

**EFFECT OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES): AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FASHION DESIGN INDUSTRY IN ABUJA MUNICIPAL AREA COUNCIL (AMAC).**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In an ideal context, entrepreneurial skills such as innovation, leadership, and communication serve as critical drivers of SME performance by fostering creativity, improving decision-making, and strengthening customer relations. These skills are expected to translate into tangible outcomes such as higher sales volumes, consistent production output, and timely delivery of goods and services. Employing a survey design, the research sampled 272 fashion designers from a population of 523, using Slovin's formula and simple random sampling. Data were collected via questionnaires and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (regression analysis) in SPSS. The findings revealed that innovative/creative skills significantly boost sales volume ( $\beta = 0.622, p < 0.001$ ), explaining 38.6% of its variance. Leadership skills profoundly influence production output, measured by the number of dresses made ( $\beta = 0.801, p < 0.001$ ), accounting for 64.1% of its variance. Furthermore, communication skills have a strong positive effect on timely delivery ( $\beta = 0.786, p < 0.001$ ), responsible for 61.8% of its variance. The study concluded that entrepreneurial skills are indispensable for fashion SME performance in AMAC. It is recommended that entrepreneurs cultivate innovation through continuous learning, invest in leadership development to optimize team productivity, and adopt proactive communication strategies to ensure reliable service delivery and build client trust.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are widely acknowledged as fundamental contributors to economic expansion, innovation, and employment creation in both advanced and emerging economies. They constitute the vast majority of business establishments worldwide and provide a substantial share of global employment, highlighting their strategic importance in

national and international development agendas (OECD, 2019; Gherghina et al., 2020; World Bank, 2020). In an increasingly competitive and interconnected global economy, the sustainability and growth of SMEs are closely tied to the competencies of their owners and managers. The global fashion industry, valued in excess of US\$2.5 trillion, depends heavily on SMEs to drive creativity, respond to specialised consumer needs, and influence evolving market trends (McKinsey

& Company, 2022). However, accelerating technological advancements, intense global competition, and rapidly changing consumer preferences mean that technical expertise alone is no longer sufficient. Instead, SME success increasingly hinges on entrepreneurial skills such as innovation and creativity, leadership, and effective communication, which play a critical role in enhancing sales performance, improving production efficiency, and ensuring timely delivery of products (OECD, 2021; Teece, 2018).

Within the African context, SMEs play an even more pivotal role as the backbone of economic activity and a key mechanism for employment generation and poverty reduction (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020; UNIDO, 2021). The African Development Bank (2022) reports that SMEs account for more than 90 per cent of enterprises and approximately 80 per cent of jobs across the continent. Despite their economic significance, African SMEs continue to face persistent structural constraints, including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, skills shortages, and exposure to unstable market conditions (World Bank, 2022). Under these conditions, entrepreneurial skills become a decisive factor in business survival and growth. Creative and innovative capabilities enable fashion entrepreneurs to differentiate their offerings, while leadership and communication skills are essential for coordinating labour, managing supply chains, and responding effectively to customer needs. As a result, enterprise performance evident in production output and delivery efficiency—is strongly influenced by the entrepreneur’s ability to overcome these contextual challenges (Rauch & Frese, 2007; Fatoki, 2019).

West Africa is endowed with a rich cultural heritage that offers considerable potential for the development of a vibrant fashion industry, particularly through indigenous fabrics and distinctive design traditions that have gained global visibility. Nonetheless, the expansion of the sector has been hindered by widespread informality and limited managerial capacity among SMEs (UNCTAD, 2018; Matsongoni & Mutambara, 2018). Empirical evidence from the ECOWAS sub-region suggests that many small enterprises struggle to achieve sustainability because business owners often

prioritise technical craftsmanship at the expense of essential entrepreneurial competencies such as innovation management, leadership, and strategic communication (Alvarez & Barney, 2020; Karami & Tang, 2019). In the fashion sector, innovative skills are necessary to successfully blend traditional elements with contemporary styles, leadership skills are required to manage apprentices and production teams, and communication skills are critical for marketing products and engaging customers across local and international markets. Inadequacies in these areas have been shown to constrain sales growth and limit the capacity of firms to expand production efficiently (Porter, 2008; Shane, 2012).

In Nigeria, SMEs contribute nearly half of the country’s Gross Domestic Product and account for more than 80 per cent of total employment, positioning them as central actors in efforts to diversify the economy beyond oil dependence (SMEDAN & NBS, 2023; Otache & Usman, 2024). The Nigerian fashion industry represents one of the most dynamic segments of the creative economy, driven by a youthful population and rising demand for locally produced apparel. Despite these favourable conditions, SME mortality rates remain high, particularly during the early years of operation. Research indicates that these failures are more closely associated with weaknesses in entrepreneurial and managerial capacity than with insufficient market demand (Kiyabo & Isaga, 2020; Fatoki, 2019). While many Nigerian fashion designers exhibit strong technical skills, deficiencies in entrepreneurial competencies often result in poor sales management, difficulty handling large orders, and delays in delivery, ultimately leading to unstable revenue streams and reduced customer satisfaction (Adelekan & Tijani, 2021).

The Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), as the administrative and commercial centre of Nigeria’s capital city, is characterised by a high concentration of government institutions, diplomatic missions, and an expanding middle-income population. This setting provides significant opportunities for fashion designers serving corporate, ceremonial, and premium fashion markets, while simultaneously creating intense competition

and elevated customer expectations regarding quality, originality, and reliability. To remain competitive in this environment, fashion entrepreneurs must demonstrate strong innovative and creative capabilities to distinguish their designs, effective leadership skills to maintain productivity and quality control within their workshops, and clear communication skills to manage client relationships and supplier interactions. Empirical studies in emerging economies consistently indicate that entrepreneurial competencies—particularly innovation, leadership, and communication—are critical determinants of SME competitiveness and performance in rapidly changing markets (Rauch et al., 2009; Otache & Usman, 2024).

