



Challenges and Opportunities of US-Based Togolese Immigrant Businesses Owners in the US and Togo

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ABSTRACT

Immigrants in the United States often display a propensity to start new ventures. The aim is to overcome the challenges of economic hardship during the initial years of arriving in a new country. The failure rate of immigrant-owned businesses, however, is high within the first 5 years of business start-up. The purpose of this single case study was to explore the strategies U.S.-based Togolese small business immigrant owners use in entrepreneurship, leveraging African roots, and seeking opportunities with Togo. The Schumpeterian entrepreneurship theory constituted an important lens to ground the study. The holistic analysis entailed the analysis and triangulation of data collected using qualitative thematic analysis and theoretical entrepreneurship postulations. The interview data from 20 successful Togolese small business owners residing in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area served the objectives of this study. Key criteria required participants to be engaged in entrepreneurial activities from the US, involving Togo, and operation of the business for at least 5 years. The key themes emerging from the coding and thematic analysis of interviews included corruption, lack of physical presence in Togo, linguistic barriers, and discrimination in the United States faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. The findings of the study may make a worthwhile contribution to improving the economic standing and business success of immigrant business owners. Entrepreneurs may use the knowledge to formulate entrepreneurship strategies, which could lead to the creation of jobs improvement in the standard of living of U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs. The discoveries from the research may contribute to the economic prosperity of local communities in Togo.

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Introduction

Background of the Problem

Immigrants from less developed countries in the US, and striving to establish and conduct business in the US often try to involve the country of origin. Immigrant entrepreneurs endeavor to earn a living and adjust to the business environment of the host country and frequently consider the home country for successful entrepreneurship, because of familiarity, relationships, and knowledge (Lin & Tao, 2012; Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013). Several studies have noted the positive role played by immigrant entrepreneurs in the home and host countries respectively (Agrawal, Kapur, McHale, & Oettl, 2011; Flisi & Murrat, 2011).

Unemployment and poverty are high in Togo (CIA, 2013). Togolese citizens often seek to immigrate to affluent countries, and travel overseas, notably to Europe and North America, to seek a higher standard of living (Ajilore & Ikhide, 2012). It is estimated, that between 1.5 and 2 million individuals of Togolese origin live abroad (Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt, 2012). The Togolese economy is reliant on the infusion of foreign capital from residents living elsewhere. Togo is one of the sub-Saharan African countries that depend significantly on the businesses and repatriation of funds by its diaspora from, who reside in more affluent countries. More than 10% of the national GDP comes from Togolese individuals living abroad (Ajilore &

Ikhide, 2012). Togolese immigrants in the United States often try to create small businesses, involving commerce with Togo, as there is often the security of affiliation and existing relationships to rely on.

Immigrants as defined by the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), denote individuals granted the right to reside permanently and work without restriction in the United States (IRS, 2015). Immigrants often display a propensity to create and conduct businesses from the new country residence they have settled in (Lin & Tao, 2012). Riddle and Brinkerhoff (2011), and Rumbault and Massey (2013) argued that immigrant entrepreneurs in the United States face unique challenges compared to native entrepreneurs. With the eagerness to conduct business in their home country, these immigrant entrepreneurs deal with several challenges in the United States, as there are new laws, regulations, culture, and other factors to contend with.

Entrepreneurial researchers noted that small businesses play a key role in the economic development of countries (Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Rehman, & Azam, 2011). Despite the abundance of business information, there is limited research on the successes and challenges of U.S.-based Togolese small business owners. This study intended to explore how successful U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs involved in entrepreneurial activities with Togo in the Washington Metropolitan area addressed challenges and leveraged

opportunities in both Togo and the US. The findings from this study may advance the cause of entrepreneurs of Togolese origin, in the United States as well as other small business owners striving to operate sustainable businesses.

Statement of the Problem

Immigrant entrepreneurs frequently start new ventures in the United States, yet also fail at higher rates compared to others, and survivability rates beyond the first five years quite dismal (SBA, 2012). Immigrant-owned firms in the United States in 2010 generated over \$775 billion in revenues, \$125 billion in payroll, and \$100 billion in income, and employed one out of every 10 workers (Liu & Wang, 2015; Partnership for a New American Economy [PNEA], 2012). The general business problem is that immigrant businesses owners in the United States often experience a diverse slew of challenges as compared to nonimmigrants. The specific business problem is that some U.S. business owners of Togolese origin lack strategies to address the challenges encountered in taking advantage of the opportunities in the Togo and the US, to operate successful businesses ventures involving both countries.

Research Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies that U.S. small business owners of Togolese origin engaged in entrepreneurial activities with Togo need to address challenges and leverage opportunities, in Togo and the US, to operate successful businesses ventures. The targeted population for this study included owners of U.S.-based Togolese small businesses, involved in entrepreneurial activities with Togo, restricted to those who have successfully run a business for more than five years. The study population for this study was appropriate and consistent with the view of Neville et al. (2014), who suggested that researchers should explore the experiences of entrepreneurs from various groups. The geographic location of the study was the Washington Metropolitan area, where several Togolese immigrant entrepreneurs reside. The findings of this study may contribute to the upliftment of the social and economic status and possibly aid U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs to succeed and serve in furthering personal aspirations and in elevating business success?

