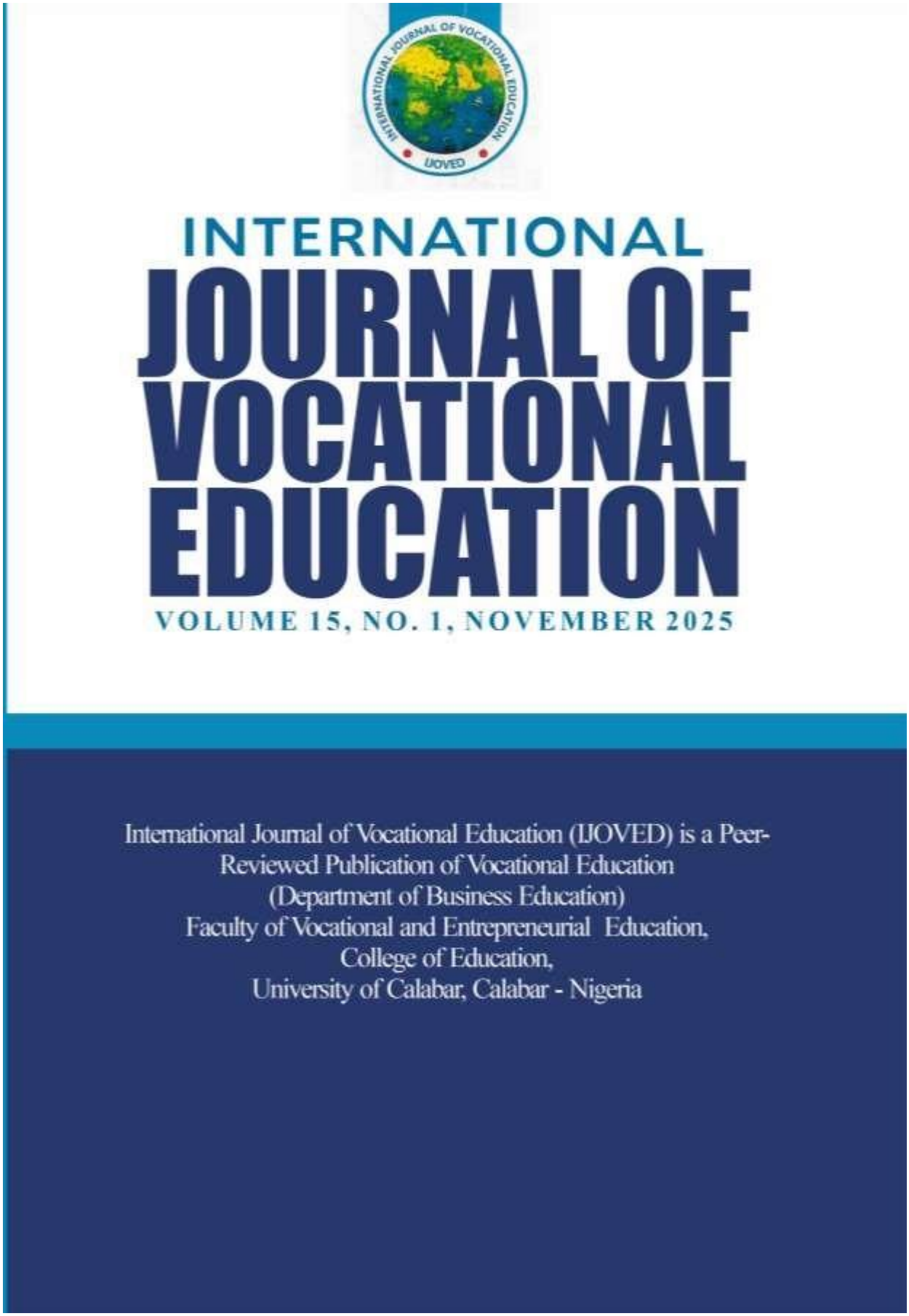

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Editor'sNote

This volume presents a focused and contemporary contribution to business and entrepreneurship education, with strong empirical evidence drawn largely from universities, and related contexts across Nigeria, and beyond. The articles explore emerging themes such as artificial intelligence integration, e-learning, entrepreneurship training, curriculum relevance, pedagogical innovation, and enterprise development within higher education systems. The collection reflects the growing intersection between technology, pedagogy, and entrepreneurial outcomes, while also addressing practical concerns such as poverty reduction, market sustainability, and small business performance. The institutional coverage highlights the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, and other affiliated academic and professional environments, reinforcing the regional relevance and broader applicability of the findings.