Overall, existing literature clearly establishes the economic significance of SMEs at global, regional, and national levels, while also highlighting internal entrepreneurial capabilities as a key determinant of firm performance (Nguyen et al., 2021; OECD, 2021). However, there remains a notable shortage of location-specific empirical studies focusing on the fashion design industry within AMAC. Although prior research has confirmed the positive influence of entrepreneurial skills on SME performance, limited attention has been paid to how innovative and creative skills, leadership skills, and communication skills individually affect tangible performance indicators such as sales volume, number of dresses produced periodically, and timeliness of delivery. This study addresses this gap by providing context-specific empirical evidence from AMAC, offering practical insights for fashion entrepreneurs and policy-makers seeking to enhance SME performance within Nigeria's creative economy.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Entrepreneurial skills such as innovation, leadership, and communication are widely recognised in the literature as critical determinants of Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) performance. These skills enable entrepreneurs to introduce differentiated products, make effective strategic decisions, coordinate resources efficiently, and build strong relationships with customers and stakeholders. Empirical studies consistently show that SMEs endowed with strong

entrepreneurial capabilities are better positioned to achieve higher sales performance, stable production output, and timely delivery of goods and services, thereby enhancing competitiveness and long-term sustainability in dynamic business environments (Morris et al., 2020; Teece, 2018; Barney, 2020).

Despite the recognised importance of these competencies, SMEs in developing economies, particularly within the creative sector, continue to experience performance challenges. In Nigeria, SMEs operate under conditions characterised by rising production costs, unstable demand, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to finance, all of which exert pressure on operational efficiency and market performance (World Bank, 2022; SMEDAN & NBS, 2023). These constraints are especially pronounced in the fashion design industry, where production processes are labour-intensive, customer preferences are highly dynamic, and delivery timelines are critical to customer satisfaction. In such a context, insufficient development or ineffective application of entrepreneurial skills may exacerbate operational inefficiencies, resulting in inconsistent sales, fluctuating production levels, and frequent delays in order fulfilment (Fatoki, 2019; Kiyabo & Isaga, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, the Resource-Based View and the Dynamic Capabilities framework emphasise that firm-specific capabilities, including entrepreneurial skills, are essential sources of competitive advantage and superior performance. These theories posit that enterprises that effectively deploy innovation, leadership, and communication capabilities are more capable of adapting to environmental uncertainties and sustaining performance over time (Barney, 2020; Teece, 2018). Empirical evidence from Nigeria and other developing economies supports this assertion, demonstrating a positive relationship between entrepreneurial competencies and SME performance outcomes such as sales growth, productivity, and operational efficiency (Rauch et al., 2009; Fatoki, 2019).

However, despite the growing body of empirical research on entrepreneurial skills and SME performance, there remains a notable gap in context-specific studies focusing on the

fashion design industry within Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). Existing studies in Nigeria have largely adopted cross-sectoral approaches or relied on aggregate measures of performance, thereby overlooking industry-specific indicators such as sales volume, number of dresses produced periodically, and timeliness of delivery, which are particularly relevant to fashion enterprises (Kiyabo & Isaga, 2020; Otache & Usman, 2024). Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on how innovative and creative skills, leadership skills, and communication skills individually influence these critical performance outcomes among fashion design SMEs in AMAC.

If this problem persists, fashion design SMEs in AMAC are likely to continue experiencing underperformance manifested in unstable revenue, low production efficiency, and delivery delays, which may erode customer trust and reduce market competitiveness. Over time, such challenges can contribute to higher business failure rates, reduced employment opportunities, and a weakened contribution of the fashion sector to local economic development (World Bank, 2023; UNIDO, 2021). Addressing this gap is therefore essential for informing targeted entrepreneurial capacity-building initiatives and policy interventions aimed at enhancing the performance and sustainability of fashion design SMEs within Abuja and its environs.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of the study was to assess the effects of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in AMAC, specifically in the Fashion Design Industry.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. examine the effect of innovative/creative skills on the sales volume in the fashion design industry in AMAC.
- ii. determine the influence of leadership skills on the number of dresses made periodically in the fashion design industry in AMAC.
- iii. assess the impact of communication skills on timely delivery in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

### **Research Hypotheses**

In line with the objectives and the research questions of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** Innovative/creative skills have no significant effect on the sales volume in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** Leadership skills have no significant influence on the number of dresses made periodically in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

**H0<sub>3</sub>:** Communication skills have no significant effect on timely delivery in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Concept of Entrepreneurial Skills**

Entrepreneurial skills encompass a broad range of abilities that enable individuals to recognise business opportunities, organise and deploy resources effectively, and establish as well as manage ventures successfully. These competencies extend beyond basic managerial knowledge to include risk evaluation, creativity, adaptability to changing business environments, and perseverance in the face of uncertainty. As noted by Kuratko (2019), entrepreneurial skills are largely acquired rather than innate and can be developed through formal education, mentoring, hands-on experience, and engagement within supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems. Such skills are especially crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where entrepreneurs typically operate under resource constraints and are required to perform multiple functions simultaneously, including planning, operations, marketing, and customer relations. The acquisition and application of entrepreneurial skills therefore enhance the ability of individuals to convert innovative ideas into viable and sustainable enterprises, thereby contributing to employment generation and economic development.