Rationale for Research Method and Design

The rationale for using qualitative methodology rested on the need to acquire an insightful understanding of the financial challenges U.S.-based Togolese small business owners face in conducting business with Togo. Qualitative research is better suited than quantitative and mixed methods approach, to record, and explore cognitive dimensions of human experience, and therefore supported the rationale in choosing this method (Kainth & Verma, 2011; Rennie, 2012). Quantitative research involves deductively drawing conclusions, and testing hypotheses, using statistical data collected, using surveys and questionnaires (Horvath, 2012). The mixed methods approach is the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches, utilized within a single study (Fielding, 2012). The selection of a method suitable to meet the objectives of the study received careful deliberation. Quantitative and mixed methods research did appear suitable to explore the critical success strategies for Togolese immigrant small business owners. The exploratory characteristic of qualitative research offered the option in insightful understanding into personal experiences and imperatives for Togolese immigrant entrepreneurs based in the United States and undertaking business with Togo.

The different designs within qualitative research include the following principal types: narrative study, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Hays & Wood, 2011). The objective of understanding participants perspectives led to choosing a case study and therefore also may appear as justification for the exclusion of the research designs listed. A narrative design entails, participants expressing life stories and experiences in chronological order (Dickey, 2011); however, was considered irrelevant as the aim was to gain insight into business experiences in establishing an international business using data from primary and secondary sources in a case study. The aim of a case study is also not to generate new theory, as would be with using a grounded theory design (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). Ethnographers immerse in cultural groups that include communities, social movements, or organizations (Pritchard, 2011), and this cultural research was not within the aim of this of a business case study. A phenomenological study entails research understanding the meaning that individuals ascribe to personal lived experiences, and interpretations of events, (Englander, 2012; Fisher & Stenner, 2011), while for this study, the focus was on using interviews on business challenges experienced, to triangulate results against other credible sources (Yin, 2014).

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do U.S.-based Togolese business owners need to address challenges and leverage opportunities, in Togo and the US, to operate successful businesses ventures?

Data Analysis Technique

A case study design is ideal in a qualitative setting for researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants (Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013). This case study intended to gain knowledge and understanding of the critical business imperatives and strategies that Togolese-owned businesses in the United States need to address the challenges and leverage opportunities, in Togo and the US, to operate successful businesses ventures. Torrance (2012) noted that methodological triangulation draws strength with the invocation of two or more data sources, which often yield comprehensiveness to data analysis, to offer greater validity than using a single data source. Interviews, documentation and additional source information aided in the triangulation, consistent with the vies of influential researchers (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). Member checking of the interview transcripts and interpretations helped to ensure completeness and accuracy of data of each participant (Torrance, 2012).

Interview Questions

1. How do you relate your entrepreneurial endeavor to some challenges you experienced in Togo and /or the United States?
2. How did you address these challenges?
3. How would you describe some opportunities from the Togolese and /or the U.S. environments that have contributed to the current state of your business?
4. How did you leverage these opportunities?
5. What other information can you share about this form of international business transacted between the US and Togo?

A systematic analysis of each response to the interview questions helped to identify emerging themes related to immigrant-owned small businesses sustainability. NVivo QSR version 10, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis

software (CAQDAS), served to manage, and analyze the interview data. Transference of the uploaded data to NVivo followed the transcription of the interviews. NVivo is a flexible qualitative data analytical software, with features helpful to the researcher to identify nodes (Ishak & Bakar, 2012). Nodes are coding features of NVivo and can represent concepts, processes, people, and other categories. The NVivo auto-code feature helped to create case nodes for each participant, and all participants were under a parent node. The evaluation of the research findings provided deeper insight into the overarching research question of this study: What strategies do U.S.-based Togolese business owners need to address challenges and leverage opportunities, in Togo and the US, to operate successful businesses ventures? Entrepreneurship theory, as proposed by Schumpeter (1934) served as the theoretical underpinning to provide insight into the aspirations of U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs, who transact business with Togo. Answers to the interview questions aided in gleaning insight into the entrepreneurial imperatives and strategies needed for U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs need to conduct sustainable businesses.

Critical Review of the Literature

Migration and Immigrant Entrepreneurship

Migration involves individuals leaving the home country, to live in a foreign country. According to the United Nations Population (UNFPA, 2014), there were 214 million migrants across the world in 2010. The financial crisis of 2007 has influenced the migration inflows in some industrialized countries such as the United States, Spain, United Kingdom, and Australia. More than 10% of the individuals living in these countries are foreign-born (UNFPA, 2014). Researchers in the migration field have attempted to understand the reason individuals migrate from a country to another one.