The journal invites scholars, researchers, and practitioners to contribute high-quality manuscripts that advance knowledge in business education, entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and related disciplines. Submissions that offer empirical rigor, theoretical advancement, and practical relevance to developing and global education systems are particularly encouraged.

SOFT SKILLS REQUIRED FOR SURVIVAL IN AN ERA OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES AMONG MEDIUM-SCALE BUSINESS OPERATORS IN CALABAR METROPOLIS, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study investigated the soft skills needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among medium-scale business operators in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study became necessary due to the increasing economic instability, competitive business environment, and the growing need for entrepreneurs to possess relevant interpersonal and adaptive competencies capable of sustaining business operations under uncertain economic conditions. Specifically, the study examined the emotional intelligence and networking skills required by medium-scale business operators for business survival and sustainability. Two research questions were raised and two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The study area was Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The sample comprised 65 medium-scale business operators selected using the accidental sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled —Soft Skills Needed for Survival in an Era of Economic Uncertainties among Mediumscale Business Operators Questionnaire (SSNSEEUMBOQ)|| containing 25 items. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while independent t-test statistics were employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that emotional intelligence and networking skills are critical soft skills required by medium-scale business operators for survival in periods of economic uncertainty. Specifically, the study identified ten emotional intelligence variables and five networking skills considered necessary for sustaining business operations and enhancing entrepreneurial adaptability within unstable economic environments. The findings further revealed that there were no significant differences in the mean ratings of respondents based on gender and ownership status. The study concluded that soft skills constitute indispensable entrepreneurial competencies for business sustainability, customer retention, effective relationship management, and organizational resilience during periods of economic uncertainty. Based on the findings, the study recommended that government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and entrepreneurship development institutions should organize seminars, workshops, and capacitybuilding programmes aimed at equipping business operators with relevant emotional intelligence and networking skills necessary for effective business management and long-term survival.

Keywords: Soft skills, Economic uncertainties, business operators, competencies

Introduction

The economy of any nation largely reflected through increased employment determines the standard of living of its opportunities, improved productivity, citizens and the overall pace of national enhanced exportation of goods and services,

development. Economic growth is often

and sustainable business expansion. These economic activities are substantially driven by small and medium-scale business operators who constitute the backbone of most developing economies. Small and medium-scale business operators are entrepreneurs, managers, and business executives responsible for establishing, coordinating, and managing medium-scale business enterprises. They formulate business strategies, make managerial decisions, and coordinate operational activities aimed at ensuring organizational survival, profitability, and growth. Through these activities, small and medium-scale enterprises contribute significantly to employment generation, poverty reduction, wealth creation, and national economic development. Consequently, small and medium-scale business operators remain central to the economic sustainability and industrial growth of any nation. Unfortunately, the activities of these business operators are increasingly threatened by prevailing economic uncertainties.

Economic uncertainties refer to unpredictable and unstable economic conditions characterized by inflationary pressures, currency devaluation, declining consumer purchasing power, supply chain disruptions, rising interest rates, reduced investments, and unfavorable market conditions capable of affecting business performance and sustainability. Factors such as economic recessions, inflation, political instability, insecurity, and fluctuating market conditions contribute significantly to an unpredictable business environment, thereby making it imperative for business operators to possess adaptive competencies and survival skills capable of helping them navigate these challenges effectively (World Economic Forum, 2020). In Nigeria, economic uncertainties have become more severe due to fluctuating oil prices, persistent inflation, rising cost of living, poor infrastructural development, unstable exchange rates, high unemployment rates, and political challenges which adversely affect business performance and entrepreneurial sustainability (Kale, 2019). In response to these conditions, business operators are increasingly required to develop diverse competencies, particularly soft skills, to sustain and expand their businesses amidst economic instability.