From a wider socio-economic standpoint, entrepreneurial skills play a significant role in stimulating innovation and supporting national development. Evidence from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2022)

indicates that economies with higher levels of entrepreneurial activity tend to exhibit stronger economic resilience, particularly during periods of economic instability. Entrepreneurs serve as agents of change by introducing new products, services, and business models that promote competition and productivity. In emerging economies, entrepreneurial ventures frequently address pressing social and economic challenges, such as limited access to healthcare, education, and financial services, creating both economic and social value. In this regard, the OECD (2021) highlighted the importance of embedding entrepreneurship education within national educational systems in order to cultivate creativity, independence, and problem-solving capabilities from an early age, thereby positioning entrepreneurial skills as a key element of lifelong learning.

### **Innovation and Creative Skills**

Innovation and creative skills represent a core dimension of entrepreneurial capability, as they enable individuals to generate novel ideas, develop unique solutions, and achieve differentiation in competitive markets. Creativity involves the ability to think beyond conventional patterns, link diverse ideas, and imagine new possibilities, while innovation refers to the transformation of these creative ideas into practical outcomes that generate value. Amabile (2018) argued that creativity is enhanced in environments that support autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and psychological safety conditions that are often characteristic of entrepreneurial settings where experimentation and calculated risk-taking are encouraged. Entrepreneurs with strong creative abilities are therefore better positioned to recognise unmet customer needs and develop products or services that redefine existing markets.

Innovation extends beyond the initial generation of ideas to include implementation, refinement, and scaling. Tidd and Bessant (2020; Abdullahi & Mohammed, 2025) described innovation as a structured process encompassing opportunity identification, idea development, prototyping, testing, and commercialisation. In many service-oriented industries, innovation is reflected more in process improvements, service delivery methods, and customer experience enhancement than in tangible products. For

example, advancements in financial technology have transformed traditional financial services through digital platforms and alternative transaction systems, illustrating how creative thinking can reshape established sectors (OECD, 2021). This underscores the relevance of innovation skills not only in product development but also in improving operational efficiency and customer engagement.

### **Leadership Skills**

Leadership skills are vital for entrepreneurs in motivating teams, aligning organisational objectives, and managing the uncertainties associated with new and growing ventures. Entrepreneurial leadership involves setting a clear vision, making informed decisions, demonstrating emotional intelligence, and inspiring others to work towards shared goals. Northouse (2021) conceptualised leadership as a process of influence that occurs within group interactions, emphasising that leadership effectiveness is rooted in the ability to facilitate collective action rather than in formal authority. In entrepreneurial firms, where organisational structures are often informal and resources limited, leaders rely heavily on personal credibility, flexibility, and interpersonal competence to guide their teams through change and ambiguity.

An important aspect of entrepreneurial leadership is the ability to remain resilient and effective during periods of crisis. Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2020) proposed the concept of complex adaptive leadership, which is particularly applicable in dynamic environments characterised by uncertainty and rapid change. This approach emphasises decentralised decision-making, continuous learning, and the empowerment of team members. Empirical evidence suggests that entrepreneurs who adopt proactive and participatory leadership styles are more likely to stimulate innovation and achieve superior organisational performance, as such leaders foster inclusive cultures that encourage initiative and collaboration (Hmieleski & Ensley, 2020; Abdullahi & Mohammed, 2025).

### **Communication Skills**

Communication skills are fundamental to entrepreneurial effectiveness, as they enable entrepreneurs to convey vision, build

relationships, negotiate agreements, and manage interactions with a wide range of stakeholders. These skills include clear verbal expression, active listening, appropriate non-verbal communication, effective writing, and digital communication competence, all of which are essential across business activities such as investor engagement, employee coordination, and customer relationship management. Adler and Elmhorst (2020) emphasised that effective communication goes beyond the simple transmission of information and requires shared understanding, empathy, and adaptability to different audiences.

In the context of stakeholder engagement, effective communication promotes trust, transparency, and sustainable relationships. Dialogic communication approaches, which emphasise interaction, feedback, and mutual understanding, are particularly important for entrepreneurs seeking to build long-term stakeholder support. Transparent and timely communication during periods of operational difficulty or service disruption can help preserve organisational credibility and customer confidence. Furthermore, as many entrepreneurial ventures operate in culturally diverse or global environments, intercultural communication competence becomes increasingly important. Martin and Nakayama (2021) observed that cultural awareness, sensitivity, and adaptability are essential for minimising misunderstandings and fostering inclusive organisational cultures, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of entrepreneurial communication.

### **Concept of SMEs Performance**

The performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) refers to the degree to which firms achieve their stated objectives through effective strategy implementation and efficient use of resources. In entrepreneurial contexts, performance encompasses both financial and non-financial outcomes, reflecting immediate results as well as long-term viability and competitiveness. Kaplan and Norton's performance measurement framework emphasises that organisational success should be evaluated using multiple dimensions, including financial results, customer outcomes, internal operational efficiency, and organisational learning. This multidimensional approach is particularly

relevant for SMEs, as it allows entrepreneurs to assess performance beyond short-term profitability and to account for capabilities that support growth and adaptability over time (Kaplan & Norton, 1996, 2001; Abdullahi & Mohammed, 2025).

Within the SME literature, business performance is commonly assessed using indicators such as sales growth, profitability, productivity, return on investment, and survival. Research indicates that SME performance is shaped by a combination of entrepreneurial characteristics, strategic orientation, industry conditions, and access to resources. Firms that perform well typically exhibit strategic focus, disciplined operations, and the ability to respond swiftly to changes in market conditions. In environments characterised by uncertainty and rapid change, organisational agility and innovation capacity have become central to sustained performance, as adaptable firms are better positioned to withstand shocks and exploit emerging opportunities (Teece, 2018; Bessant & Tidd, 2021).