Hwang, Liao, and Huang (2013) found that the economic reason driven by the wages difference between countries is a strong motivator that can trigger a decision to migrate to another country. Couyoumdjian (2012) opined that migrating individuals seek for a suitable institutional context to exploit human capital, and maximize it. Beckhusen, Florax, Graaff, Poot, and Waldorf (2013) argued however that there is an imperfect transferability of the human capital acquired in the migration sending country to the host one. Chiswick and Miller (2013) held the same view as Beckhusen et al. (2013), noting that immigrant individuals can be overqualified, and most of the time underqualified for the job market of the host country. Crockett (2013) and Bianchi (2013) observed that immigrant often display higher abilities and stronger motivation compared to other categories in the community.

Gillespie and McBride (2013) observed that the literature on diaspora entrepreneurship was relatively recent and appeared at the turn of the 21st century as a key factor in the international business field. There are many studies on the achievements of immigrants' entrepreneurship, especially for gains and contribution to the home country. There is an extensive body of literature on achievements of the immigrants' entrepreneur businesses. Vaaler (2013) argued that remittances from the diaspora represent the second largest capital inflow in non-industrialized countries after foreign direct investments; and the largest inflow in developing countries. Diaspora entrepreneurship may help to boost the internationalization of developing countries (Boly, Coniglio, Protta, & Seric, 2014).

Lin and Tao (2012) in a quantitative study, used data collected from the Chinese Canadian community, to

examine the characteristics, drivers, and factors of success of transnational entrepreneurs. Lin and Tao (2012) described the typical successful diaspora entrepreneur as a 45-year-old married man, with one child, with a Master's or higher educational degree, and not holding a full-time job. Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013) suggested that researchers in diaspora entrepreneurship field should move from the descriptive stage, which consists of the achievements of the immigrant entrepreneurs, to the theory-building stage of the phenomenon. Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013), listed Lin and Tao (2012) among the existing theory-building studies. Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013) noted that, besides the success factors of traditional entrepreneurship, parameters such as altruistic motivation, need for social recognition, friendliness, and receptivity of the home country, entrepreneurial opportunities, and support to immigrants in the host countries, are drivers of a successful diaspora entrepreneurship. Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013) suggested that further research should address these success factors in respect of each particular diaspora.

Immigrant-Owned Businesses and Export Activities

Immigrant-owned businesses engaged in export and import activities received considerable attention in entrepreneurial research. Wang and Liu (2015) quantitatively studied the transnational activities of immigrant-owned businesses, in respect of the performances in the United States, using microdata from the Survey of Business Owners (SBO) of 2007. Wang and Liu found that immigrant business owners are more likely to engage in transnational activities than nonimmigrant entrepreneurs are, because of the accrual of human and social capital in respective countries of current and former residences respectively. The findings of Wang and Liu (2015), and Neville et al. (2014) have indicated that young immigrant-owned businesses involved in export activities outperform other new ventures. Neville et al. (2014) argued that immigrant entrepreneurs are export-oriented because of routines and decision-making mechanisms, in respect of the historical home country environments, which may enhance business success and performance. Liu and Wang also observed that immigrant-owned entities not involved in transnational activities are less performant than nonimmigrant; and immigrant entities involved in transnational activities such as outsourcing jobs and exporting, perform more than nonimmigrant firms do.

Business Environment: Home and Host Countries

Diaspora entrepreneurs, who conduct business with the country of origin, operate in an environment that involves both the host and the home countries. Several researchers have addressed the influence of the environment on the success of the international entrepreneurial business (Dyck & Ovaska 2011). Lin and Tao (2012) conducted a study on characteristics, drivers, and success factors affecting Chinese - Canadian entrepreneurs. Lin and Tao (2012) found that a significant advantage for immigrant entrepreneurs was the capability to draw resources from both home and host countries respectively.

Governments of various countries implement strategies to attract foreign investors. The U.S. government shows a preference to grant entry visas to foreign individuals who can invest \$1 million and generate at least 10 full-time jobs in the United States. The Startup Act 2.0 bill is a feature that provides immigrants with more opportunities to start a business is through the EB-5 visa (U.S. Department of

Homeland Security, 2012). Anderson (2012) observed however that, the EB-5 visa is insufficient to harness foreign individuals to invest in the United States because of the required minimum of \$500 000, and there are few immigrant business owners performing in the United States under the EB-5 visa in the past years.

Governments and international organizations across the world widely recognize that small businesses play a key role in the economic growth of the country (Gstraunthaler & Hendry, 2011; Uy, 2011). As small businesses, and immigrant-owned ventures especially, contribute significantly to the economic growth of the host country, leaders of this country strive to address the high failure rate of small businesses. Solomon, Bryant, May, and Perry (2013) suggested that agencies and programs that support small businesses, such the SBA, and similar agencies should strive to mitigate the high rate failure of ventures. Immigrant business owners may find in the host country, agencies, and programs that provide support for sustainable ventures.

