entrepreneurship productivity on poverty reduction. To fill this void in knowledge, this study examined the degree to which entrepreneurship productivity (proxies by entrepreneurial productivity, entrepreneurial skill acquisition and entrepreneurial innovation) contributes to poverty reduction using trading SMEs in Awka South.

## V. Conclusion

Entrepreneurship has been shown in this study to be a significant contributing factor to poverty reduction. Entrepreneurship productivity is believed to contribute to poverty reduction because it helps to create employment through the establishment of new entrepreneurial enterprises or the expansion of existing ones which altogether increases social wealth by creating new industries, new markets, new technology, new jobs, new institutional forms, and net increase in real productivity. Furthermore, entrepreneurial productivity increases income which ultimately translates to higher standards of living for the population thereby making the argument that increase in entrepreneurship productivity significantly reduces poverty level and vice versa logically valid. Verily, the jobs which are created through entrepreneurial activities in turn lead to equitable distribution of income that increases the standards of living for the populace. It has been proven that one of the best approaches towards reduction of poverty is through entrepreneurial skill acquisition, training and innovation. In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. The Anambra state government should invest more in massive entrepreneurial skill acquisition in order to help the citizens to learn various aptitudes that will enable them to be self-reliant.
2. Entrepreneurs should be encouraged to use their initiative and creativity to create a long-term value and better work flow streams.
3. Well-established individuals and Non-Governmental Organisations should help in facilitating entrepreneurial productivity by creating employment through the establishment of new enterprises.

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