Holmberg-Wright and Hribar (2016) defined soft skills as interpersonal and human relation competencies such as team building, conflict resolution, stress management, effective communication, business writing, decision-making, resilience, curiosity, adaptability, creativity, and innovation. Soft skills equally encompass entrepreneurial mindset, problem-solving ability, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, networking ability, time management, collaboration, negotiation, flexibility, leadership, resourcefulness, self-management, and continuous learning. These competencies enable individuals to function effectively within complex and uncertain business environments while improving organizational performance and sustainability. The World Economic Forum (2020) identified critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, and self-management among the most important skills required for survival in the future workforce. Soft skills therefore constitute intangible entrepreneurial assets capable of enabling business operators to make informed decisions, identify business opportunities, manage relationships, maximize available resources, and adapt effectively to changing economic realities.Robles (2012) emphasized that soft skills are essential determinants of employability, productivity, and career advancement in the twenty-first century. Similarly, Harari (2020) observed that employers increasingly seek individuals who demonstrate creativity, effective communication, adaptability, and critical thinking skills, which are often developed through experiential learning and collaborative engagements. Consequently, understanding the soft skills required for survival during periods of economic uncertainty has become increasingly important for entrepreneurial adaptability and business sustainability. The present study therefore focused specifically on emotional intelligence and networking skills as essential soft skills required by medium-scale business operators.

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and manage one's emotions as well as the emotions of others in ways that positively influence thought processes, decisionmaking, interpersonal relationships, and behavioral outcomes. Shafiq and Rana (2016) explained that emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and influence emotions, thereby facilitating effective interpersonal interactions, leadership effectiveness, and cohesive organizational relationships. Similarly, Salovey and Mayer in Palmer, Walls, Burgess, and Stough (2020) described emotional intelligence as a set of abilities that determine how effectively individuals manage emotions within themselves and in their interactions with others. The major components of emotional intelligence include self-awareness, selfregulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Self-awareness refers to the ability to recognize one's strengths, weaknesses, emotions, and values. Self-regulation involves the capacity to control emotions, impulses, and behaviors in challenging situations. Motivation relates to the internal drive required to achieve personal and organizational goals, while empathy involves understanding and responding appropriately to the emotions of others. Social skills refer to the ability to communicate effectively, establish meaningful relationships, and interact positively with others.

Emotional intelligence remains highly essential in enhancing decision-making, improving self-confidence, promoting mental well-being, fostering teamwork, and strengthening leadership effectiveness. Developing emotional intelligence requires deliberate practices such as self-reflection, mindfulness, active listening, feedback utilization, and continuous learning from experiences and challenges. The integration of emotional intelligence into entrepreneurial and organizational practices has gained increasing recognition because of its influence on organizational effectiveness and business sustainability (Afni & Amar, 2019). Unlike traditional intelligence measures which focus mainly on cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence provides a broader understanding of human behavior by emphasizing emotional and social competencies necessary for effective business operations (Reis da Silva & Low, 2024). According to Shafiq and Rana (2016), selfawareness enables individuals to make informed decisions based on proper

understanding of their emotions, while selfregulation promotes trustworthiness, adaptability, innovation, and emotional stability during difficult situations. Similarly, Silva (2022) maintained that emotional intelligence contributes significantly to emotional self-awareness, confidence, and improved interpersonal effectiveness.

Networking skill represents another critical soft skill necessary for entrepreneurial survival and growth during periods of economic uncertainty. Wolff and Moser in Favia (2023) defined networking skills as behaviors aimed at building, maintaining, and utilizing informal relationships capable of facilitating work-related activities through access to information, resources, and mutual advantages. Networking involves creating meaningful interpersonal connections and collaborative relationships capable of promoting business growth, professional development, and information sharing. It is fundamentally a human-centered process aimed at fostering cooperation, social interaction, and exchange of ideas among individuals and organizations.

Scholars have consistently emphasized that networking constitutes an important self-management and entrepreneurial strategy positively associated with business success and career advancement (Blickle et al., 2012; Hirschi & Dries, 2019). Networking skills facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing, exposure to business opportunities, access to valuable information, and interaction with like-minded individuals within the business environment. Granovetter (2018) argued that the effectiveness

of networking depends largely on the frequency of interaction, emotional investment, trust, and degree of intimacy established within professional relationships. Janasz and Forret (2018) identified several networking practices, including attendance at professional meetings and conferences, participation in committees, collaboration on projects, public speaking engagements, writing professional articles, and maintaining regular communication with colleagues and professional associates. Effective networking therefore enhances professional visibility, relationship management, business opportunities, collaboration, emotional support, and entrepreneurial growth.LinkedIn (2017) further observed that networking provides several ancillary benefits, including access to diverse ideas, increased selfconfidence, enhanced creativity, mentorship opportunities, collaborative engagements, and professional support systems. Networking equally contributes to emotional and creative intelligence while promoting career growth and business expansion. Janasz and Forret (2018) further noted that networking enhances access to organizational resources, facilitates information exchange, promotes innovation, supports business expansion, and assists individuals seeking professional or entrepreneurial advancement.