Riddle and Brinkerhoff (2011) observed that the immigrant individual confront new beliefs, norms, and behaviors in the institutional business environment of the country of settlement. Immigrant support programs, therefore, in the host country represents a vital factor that promotes sustainable immigrant-owned businesses. Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013) noted that several governments and international institutions had implemented programs to encourage diaspora members to participate in the economic development of the country of origin. These agencies and programs include the Diaspora Network Alliance (DNA) sponsored by the USAID and the U.S. State Department (Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013). Bowen (2012) found that privately held corporations, governments, and international agencies, in response to political and ethical calls have implemented programs to help small or/and minority businesses.

Another advantage is the residence in a geographically concentrated immigrant community, in the host country. Beine, Docquier, and Ozden (2011) observed that immigrant individuals are sharing a similar ethnic heritage in a geographically concentrated region benefit from the low-cost information and affordable services that trigger investments in the home countries. Vaaler (2013) shared the view of Beine et al. (2011) and conducted a quantitative study in 50 developing countries analyzing data from diaspora investments from 2002 to 2007. Vaaler (2013) found that diaspora concentration is more likely to facilitate immigrant individuals' investments back home. Vaaler (2011) argued that the informal relationship with extended family and community members helps immigrant entrepreneurs secure investments in the home country.

The home country of the immigrant business owner influences the venture on several aspects. Goktan and Gunay (2011) identified three factors that can influence investment from the diaspora in the country of origin. These factors are government attitude, local infrastructures, and the sociocultural beliefs about conducting business.

The findings in several studies have highlighted the positive role played by the diaspora through its remittance and investment in the economic growth of the home countries on several aspects. These aspects can involve capital (Flisi and Murat, 2011; Mullings, 2011; Ellis, 2011), the expectations of the way to conduct business (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011), and technical knowledge (Agrawal et al.,

2011). Researchers posited that investments from the diaspora played a key role in the economic growth of developing countries (Vaaler, 2011). Kotabe et al. (2013) argued that diaspora investments do not play an important role only in developing countries, and capital from individuals living abroad have positively impacted the economic growth of several developed countries such as those of Italy, Ireland, and Israel. A positive business environment in the country of origin could be a catalyst to attract diaspora investments. Beyond the economic role, Barnard and Pendock (2013) identified diaspora investors as bridges between the home and host countries. Goktan and Gunay (2011) viewed the government attitude as a critical factor to encourage diaspora investment.

Regarding the government attitude, Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013) distinguished between hostility and hospitality attitude. Nkongolo and Bakenda (2013) observed that the highest level of hospitality is critical to optimizing the diaspora investments in the country of origin. The governments of these countries often try to implement strategies through diaspora engagement policies to harness individual living abroad to invest in the home countries (Kotabe et al., 2013). Governments of countries with high emigres are continuously seeking creative ways to create an attractive environment for diaspora investors by implementing rules, regulations, and structures.

For example, governments from which a large number of immigrants emanate often allow dual nationality for individuals who have acquired the citizenship of the host country by naturalization. In its effort to promote diaspora entrepreneurship in Togo, the Togolese government passed a law effective in July 2014 that implicitly recognized the dual nationality of Togolese individuals living abroad. According to the Togolese Government's official website, the new law waives entry visas to Togolese individuals, using a passport of another country. Togolese immigrant individuals can enter the home country, upon the presentation of a document attesting the former Togolese citizenship such as a birth certificate, a Togolese citizenship certificate, or passport even expired (Togolese Government, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Entrepreneurship often regarded as a multidimensional concept, to which leading economists have provided a definition that reflects personal focus and perspectives (Bula, 2012; Sudabby, 2014). The views and postulations of economists Bentham (1780), Cantillon (1730), Kizner (1973), and Knight (1921) have contributed to further evolution of the entrepreneurship theory, originally developed by Schumpeter (1934). The entrepreneurship theory, originally developed by Schumpeter (1934), one of the influential entrepreneurial researchers, grounded this study.

Schumpeter (1934) defined the entrepreneur to be an innovator, in the quest for monetary rewards through the seeking of opportunities. The principles of the Schumpeterian theory furthered the understanding of entrepreneurship in the context of innovation, risk-taking, and proactive behavior, as it was found insightful by other researchers (Crockett, McGee, & Payne, 2013). According to Schumpeter (1934), the entrepreneur is an individual who implements new processes, or uses the existing ones, in an innovative manner (Berglann, Moen, Røed, & Skogstrøm, 2011).

Per the Schumpeterian theory, the entrepreneur is a seeker of new markets and exploits new opportunities, while also identifying and managing risk effectively (Block,

Sandner, & Spiegel, 2013). Schumpeter description of the entrepreneur as an individual who addresses barriers related to entrepreneurial activities has also found favor with others (Sadeghi, Mohammadi, Nosrati, & Malekian, 2013). Schumpeter (1934) viewed the entrepreneur as a motivated individual, choosing to fulfill innate, or acquired entrepreneurial potential (Zeffane, 2013). The Schumpeterian entrepreneurship theory was congruent with the aims of this research, as the goal was to explore the success factors of Togolese immigrant entrepreneurs, through the lens of the Schumpeterian theory. Researchers have used this theory to study the attributes of entrepreneurial motivation, risk propensity, innovation, managerial and educational skills (Frese & Gielnik, 2014).