### **Sales Volume**

Sales volume is one of the most direct and widely used indicators of SME performance, as it reflects customer acceptance and market responsiveness. For small firms, sustained sales volume is essential not only for revenue generation but also for maintaining cash flow, financing operations, and supporting business expansion. In competitive industries, sales performance signals brand relevance and the effectiveness of product differentiation strategies, which are critical for long-term survival (Eggers, 2020; Abdullahi & Mohammed, 2025).

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate a strong association between innovation and sales performance in SMEs. Firms that engage in creative product design and continuous innovation are more likely to experience higher sales growth due to improved customer perceived value and enhanced competitive positioning. Evidence suggests that innovative SMEs outperform non-innovative counterparts in terms of market reach and revenue generation, underscoring the importance of innovation as a driver of sales outcomes (Rosenbusch et al., 2011; Rosli & Sidek,

2013). Accordingly, sales volume represents an appropriate outcome measure for examining how entrepreneurial creativity translates into tangible market performance.

### **Production Output (Number of Dresses Made Periodically)**

Production output, measured by the quantity of goods produced within a specific period, serves as a key indicator of operational efficiency and internal process effectiveness. From an operations management perspective, output reflects the ability of a production system to convert inputs into finished products in a timely and cost-effective manner. For fashion SMEs, consistent production output indicates effective workflow coordination, efficient labour utilisation, and minimal operational bottlenecks, all of which are necessary for meeting customer demand and sustaining profitability (Slack et al., 2022).

Leadership plays a critical role in determining production performance within SMEs. Entrepreneurial leaders influence output by setting clear goals, coordinating tasks, motivating employees, and ensuring adherence to operational standards. Empirical research shows that leadership behaviours that emphasise structure, motivation, and continuous improvement are positively associated with productivity and operational performance in small firms (Yukl, 2013; Rauch & Frese, 2007). Consequently, the number of dresses produced periodically provides a practical measure of how leadership skills are reflected in the productive capacity of fashion enterprises.

### **Timely Delivery**

Timely delivery, also referred to as delivery reliability, is an important dimension of service quality and customer satisfaction. It reflects a firm's ability to meet agreed delivery schedules and is closely linked to customer trust, repeat patronage, and competitive advantage. In contemporary markets characterised by heightened customer expectations and fast service requirements, the ability to deliver products on time has become a critical determinant of business reputation and performance (Mentzer et al., 2001; Saghir et al., 2022).

Effective communication is central to achieving reliable delivery performance in SMEs. Clear and timely communication with customers helps manage expectations and reduce misunderstandings, while effective internal communication ensures coordination across production and logistics activities. Studies in supply chain and operations management consistently identify information sharing and communication quality as key factors in reducing lead-time variability and improving delivery performance, particularly in small firms with limited operational slack (Flynn et al., 2010; Dubey et al., 2020). As such, timely delivery represents a suitable performance indicator for assessing the impact of entrepreneurial communication skills on operational reliability.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded solely in the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, which interprets organisational performance as a function of internally controlled, firm-specific resources rather than external market forces. Drawing from the foundational work of Barney (1991), the RBV argues that sustained competitive advantage is achieved when resources possess the attributes of being valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Within this framework, entrepreneurial skills specifically innovation, leadership, and communication are conceptualised as critical intangible resources embedded within the firm that can generate superior performance. Although related perspectives such as Human Capital Theory, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Upper Echelons Theory, and Dynamic Capabilities are acknowledged, they are treated as complementary insights that enhance the explanatory power of the RBV rather than as standalone theoretical lenses, thereby preserving conceptual consistency through the VRIN logic. In the context of this study, the RBV offers a clear explanatory mechanism linking entrepreneurial skills to organisational performance outcomes, including customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and service delivery effectiveness, as innovation supports service differentiation, leadership promotes organisational cohesion, and communication facilitates timely and responsive interactions with customers. By adopting the RBV as the

exclusive theoretical foundation, the study ensures theoretical simplicity and robustness in hypothesis formulation, reinforcing the argument that long-term organisational success is primarily driven by the deliberate development and effective deployment of distinctive internal capabilities, particularly entrepreneurial competencies that enhance customer value and operational performance.

### **Empirical Review**

**Irja et al. (2023)** examined how the implementation of creativity and innovation strategies influenced sales performance in the creative fashion industry, focusing on the Indah Mayang embroidery business in Pariaman City, Indonesia. The objective of the study was to identify strategies for improving sales volume after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study adopted a qualitative-descriptive approach, utilising both primary and secondary data, which were analysed through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion techniques. The findings revealed that increased creativity played a dominant role in boosting sales volume, accounting for about 70 per cent influence, while production increase contributed only marginally. The use of technology and global marketing strategies showed very limited impact on sales growth. A major gap in the study was the absence of quantitative modelling to statistically validate the strength of creativity and innovation on performance, as well as the narrow focus on a single embroidery enterprise, which limited the generalisability of the findings to other fashion SMEs

**Wijayanti et al. (2022)** investigated the effect of entrepreneurial skills, product innovation, and creativity on business development within the sportswear and clothing sector at Philosophy Industries. The study aimed to empirically establish whether these entrepreneurial factors influenced business growth. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through online questionnaires administered to 97 customers, and the analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression techniques. The results showed that entrepreneurial skills, product innovation, and creativity all had positive and statistically significant effects on business development. Despite these findings, the study exhibited a notable gap by relying solely on

customer perceptions rather than firm-level operational data, and it did not examine specific performance indicators such as production output or delivery efficiency, which are critical in the fashion industry.