Empirical studies have continued to establish the importance of soft skills in entrepreneurial and professional success. Jackson (2010) examined the role of soft skills in enhancing graduates' employability in Australia and found that graduates possessing strong soft skills demonstrated higher employability and greater adaptability during economic uncertainties. This finding suggests that soft skills are not only necessary for obtaining employment but are equally essential for sustaining business operations and professional growth during periods of economic instability. Oluwalola (2020), in a review of literature on soft skills among business education teachers, identified communication skills, entrepreneurial mindset, ethical competencies, and critical thinking as essential skills required for effective professional performance. The study further emphasized the need for training programmes aimed at developing these competencies among business operators and professionals.Similarly, Nwakire and Ukonu (2025) examined the impact of soft skills on the employability of business education graduates in South-East Nigeria and revealed that organizational effectiveness and sustainability depend not only on technical competencies but also significantly on soft skills. In the same vein, Alshebami (2025), in a study titled ―Soft Skills in Action: Enhancing Entrepreneurial Growth through Commitment and Bricolage Strategies,‖ established that soft skills development among small and medium-scale entrepreneurs significantly promotes business growth aspirations and entrepreneurial sustainability. These findings therefore demonstrate that emotional intelligence and networking skills remain indispensable competencies for business survival and adaptability in periods characterized by economic uncertainties.

Statement of Problem

The persistent economic instability currently experienced in Nigeria has continued to constitute a major threat to business survival, productivity, and sustainable entrepreneurial growth. Rising inflation, unstable exchange rates, declining purchasing power, high operating costs, poor consumer spending, unemployment, and unpredictable government policies have created an unfavorable business environment characterized by uncertainty and heightened risk. These economic realities have negatively affected the operational efficiency, profitability, and continuity of many small and medium-scale enterprises across the country. Medium-scale business operators in particular face enormous challenges relating to declining sales, reduced access to capital, increased production costs, customer retention difficulties, and weakened competitive advantage. Consequently, many businesses struggle to remain operational, while

others experience stagnation, downsizing, or eventual closure.

In response to these economic challenges, the Cross River State Government has introduced several intervention measures aimed at promoting entrepreneurial growth and business sustainability. Such measures include tax incentives, low-interest loans, infrastructural improvements, and free transportation services designed to reduce operational burdens on businesses. Similarly, tertiary institutions and entrepreneurship development programmes have continued to emphasize the acquisition of technical and hard skills such as accounting, finance, marketing, and managerial competencies as important requirements for entrepreneurial success. Despite these interventions and skill development initiatives, a considerable number of medium-scale businesses continue to experience operational difficulties and poor sustainability within the prevailing economic climate.

This situation suggests that possession of technical competencies alone may no longer be sufficient for business survival in periods characterized by economic uncertainties and rapidly changing business conditions. Increasingly, attention has shifted toward the importance of soft skills such as emotional intelligence, networking ability, adaptability, resilience, communication, interpersonal competence, and relationship management as critical survival tools for entrepreneurs. Soft skills are believed to enhance entrepreneurs' capacity to manage stress, build strategic relationships, make sound decisions, adapt to changing market conditions, and sustain customer loyalty during economic crises. However, despite the growing recognition of soft skills as important entrepreneurial competencies, there appears to be limited empirical evidence on the specific soft skills required by mediumscale business operators for survival in periods of economic uncertainty, particularly within the context of Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria.It is against this background that the present study sought to investigate the soft skills required for survival in an era of economic uncertainties among medium-scale business operators in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria, with particular emphasis on emotional intelligence and networking skills.

Objectives of the study

Specifically, the study sought to identify:

1. Emotional intelligence needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among undergraduates of Business Education.
2. Networking skills needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among undergraduates of Business Education.

Research questions

1. What are theemotional intelligence needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among undergraduates of business education?
2. What are the networking skills needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among undergraduates of business education?

Statement of Hypothesis 1. There is no significant difference between the responses of male and female respondents on the emotional intelligence needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among undergraduates of business education.

2. There is no significant difference between the responses of male and female respondents the networking skills needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among undergraduates of business education**.**

Research method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The choice of this design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to

systematically collect data from a representative group of medium-scale business operators in order to describe their perceptions, experiences, and views regarding the soft skills required for survival in an era of economic uncertainty. Descriptive survey design is particularly suitable for studies involving opinions, attitudes, and behavioural tendencies within a defined population because it facilitates objective description and interpretation of existing conditions without manipulation of variables (Ohaka, 2021). The design further provided the opportunity to identify critical soft skills needed for business sustainability and adaptability within the contemporary business environment characterized by economic instability, inflationary pressures, and fluctuating market conditions.