Potential Significance of the Study

This study might be of significance to U.S.-based Togolese small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs. Immigrant-owned businesses often encounter more challenges in running and establishing enterprises than those owned by others (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011). There is limited research on Togo-owned small businesses in the United States, denoting a gap in the contemporary literature and business knowledge in this realm.

Contribution to Business Practice

As in many countries, immigrant-owned businesses play an important positive role in contributing to the U.S. economy (SBA, 2014). Immigrant-owned businesses, however, fail at a higher rate compared to others in the US (SBA, 2012). The knowledge and the insight from uncovering the strategies of some U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs who have been in business past five years may help others in developing and operating sustainable for-profit ventures. The discoveries from this study could also contribute to advancing the business practice and represent a source of knowledge to U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs on strategies needed to conduct sustainable ventures.

Implications for Transformational Business Change

The discoveries of this study might contribute to positive business change, and social improvement as the findings could help U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs to be successful. Successful and sustainable Togolese-owned ventures could contribute to the economy as immigrant-owned businesses play an influential contributing role in the United States (SBA, 2014). Prevailing and overcoming adversity, successful business ownership could foster individual, and community economic empowerment can help entrepreneurs of Togolese origin to improve the standard of living. The business and entrepreneurial knowledge form this research study may contribute to improving the welfare of Togolese citizens, as the diaspora, located in more affluent countries, often advance the cause of socio-economic development of the home country through investments, remittances, and job creation (Vaaler, 2013).

Reliability and Validity

Quality is paramount in research, and researchers have an explicit responsibility to ensure credibility to studies through appropriate measures intended to improve reliability and validity (Hassi, Storti, & Azennoud, 2011). Houghton et al. (2013) noted that in qualitative research the concept of trustworthiness should replace the quantitative criteria of reliability, validity, and objectivity. The quality criteria to ensure trustworthiness should include credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Whiteley, 2012). With the emphasis in ensuring rigor in this

study instituting appropriate steps helped to increase credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability, in compliance and adherence to the strategies recommended by Houghton et al. (2013).

Reliability

Miner-Romanoff (2012) advocated the minimizing of biases, firstly through awareness, then introspection, and must endeavor to mitigate this risk of adversely influencing the quality of the study. It is incumbent upon the researcher to ensure reliability across the continuum of the study. While there are no straightforward tests to evaluate the reliability of qualitative inquiry; adopting some measures and quality strategies can, however, enable the researcher to infuse reliability to the study (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). Evaluating the reliability of qualitative research involves deliberate strategies enacted to increase the robustness, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Houghton et al., 2013).

Following the practices of leading research exponents, to ensure dependability in this study, some of the strategies used included member checking and methodological triangulation which involved the use of multiple sources to ensure the collection of comprehensive data to address the research topic (Torrance, 2012). To supplement the interview data collected from carefully screened, qualified, and participants who met the eligibility criteria, to achieve a comprehensive picture necessitated a review of business documents from the government, business, and other credible sources specific to immigrant-owned businesses. After completion of an interview, each participant had the opportunity to review a transcript to ensure that it accurately conveyed the recorded discussion (Torrance, 2012), as a member checking strategy.

Maintaining an audit trail, and keeping comprehensive notes on the contextual background of the data, and rationales for all methodological decisions helped in increasing research rigor. The use of qualitative data analytical software enables insightful and deep qualitative analysis. The features within the NVivo software facilitates querying, auditing, and coding of interview data (Bergin, 2011). In this study, leveraging the technical capabilities of the NVivo software aided to implement quality and strategies that served to increase dependability and confirmability of the quality of findings in this study.

Validity

In striving to increase research quality, researchers must implement measures to ensure truthfulness and certainty to the findings of studies (Trotter, 2012). Per the views of research exponents, credibility replaces the quantitative criterion of internal validity, and transferability for the external validity (Trotter, 2012; Houghton et al., 2013). In this study, the following strategies served to enhance validity:

To infuse greater credibility to the study findings, the researcher should select from among techniques such as triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member checks, peer debriefing (Houghton et al., 2013). Implementing member checking, triangulation, and prolonged engagement and persistent observation were the validation strategies used in this qualitative study. Member checking in this study entailed, as advocated by researchers, providing participants involved in research with the opportunity to review the accuracy of the transcription of the interviews, and the initial findings and interpretation (Houghton et al., 2013). The audience of Togolese immigrant small business owners, participating in the study received a

personal copy of the interview transcript for review. The review afforded the interviewees with the opportunity to amend or add to the details provided, and annotate changes to any part not accurately reflecting personal perceptions.