**Larios-Francia and Ferasso (2023)** analysed the relationship between innovation and firm performance among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the wearing apparel sector in emerging economies, specifically Peru and Colombia. The study sought to assess how product and process innovation influenced organisational, economic, commercial, and productive performance, while also examining the moderating roles of investment and collaboration. A partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) technique was applied to survey data collected from 104 apparel SMEs. The findings indicated that product and process innovation jointly explained significant variations in organisational and economic performance, although product innovation alone was not a strong predictor of productive performance. The study's gap lay in its limited consideration of managerial and entrepreneurial skills as explanatory variables, as the analysis focused predominantly on innovation constructs while overlooking leadership and communication competencies that could influence operational outcomes.

**Bich and Thai (2019)** examined the effects of leadership skills on the performance of textile and garment firms in Vietnam. The objective was to determine how different leadership skill dimensions influenced firm performance. The study adopted a quantitative approach, using primary data analysed through Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and structural equation modelling with SPSS and AMOS. The results demonstrated that strategic skills had the strongest positive effect on firm performance, followed by interpersonal and business skills, while cognitive skills exerted the weakest influence. However, the study did not examine demographic variations such as age, gender, or managerial experience, and it failed to incorporate other entrepreneurial competencies such as innovation and communication, limiting its explanatory scope.

**Shalini (2020)** investigated the influence of leadership styles and managerial skills on

organisational performance in textile industries in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, India. The study employed a descriptive research design, collecting data from 136 project leaders and managers across 25 textile firms. The findings showed that both transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly improved organisational outcomes, while managerial skills were found to exert a meaningful influence on performance. A major limitation of the study was its reliance on descriptive analysis without advanced inferential modelling, as well as its failure to link leadership skills to specific operational performance indicators such as production output or delivery reliability.

Oliveira et al. (2022) examined the role of communication style in facilitating adaptation to disruptions in inter-organisational projects. The study aimed to understand how the content and features of communication affected adaptation quality following project disruptions. Using a qualitative analysis of written communications from seven construction projects in the United Kingdom, the findings revealed that communication styles characterised by clarity, precision, authenticity, and information orientation significantly enhanced adaptive performance. Despite its robust qualitative insights, the study was limited by its sectoral focus on construction projects, thereby restricting the applicability of its findings to SME and fashion-industry contexts.

**Chen (2021)** investigated the impact of communication on capital project performance using a mediated moderation model. The study aimed to explain how project competencies and team innovative behaviour mediated the relationship between communication and performance outcomes. A longitudinal survey design was adopted, and data from 108 capital projects were analysed using structural equation modelling. The results showed that project managerial and technical competencies fully mediated the relationship between communication and project performance, with communication exerting a substantial indirect effect. The gap in this study was its focus on large-scale capital projects, which limited its relevance to small-scale entrepreneurial ventures and SMEs.

Wahyuni (2024) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the influence of interpersonal communication on organisational performance across various sectors. The study analysed empirical research published between 2020 and 2024, using effect-size analysis to synthesise findings from both national and international journals indexed in Scopus and SINTA. The results indicated a strong positive relationship between interpersonal communication and organisational performance, with a high effect size. However, the study did not disaggregate performance into specific operational indicators, nor did it examine sector-specific contexts such as fashion SMEs, leaving a gap in understanding how communication influences particular dimensions of business performance.

### **Study Gap**

A critical review of the existing empirical literature reveals several gaps that necessitate the present study. First, although prior studies have established that entrepreneurial skills such as creativity, innovation, leadership, and communication significantly influence organisational performance, most of the evidence is drawn from contexts outside Nigeria, including Indonesia, Vietnam, India, and Latin American emerging economies (Irja et al., 2023; Bich & Thai, 2019; Larios-Francia & Ferasso, 2023). Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on how these entrepreneurial competencies operate within the Nigerian fashion industry, particularly at the SME level. Second, many existing studies have focused on broad or aggregate performance measures such as organisational performance, business development, or overall success, without disaggregating performance into industry-specific and operational indicators such as sales volume, production output, and timeliness of delivery, which are critical to fashion design enterprises (Wijayanti et al., 2022; Wahyuni, 2024). Third, while innovation has been widely examined as a driver of SME performance, fewer studies have jointly examined innovation alongside leadership and communication skills within a single analytical framework, despite evidence that these competencies often interact to shape operational and market outcomes (Larios-Francia & Ferasso, 2023; Chen, 2021). Additionally, several studies suffer from

methodological limitations, including small or sector-specific samples, reliance on descriptive analysis, or a focus on large organisations and capital projects, which limits their applicability to small, owner-managed fashion SMEs (Shalini, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2022). Most importantly, there is a notable absence of context-specific empirical research focusing on fashion design SMEs within Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), despite the sector's growing economic relevance. This study therefore fills a significant gap by empirically examining how innovative/creative skills, leadership skills, and communication skills individually influence sales volume, number of dresses produced periodically, and timeliness of delivery among fashion design SMEs in AMAC, Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

This section presented the methodology adopted to examine the effects of entrepreneurial skills on the performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). A survey research design was employed because it enabled the systematic and cost-effective collection of primary data directly from SME owners and managers through structured questionnaires. This approach was considered appropriate for capturing measurable information on entrepreneurial skills and assessing their relationship with business performance, while also supporting quantitative analysis and statistical generalisation of the findings.