The study was conducted in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all medium-scale business operators within the metropolis. A sample size of sixty-five (65) medium-scale business operators was selected using accidental sampling technique. The technique was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to conveniently access respondents who were available and willing to participate at the point of data collection.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled —Soft Skills Needed for Survival in an Era of

Economic Uncertainties among MediumScale Business Operators Questionnaire

(SSNSEEUMBOQ).‖ The instrument was developed by the researcher using a fourpoint Likert rating scale comprising Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The questionnaire items were designed to elicit responses on the relevance of emotional intelligence and networking skills as critical soft skills required for business survival under uncertain economic conditions.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by two experts, one

Results

from the Department of Business Education and the other from the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, University of Calabar. Their observations and corrections enhanced the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the instrument items. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted outside the study area, and the responses obtained were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability technique. A reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained, indicating that the instrument possessed adequate internal consistency and was reliable for data collection.

After data collection, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted as the benchmark for decisionmaking. Consequently, any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was regarded as a soft skill required by medium-scale business operators for survival in an era of economic uncertainty, whereas items with mean scores below 2.50 were regarded as not required.The null hypotheses were tested using the independent t-test statistical technique at the 0.05 level of significance. In making decisions regarding the hypotheses, any calculated probability value greater than 0.05 resulted in the acceptance of the null hypothesis, indicating no statistically significant difference, whereas any probability value less than 0.05 led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating a statistically significant difference.

Question 1:What is theemotional intelligence required for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among Medium-Scale Business Operators Cross River State Nigeria?

TABLE 1: Mean responses of the respondents on emotional intelligence needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among among Medium-scale Business OperatorsCross River State Nigeria.

S/N	Emotional Intelligence Problem Statement	MALE Mean	SD	Rmks	FEMALE Mean SD		Remarks
1	Self-awareness of one's emotions	4.11	0.88	Agree	3.67	0.78	Agree
2	Ability to recognize and manage people's emotion	3.07	0.63	Agree	3.99	0.68	Agree
3	Ability to manage your own emotions	3.47	0.79	Agree	2.76	0.82	Agree
4	Ability to manipulate your emotions to enforce your behaviors	4.15	0.91	Agree	2.97	0.77	Agree
5	Ability to develop good social skills	3.13	0.61	Agree	3.66	0.69	Agree
6	Ability to create and sustain relationship and interact effectively	4.02	0.84	Agree	3.72	0.80	Agree
7	Ability to communicate effectively	4.05	0.99	Agree	2.57	0.85	Agree
8	Ability to manage and resolve conflict	3.51	0.82	Agree	2.93	0.82	Agree
9		2.50	0.80	Agree	3.20	0.70	Agree
10	Ability to manage stress effectively Ability to recognize your strength and weakness	2.90	0.72	Agree	3.20	0.70	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.76	0.74	Agree	3.26	0.65	Agree

Data in Table 1 revealed that the respondents agreed to all the items on emotional intelligence skillsrequired by small and medium scale business operators to succeed in the era of economic uncertainties, since the mean and standard deviation were above the cut off mark of 2.50 and 0.5 respectively. Therefore, emotional intelligence skillsare required by small and medium scale business operators to succeed in the era of economic uncertainties in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Question 2:What arenetworking skills is needed survival in an era of economic uncertainty amongamong Medium-scale Business Operators?

TABLE 2: Mean responses of the respondents on networking skills needed for survival in an era of economic uncertainty among among Medium-scale Business OperatorsCross River State Nigeria.