To achieve methodological triangulation using several sources on the same phenomenon may aid to confirm or disconfirm to some degree and extent the collected primary data. Methodological triangulation can help ensure completeness to increase the credibility of findings (Houghton et al., 2013) and served to provide credibility in this qualitative research. In this study, using various secondary business and trade reports and publications helped to accomplish a holistic review and analysis of study results. These sources included government reports from the Chamber of Commerce of the US, the USCIS, and other stakeholders such as organizations and advocate programs for immigrant entrepreneurship. The comparison of primary data against these secondary sources aided in a comprehensive review and analysis of the findings.

The infusion of data saturation, or prolonged engagement and persistent observation with research participants helped in the collection of detailed insights related to the phenomenon. Data saturation requires the researcher in the primary data collection process, to strive to elicit maximum information of pertinence from the research subjects, to a level where there is no new emerging data, to accomplish the saturation of data saturation, and there is a full understanding of the phenomenon under study (Houghton et al., 2013). Typically data saturation occurred in several qualitative studies after a maximum of 15 interviews (Simeone, Salvini, Cohen, Alvaro, & Vellone, 2014; Ali, Vitulano, Leel, Weiss, & Colson, 2014). Hanson, Balmer, and Giardino (2011) recommended a sample size of 20 participants, however, to achieve data saturation in a case study research. O'Reilly and Parker (2012) opined that in a case study, data saturation occurs with a small number, notably when participants have significant knowledge to answer the research questions. The number of participants in this study helped fulfill the need for

comprehensive data collection, and the responses of 20 participants in this study were optimal to reach data saturation. A contingency plan, although not needed, held the provision of recruiting new participants and conducting additional interviews if the sample size of 20 participants was not sufficient to reach data saturation.

In all forms of research, a critical responsibility of the researcher is to ensure the transferability to the study findings, to related and suitable geographic and other contexts (Houghton et al., 2013). External validity or transferability in qualitative research consists of the extent that the findings of the study are generalizable to other populations and backgrounds, relatable to the phenomenon (Ali & Yusof, 2011). While there is fixation often with generalizability, it may be important to note, that the purpose of a qualitative study is more about the quality in data critical and deep understanding, rather than generalizability (Nicola, Oliver, & Graham, 2012). The depth of the data and the quality of insights as evidenced by thick description is a what may help readers to make an informed decision on the transferability of the findings of a study to the specific context (Hanson et al., 2011). The verbatim transcription of each interview helped to ensure accuracy and original responses of participants remained intact in a standard data set and aided in documenting and transcribing the rich data elicited from participants.

Presentation of Findings

The two environments where the international entrepreneurs operate differ significantly in terms of the level of development, political and legal aspects, sociocultural dimension, and technological development (Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013). A thematic analysis of participants' shared perceptions to interview question 8, on challenges encountered in Togo and the United States respectively, revealed four major themes of corruption, lack of physical presence in Togo, linguistic barriers, and discrimination in the United States. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Dual Business Environment.

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 8: How do you relate your entrepreneurial endeavor to some challenges you experienced in Togo and / or the United States? How did you address these challenges?	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
PP3 "...the business environment is not as regulated as it is in the United States." "...if you don't bribe things will not be easy for you." PP1, PP3, and PP17 "high corruption", PP14, "lot of corruption", PP5, "corruption is major". PP4 "The challenge in Togo, is that the overall environment is a mess.... The administrative environment is very corrupted"	Participants consistently viewed corruption as the main challenge in the Togolese business environment. Participants' perceptions on business ethics, were congruent with the reports of Transparency International (2015) and Heritage International (2016).	Corruption in Togo is very prevalent, a way of life, and almost unavoidable.
PP2 stated: "The challenge in Togo, is your physical absence there." PP11 "... your asset is at risk because everyone wants to become rich." PP8 "In Togo, the challenge is to have someone trustworthy that will take care of your business." PP13 "my challenge was to have people I can trust and who can run the business in my absence."	Participants also stressed on a lack of physical presence in Togo as significant challenge in maintaining businesses	Lack of physical presence in Togo can present challenges in running the business.
PP11 "The challenge here in the United States is that if you cannot speak American English fluently as they do..." PP12 "... in the United States. Being a black man starting a business is very difficult because of discrimination". PP14 "...and the language barrier adds to the woes". PP2 "therefore native entrepreneurs are more favored as compared to us". PP4 "We immigrant most of the time, we have to deal with language and cultural barriers."	The French being the lingua franca of Togo, the American English, presented a challenge to participants in conducting businesses in the United States	Linguistic and cultural barriers in the United States impose challenges for non-native English entrepreneurs.
PP1 "the United States is having access to loans as banks and financial institutions are very discriminative PP9 "When they hear our English they know that we are not from here, and then our tribulations start." PP14 "In the United States "I am seen as an outsider."	Several participants experienced discrimination in the United States in respect of obtaining financial assistance.	Some degree of discrimination in the United States is an accepted fact.

All participants shared personal views on business concerning Togo as the home country and the United States as the host country. Lin and Tao (2012) observed that a significant advantage for immigrant entrepreneurs was the possibility to draw resources from both home and host countries.