The population of the study comprised 523 registered fashion designers operating within AMAC, as obtained from the Abuja Municipal Area Council Business Registry (2024). The fashion design sector was purposively selected due to its increasing economic relevance, creativity-driven nature, and strong dependence on entrepreneurial competencies for survival and growth. Fashion designers in AMAC contribute significantly to employment generation, value-chain development, and local economic activity, making them suitable for assessing the influence of entrepreneurial skills on SME performance.

The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5 per cent margin of error, resulting in an initial sample of 227 respondents. To address potential non-response and incomplete questionnaires, a 20 per cent margin of safety was added, yielding a final sample size of 272 respondents. Simple random sampling was adopted to ensure that every fashion designer in the population had an equal chance of selection, thereby reducing sampling bias and enhancing the representativeness and validity of the study findings.

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered directly to the respondents. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and was divided into two sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics, while Section B focused on the study variables, including entrepreneurial skills—innovative/creative, leadership, and communication skills—and performance indicators such as sales volume, number of dresses produced periodically, and timeliness of delivery. This method ensured consistency, comparability of responses, and suitability for quantitative analysis.

Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise respondents' socio-economic characteristics, while regression analysis was employed to examine the effect of entrepreneurial skills on SME performance. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 27.01) was used to facilitate data processing, analysis, and interpretation.

The study model specified SME performance as a function of entrepreneurial skills. The theoretical model was expressed as:

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \beta_i X_i + \varepsilon,$$

where  $Y$  represents performance indicators (sales volume, number of dresses produced periodically, and timeliness of delivery),  $\alpha_0$  is the intercept,  $\beta_i$  denotes the coefficients of the independent variables,  $X_i$  represents entrepreneurial skills, and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.

The empirical models were further specified as:

$$SV = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 ICS + \varepsilon,$$

$$NDPP = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 LS + \varepsilon, \text{ and}$$

$$TD = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 CS + \varepsilon,$$

where SV denotes sales volume, NDPP represents the number of dresses produced periodically, TD denotes timeliness of delivery, ICS represents innovative/creative skills, LS denotes leadership skills, and CS represents communication skills.

The validity of the research instrument was established through a pilot study involving 30 fashion designers in AMAC who shared similar characteristics with the study population. The pilot results confirmed that the questionnaire items were clear, relevant, and unambiguous. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, and all constructs recorded alpha values above the 0.70 benchmark, indicating acceptable internal consistency and confirming the suitability of the instrument for the study.

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

### Response Rate.

Questionnaire Distributed	272
Returned Questionnaire	259
Percentage of returned Questionnaire	95%
Unreturned Questionnaire	13
Percentage of not returned Questionnaire	5%

**Source: field Survey, (2025)**

The questionnaire distribution and return data indicated a high response rate, with 272 questionnaires distributed and 259 successfully returned, representing 95% of the total. This strong return rate suggested effective engagement with respondents and a well-executed data collection process, minimizing non-response bias and enhancing the reliability of the findings. Only 13 questionnaires (5%) remained unreturned, reflecting a relatively low non-response rate that was unlikely to significantly compromise the representativeness or validity of the results. Overall, the high return percentage reflected

positive participant cooperation and successful survey administration.

The exceptionally high return rate was possible because fashion designers in the Abuja Municipal Area Council were easily accessible within organized fashion clusters, maintained stable business locations, and showed strong interest in initiatives that could enhance their operations. Their close professional networks and willingness to cooperate enabled smooth distribution and prompt retrieval of questionnaires, contributing to the 95% response rate.

### Test of Hypotheses

#### Test of hypothesis one

**H0:** Innovative/creative skills have no significant effect on the sales volume in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

#### Model 1

$$SV = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 ICS + \varepsilon \dots \dots \dots 3.2$$

#### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.622 <sup>a</sup>	.386	.384	.41795

a. Predictors: (Constant), ICS

**Source:** Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The model summary indicated that the Innovative/Creative Skills (ICS) construct explained a moderate but statistically

meaningful proportion of the variance in the dependent variable, with an R value of 0.622 and an R<sup>2</sup> of 0.386. This meant that

approximately 38.6% of the variation in the outcome (likely sales volume or a related performance metric) was accounted for by ICS alone. The Adjusted *R* Square of 0.384, which adjusted for the number of predictors in the model, confirmed the robustness of this explanatory power with minimal inflation due to sample size. The standard error of the estimate (0.41795) suggested a relatively low

average deviation of observed values from the regression line, implying reasonable predictive accuracy. Overall, the model demonstrated that ICS was a significant and practically relevant predictor, though nearly 61% of the variance remained unexplained, pointing to the potential influence of other factors not included in this simple regression.

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	28.256	1	28.256	161.753	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	44.894	257	.175		
	Total	73.150	258			

a. Dependent Variable: SV

b. Predictors: (Constant), ICS

Source: Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The ANOVA results for the regression model indicated that the Innovative/Creative Skills (ICS) construct was a statistically significant predictor of Sales Volume (SV). The model's F-statistic of 161.753, with a corresponding p-value (Sig.) of .000, confirmed that the relationship between ICS and SV was highly significant at the 0.05 level, allowing for the rejection of the null hypothesis that ICS had no effect on SV. The regression sum of squares (28.256) reflected the variation in SV

explained by ICS, while the residual sum of squares (44.894) represented unexplained variation. With 1 degree of freedom for regression and 257 for residuals, the large F-value relative to the mean square error underscored the strength and reliability of the predictive relationship. This supported the conclusion that ICS contributed meaningfully to explaining differences in sales volume among respondents.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	2.043	.179		11.394	.000
	ICS	.576	.045	.622	12.718	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SV

Source: Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The coefficients table revealed that both the constant and the Innovative/Creative Skills (ICS) predictor were statistically significant in explaining Sales Volume (SV). The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) for ICS was 0.576, indicating that for every one-unit increase in ICS, SV increased by 0.576 units, holding all else constant. This relationship was highly significant ( $p = .000$ ), as confirmed by the t-value of 12.718. The

standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.622) aligned with the model's R value, reinforcing that ICS had a strong positive effect on SV. Additionally, the constant (intercept) of 2.043 was also significant ( $p = .000$ ), representing the predicted SV when ICS was zero. Together, these results confirmed that ICS was a robust and meaningful predictor of sales performance in the studied population.