	Networking Skills	Female			Male		
S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Rmks	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Ability to build healthy customer relationships	4.02	0.92	Agree	3.78	0.69	Agree
2	Ability to collaborate with other entrepreneurs	3.13	0.71	Agree	3.86	0.72	Agree
3	Ability to sustain a good supplier relationship	3.58	0.84	Agree	2.73	0.87	Agree
4	Ability to create partnership with bigger companies	3.78	0.90	Agree	3.13	0.64	Agree
5	Ability to develop innovative ideas for business growth	3.46	0.73	Agree	\ 3.25	0.69	Agree
6	Ability to develop strong relationship with competitors	3.18	0.79	Agree	2.86	0.77	Agree
7	Ability to consult business/ entrepreneurship experts	3.89	0.86	Agree	3.33	0.82	Agree
8	Ability to seek advice from more experienced entrepreneurs	4.15	0.94	Agree	3.03	0.79	Agree
9	Developing partners and mentors‘ network	3.51	0.76	Agree	3.15	0.85	Agree
10	Ability to attend business conferences and seminar	3.24	0.74	Agree	3.60	0.75	Agree
	Grand mean	3.49	0.80	Agree	3.22	0.74	Agree

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female respondents on networking skills**r**equired for survival in the era of economic uncertaintiesamong Medium-scale Business Operators.

TABLE 3: t-test analysis of the mean differences in the mean responses of male and female respondents on networking skillsrequiredfor survival in an era of economic uncertaintyamong Medium-scale Business Operators in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Respondents	No.	Mean	SD	Df	T-cal	P-value	Level of sig	Decision
Male	29	18.67	3.62	86	1.57	0.0632	0.05	Not Sig.
Female	36	19.28	2.97					

The data in Table 4 showed the result of the t- at 0.05 level of significance. Conclusively, test analysis with a t-calculated value of 1.57 the null hypothesis was accepted meaning, (which is less than t-tabulated value of 1.660) there is no significant difference between the and a P-value of 0.0632 which is greater 0.05 male respondents and female respondents on

networking skills required among Mediumscale Business Operators for survival in the rea of economic uncertainties. This indicates that entrepreneurial mindset skills are required for survival in the era of economic uncertaintiesamong Medium-scale Business Operators.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female respondents on networking skills requiredin the era of economic uncertaintiesamong Medium-scale Business Operators.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the mean differences in the mean responses of male and female respondents on networking skill needed survival in an era of economic uncertainty among among Medium-scale Business Operators in Calabar Metropolis Cross River State, Nigeria.

Respondents	No.	Mean	SD	Df	T-cal	P-value	Level of sig	Decision
Male	29	20.18	3.94	86	1.62	0.0716	0.05	Not Sig.
Female	36	17.77	2.55					

The data in Table 4 showed the result of the t-test analysis with a t-calculated value of 1.52 (which is less than t-tabulated value of 1.660) and a P-value of 0.0716 which is greater 0.05 at 0.05 level of significance. Conclusively, the null hypothesis was accepted meaning, there is no significant difference between the male respondents and female respondents on networking skills for survival in the era of economic uncertainties. This indicates that on networking skills are required for survival in the era of economic uncertainties among Medium-scale Business

Operators.

Discussion of findings

The findings of the study are discussed under the following sub-headings:

The findings of this aspect of the study revealed that emotional intelligence skills are required by small and medium scale business operators to survive in the rea of economic uncertainties. This finding is in line with the findings of Harari (2020), who revealed that employers are increasingly seeking candidates who can demonstrate critical thinking, creativity, and effective communication skills that are often developed through experiential learning and collaborative projects during university education. The findings support the finding of

Adebisi (2013) who identified communication, teamwork, and adaptability as critical skills for comparative advantage among entrepreneurs. The finding also affirms the report of World Bank (2021) which revealed that students who received soft skills training showed significant improvements in interpersonal skills and selfefficacy compared to those who received hard skills training alone. The finding affirms Palmer, Walls, Burgessand Stough (2020) opinion which states that emotional intelligence is measured by the ability to monitor and manage emotions within oneself and others may be an underlying competency of transformational leadership.

The findings of this aspect of the study revealed that networking skills are needed by entrepreneurship education students to succeed in the rea of economic uncertainties. The findings on this sub variable are in line with Chukwurah and Otum (2024) who suggested thata class project should be encouraged as it serves as a first step in providing students with networking experience. The finding corresponds with the findings of Emele (2018) who asserted that an active entrepreneur is expected to build a sustainable and collaborative network to anchor an established business relationship.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be affirmed that emotional intelligence and networking skills are requiredfor survival in an

era of economic uncertainties among medium- possess adequate number of soft skills to scale business operators. To ensure business navigate business environment and survive in growth, expansion and general success, any economic situation.
medium-scale business operators need to

Recommendations

1. Medium-scale business operators should be encouraged to practice adequate number of soft skills for survival in this era of economic uncertainties.
2. Government and non-government organizations should organize a seminar to educate the business owners on the relevance of soft skills and how to unleash these skills in the course of doing business to customers satisfaction and retention.

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