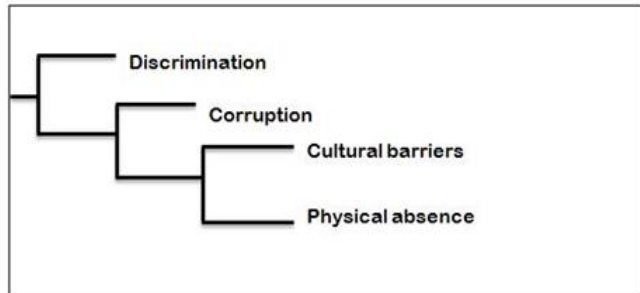


Figure1. Word clustering depicting the major views participants on challenges experienced in the dual business environment.

In response to question 8 and 9, several participants related their success to overcoming challenges experienced in Togo and the United States. Figure 5 represents the word frequency in participants' responses. The data analysis revealed two core themes namely corruption in the overall business environment and physical absence in Togo; and two themes, discrimination and linguistic barrier in the United States as the host country.

The business environment in Togo.

Corruption. All the participants perceived Togo as an untapped market, eager to purchase goods and service from the United States. For example, Participant PP1 stated, "The opportunity in Togo is that there is an untapped market that prefers the high quality of products from the United States as compared to China." PP7 related his success to the Togolese business environment as "... an emerging market with a lot of potential customers." For PP19, "The opportunity in Togo is that there is a large market that respects a lot of products from the United States. Participants observed, however, that the Togolese business environment reflects several challenges to overcome to conduct a sustainable business in Togo. The core themes that emerged from the data analysis were namely: (a) corruption, and (b) physical absence in Togo.

Table 2. Frequency of distribution of Perceived Challenges in Togo.

Challenges	N	% of Participants
Corruption in the business environment	17	85
Physical absence in Togo	9	45

Seventeen participants representing 85% of all participants viewed corruption as the greatest challenge in Togo to overcome to operate successful businesses ventures (See Table 2). The shared perceptions of these participants are congruent with the view of Mogens and Bjørnskov (2014), who argued that individuals in poor African countries are more likely to experience having to pay bribes to government officials. For example, PP3 comparing the Togolese and the United States stated, "...the business environment is not as regulated as it is in the United States." Participant PP9 describe the situation through commonly used allegory used in Togo to describe the situation, "... you have to put a stone on your file, if not the wind will blow it away... That means if you don't bribe things will not be easy for you." It came out of the data analysis that participants used various words to express the high level of corruption in the country. Participants PP1, PP3, and PP17 used the phrase

"high corruption," PP14, "a lot of corruption," PP5, "corruption is major," Participant PP4 stated, "The challenge in Togo, is that the overall environment is a mess. Excuse me the term. The administrative environment is very corrupted; I mean from A to Z."

We deployed methodical triangulation to confirm the responses from participants. A comparison of participants' perception of corruption against data from the Global Corruption Report (GRC) by Transparency International, confirmed the level of corruption in Togo. According to Transparency International (2015), Togo is 47th, in ranking among the top 50 most corrupted country in the world. Using another source, Heritage International (2016), Togo had a low score of 29 over 100 in freedom from corruption (0 being totally corrupted, and 100, corruption free). It appears that Togo, as shared by participants, reflects a high level of corruption.

We also used the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1988) to view the responses from the participants. The intent here was not to stereotype the Togolese business environment, rather to confirm participants' perceptions. Togo reflects a high-power distance culture, which often means, according to Hofstede (1988), an autocratic government that does not ensure equality of power, the tax system protects the wealthy, and power and inequality are facts. In general, people feel more threatened with a weaker perceived uncertainty avoidance culture. In Togo, there is a low uncertainty avoidance culture. In such a culture, there is less need for written rules, as a less elaborate legal system exists, and hierarchical structures or rules could be broken for pragmatic reasons (Hofstede, 1988). Togo also reflects a low level of individualism, low long-term, and high masculinity culture, which explain the perceptions of participants on the Togolese business environment.

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that, although 85% of all participants claimed that corruption is a great challenge in Togo, there was no clear core solution to address the issue. The responses were diverse and vague. For example, as a solution to the corruption PP1 stated, "... I strive my best to do the right thing...meaning doing lawful things", while PP3 thought, "You have to build a relationship with people in the government that will be able to help you, you understand, sometimes you have to offer them gifts such as watches, cell phones, computers, and others." From the participants' view, there is no clear line between bribing or not Togolese officials. For Participant PP9: "...you have to have strong connections in Togo." PP10 opined, "To address this issue, I always try to balance corruption and righteousness. Because if you don't bribe, you will lose a lot, which is harmful to the business."

A review of the Code of Conduct of the Foreign Practice Corruption Act (FPCA) indicated U.S.-based businesses should not use gifts or bribery to obtain favor, and failure to comply with the provisions of the FPCA could imply civil and criminal charges. It appears that U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs who operate in Togo face a dilemma in ensuring sustainability to businesses. In Togo, dealing with corruption is unavoidable to run sustainable businesses while it is prohibited in the United States.