**Test of hypothesis two**

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** Leadership skills have no significant influence on the number of dresses made periodically in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

**Model 2**

$$NDMP = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 LS + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots 3.3$$

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.801 <sup>a</sup>	.641	.640	.31475

a. Predictors: (Constant), LS

**Source:** Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The model summary showed that Leadership Skills (LS) was a strong predictor of the dependent variable (likely Sales Volume or a related outcome), with an *R* value of 0.801 and an *R*<sup>2</sup> of 0.641. This indicated that approximately 64.1% of the variance in the dependent variable could be explained by LS alone, reflecting a substantial explanatory power. The Adjusted *R* Square of 0.640 suggested minimal overfitting and confirmed

the model's reliability given the sample size. Additionally, the relatively low standard error of the estimate (0.31475) implied that the model's predictions were, on average, close to the observed values. Overall, these results demonstrated that leadership skills played a highly influential role in determining the outcome, with LS accounting for a significant majority of the explained variability.

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.491	1	45.491	459.201	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	25.460	257	.099		
	Total	70.950	258			

a. Dependent Variable: NDMP

b. Predictors: (Constant), LS

**Source:** Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The ANOVA results confirmed that the regression model with Leadership Skills (LS) as the predictor significantly explained variation in the Number of Dresses Made Periodically (NDMP). The *F*-statistic of 459.201, with a *p*-value (Sig.) of .000, indicated an extremely strong and statistically significant relationship between LS and NDMP, allowing for the rejection of the null hypothesis. The regression sum of squares

(45.491) showed that LS accounted for a large portion of the total variability in NDMP (total SS = 70.950), while the residual sum of squares (25.460) represented the unexplained variation. With 1 and 257 degrees of freedom for regression and residuals, respectively, the exceptionally high *F*-value underscored the model's robustness and the pivotal role of leadership skills in enhancing periodic dress production.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.238	.131		9.418	.000
	LS	.695	.032	.801	21.429	.000

a. Dependent Variable: NDMP

**Source:** Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The coefficients table revealed that Leadership Skills (LS) was a highly significant and strong positive predictor of the Number of Dresses

Made Periodically (NDMP). The unstandardized coefficient (B) for LS was 0.695, indicating that for every one-unit

increase in LS, NDMP increased by 0.695 units, holding all else constant. This relationship was statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ), as evidenced by the large  $t$ -value of 21.429. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.801) aligned with the model's  $R$  value, confirming that LS had a very strong effect on

production output. Additionally, the intercept (Constant = 1.238,  $p = .000$ ) represented the baseline level of NDMP when LS was zero. Collectively, these results demonstrated that leadership skills were a critical driver of periodic dress production among respondents.

**Test of hypothesis three**

**H0:** Communication skills have no significant effect on timely delivery in the fashion design industry in AMAC.

**Model 3**

$$TD = \alpha_0 + \beta_1 CS + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots 3.4$$

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.786 <sup>a</sup>	.618	.616	.32168

a. Predictors: (Constant), CS

**Source:** Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The model summary indicated that Communication Skills (CS) was a strong and statistically meaningful predictor of the dependent variable (likely Timely Delivery or a related operational outcome), with an  $R$  value of 0.786 and an  $R^2$  of 0.618. This meant that approximately 61.8% of the variance in the dependent variable could be explained by CS alone, reflecting substantial explanatory power. The Adjusted  $R$  Square of 0.616

suggested that the model generalized well to the population with minimal inflation due to sample size. Additionally, the relatively low standard error of the estimate (0.32168) implied that predicted values were, on average, close to observed values, indicating good predictive accuracy. Overall, these results underscored the critical role that effective communication played in influencing the outcome under study.

**ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	42.973	1	42.973	415.280	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	26.594	257	.103		
	Total	69.568	258			

a. Dependent Variable: TD

b. Predictors: (Constant), CS

**Source:** Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The ANOVA results demonstrated that the regression model with Communication Skills (CS) as the predictor significantly explained variation in Timely Delivery (TD). The  $F$ -statistic of 415.280, with a  $p$ -value (Sig.) of .000, confirmed an extremely strong and statistically significant relationship between CS and TD, allowing for the rejection of the null hypothesis. The regression sum of squares (42.973) accounted for the majority of the total

variability in TD (total SS = 69.568), while the residual sum of squares (26.594) represented the unexplained portion. With 1 and 257 degrees of freedom for regression and residuals, respectively, the very high  $F$ -value underscored the model's robustness and highlighted communication skills as a pivotal factor in ensuring timely delivery among respondents.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.341	.134		10.043	.000
	CS	.673	.033	.786	20.378	.000

a. Dependent Variable: TD

Source: Generated using SPSS Output Version 27.0

The coefficients table showed that Communication Skills (CS) was a highly significant and strong positive predictor of Timely Delivery (TD). The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $B = 0.673$ ) indicated that for every one-unit increase in CS, TD increased by 0.673 units, holding all else constant. This relationship was statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ), as confirmed by the large  $t$ -value of 20.378. The standardized coefficient ( $Beta = 0.786$ ) aligned with the model's  $R$  value, underscoring the substantial influence of communication skills on timely delivery performance. Additionally, the intercept (Constant = 1.341,  $p = .000$ ) represented the expected level of TD when CS was zero. Collectively, these findings highlighted that effective communication was a critical enabler of on-time order fulfilment in the respondents' fashion businesses.

**Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study provided strong empirical evidence that innovative and creative skills (ICS) constituted a strategic resource that significantly enhanced sales volume among fashion designers in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC). The regression results indicated that innovative and creative skills explained approximately 38.6 per cent of the variation in sales performance ( $\beta = 0.622, p < 0.001$ ). This outcome was consistent with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which emphasises that firms achieve superior performance when they possess valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. In the fashion industry, where consumer preferences are dynamic and competition is intense, the ability to generate original designs, introduce new styles, and creatively utilise materials represents a form of intangible human capital that competitors find difficult to replicate. This finding aligned with Irja et al. (2023), who reported that creativity played a dominant role in improving sales volume in the creative fashion industry in Indonesia, and with

Wijayanti et al. (2022), who found that entrepreneurial skills, innovation, and creativity had a positive and significant effect on business development in the sportswear and clothing sector. Similarly, Larios-Francia and Ferasso (2023) demonstrated that innovation significantly influenced organisational and commercial performance among apparel MSMEs in emerging economies. Unlike these studies, however, the present research empirically quantified the direct effect of creativity on sales performance within a localised Nigerian fashion context, thereby reinforcing the RBV argument that creativity-driven capabilities are central to value creation in service-oriented creative industries.

The study further revealed that leadership skills (LS) exerted a strong and statistically significant influence on the number of dresses produced periodically, accounting for about 64.1 per cent of the variation in production output ( $\beta = 0.801, p < 0.001$ ). From an RBV perspective, leadership skills functioned as a higher-order organisational capability that coordinated and optimised other productive resources such as labour, time, and materials. Effective leadership enhanced productivity through staff motivation, task delegation, supervision, and workflow coordination, confirming that leadership is not merely an administrative function but a firm-specific resource that improves operational efficiency. This finding was consistent with Bich and Thai (2019), who found that leadership skills particularly strategic and interpersonal skills had a significant positive effect on the performance of textile and garment firms in Vietnam. It also supported the findings of Shalini (2020), who reported that leadership styles and managerial skills significantly influenced organisational outcomes in the textile industry in India. While these studies focused on relatively larger textile firms, the present study demonstrated that leadership skills are even more critical in micro- and small-scale fashion enterprises, where the

entrepreneur's direct involvement in daily operations makes leadership quality a decisive factor in production scalability. In line with RBV, leadership skills in AMAC's fashion SMEs therefore represented a rare and context-specific resource whose effectiveness was embedded in interpersonal relationships and could not be easily transferred across firms.

The results also showed that communication skills (CS) had a substantial and statistically significant effect on timely delivery, explaining approximately 61.8 per cent of the variation in delivery performance ( $\beta = 0.786$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Within the RBV framework, communication skills emerged as a complementary intangible resource that enabled the effective utilisation of other capabilities. Clear internal communication facilitated accurate interpretation of design requirements and efficient coordination among tailors, while effective external communication with clients helped manage expectations regarding deadlines, modifications, and progress updates. This finding was consistent with Oliveira et al. (2022), who demonstrated that communication style significantly improved adaptation and performance in disrupted interorganisational projects, and with Chen (2021), who found that communication indirectly enhanced project performance through managerial and technical competencies. Furthermore, Wahyuni (2024) provided meta-analytic evidence of a strong positive relationship between interpersonal communication and organisational performance across multiple sectors. Unlike these studies, which largely examined communication in project-based or organisational settings, the present study established communication skills as a direct operational enabler of delivery reliability in fashion SMEs. In an industry where customer trust and reputation are closely tied to punctuality, effective communication thus functioned as a socially complex and valuable resource that sustained competitive advantage, fully consistent with RBV logic.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The study concluded that entrepreneurial skills exerted a significant influence on the performance of fashion design enterprises in Abuja Municipal Area Council. Specifically, innovative and creative skills were found to have a positive and statistically significant

effect on sales volume, indicating that the capacity to generate original designs, adopt new styles, and creatively apply materials enhanced product attractiveness and stimulated revenue growth, thereby positioning creativity as a core strategic resource. In addition, leadership skills significantly affected the number of dresses produced periodically, suggesting that effective leadership practices such as motivation, coordination, task allocation, and supervision improved production efficiency and output levels, enabling fashion entrepreneurs to respond effectively to customer demand and expand their operations. Furthermore, communication skills were shown to have a positive and significant effect on timeliness of delivery, implying that clear and proactive communication within production teams and with clients reduced operational delays, improved order management, and strengthened customer confidence and business reputation within the fashion design industry in AMAC.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the performance and sustainability of fashion design businesses in AMAC:

- i. Fashion business owners should prioritize the continuous development of their innovative and creative skills, as these directly drive sales performance. Engaging in design workshops, staying attuned to global and local fashion trends, and experimenting with unique fabric combinations and styles can help them differentiate their products and attract more customers in the competitive AMAC market.
- ii. Fashion business owners should invest in building strong leadership capabilities to enhance team productivity and increase the number of dresses produced periodically. This includes learning effective delegation, motivating staff, setting clear production goals, and managing workflow efficiently skills that are essential for scaling operations and meeting rising customer demand.
- iii. Fashion business owners should adopt clear and consistent communication practices both within their teams and

with clients to ensure timely delivery. Providing regular order updates, setting realistic timelines, and using digital platforms for transparent client interaction can minimize delays, reduce complaints, and build long-term trust and loyalty among customers.

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