The Physical Absence in Togo. Another core theme that emerged from the data analysis for the participants was the lack of physical presence in Togo. Nine participants out of 20 involved in the study perceived the physical absence in Togo, as a challenge to overcome to conduct sustainable businesses.

Participants narrated that residing permanently in the United States is conducive to being absent in Togo to follow the daily activities of one's businesses. For example, Participant PP2 stated, "The challenge in Togo, is your physical absence there." Participant PP8 in his response to interview question 8, explained,

In Togo, the challenge is to have someone trustworthy that will take care of your business. I say that because if you leave your business in the hands of someone who will not take care of your business in a proper way, you will lose a lot, I mean your business can collapse easily.

Participant PP11 shared the same view as PP8 stating, "...in Togo, is that there is a high level of poverty, for this reason, your asset is at risk because everyone wants to become rich." From the data analysis, it appears that all the nine participants who indexed physical absence as a challenge proposed to visit Togo at least twice a year and/or finding a trustworthy person in Togo as the solution. For example, Participant PP11 stated, "The solution to this problem is to have a trustworthy person in Togo, and you have to travel often to Togo."

The business environment in the United States. Eleven participants (Table 3) viewed discrimination as a great challenge experienced in the United States. The linguistic barrier and hardship in speaking and /or understanding the American English was another emergent theme from the data analysis. Immigrant individuals confront new beliefs, norms, and behaviors in the institutional business environment of the country of settlement (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011).

Table 1. The frequency of distribution of Perceived Challenges in the United States.

Challenges	N	% of Participants
Discrimination	11	65
Linguistic barriers	9	45

Discrimination. The findings in Table 3 indicated that 65% of participants perceived discrimination as a great challenge they faced in the United States. Most of the participants, such as PP3 and PP4, talking about discrimination, regarded themselves as "immigrant, foreign-born" as compared to native-born individuals. For example, PP3 stated, "In the United States, as a foreign-born individual we immigrant, we are subject to any kind of discrimination with people you will have to meet in your business journey." Participants PP17 and PP18 referred to themselves as "African," PP17 and PP18 as "minority". PP12 claimed a discrimination based on the race, "Here in the United States being a black man starting a business is very difficult because of discrimination. Sometimes, people just treat you as you come from another planet; they just see horns on your head."

Several participants made suggestions to overcome the discrimination to conduct sustainable businesses ventures. Participant PP20 shared, "I tried to integrate the American society." PP19 and PP18 also used the word "integration." PP11 suggested, "To address this challenge, you have to show them you are worth it. I try to be effective in everything I do for my business." Participant PP20 mentioned networking as a way of overcoming discrimination in the United States also, Participants PP2, PP8, PP11, PP15, and PP16, in response to the interview question 10, on concluding remarks, pointed out the creation of a Togolese network to support peers. For example, Participant PP16 stated,

The information I would like to point out is the importance of the creation of a Togolese network that can provide support to nascent Togolese entrepreneurs to be

successful. For example, I got my financial support from an Indian network, why not such a structure for us, people from Togo. I would really like to see this as a recommendation of your research.

Linguistic barriers. The linguistic barrier is another core theme in the frequency of occurrence. Nine participants, as shown in Table 3, related their success in overcoming the linguistic challenge that immigrant business owners experience in the United States business environment. Participant PP11 opined, "The challenge here in the United States is that if you cannot speak American English fluently as they do, I mean if you speak with what they call accent, business partners, banks, and others don't take you seriously." Participant PP10 observed, "The language also has been a roadblock for me, or don't understand them, or they don't understand me, that was tough." PP9 in the same vein, stated, "When they hear our English they know that we are not from here, and then our tribulations start."

To overcome the linguistic barrier, PP3 suggested, "Nevertheless, you have to stay strong and prove wrong anyone who tries to underestimate you," while PP4 shared his perception, "A good strategy to overcome these challenges is always to try to be best in what you are doing." Regarding solutions to the linguistic barriers, PP10 remarked, "But now we understand each other very well as took some business and English classes."

Applications to Professional Practice

In the United States, although immigrants are more likely to start a business, immigrant-owned ventures are more likely to fail as compared to others (SBA, 2012). The main purpose of this study was to explore the strategies needed for U.S.-based Togolese business owners, engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Togo, to conduct sustainable businesses ventures. The findings of this research indicated that business owners must display motivation, and some entrepreneurial characteristics or attributes, to overcome financial hardships and other challenges. The strategies to overcome these challenges may include using information technology and other innovative approaches to address some of the major challenges faced by these entrepreneurs in the United States and Togo. The findings of this study may apply to Togolese entrepreneurs living in the Washington DC Metropolitan area and could be of value for all Togolese business owners in the United States.

The discoveries from this research can be useful to Togolese individuals who are contemplating to start new business ventures. The findings can also be useful to Togolese entrepreneurs who are struggling for business survival, to be successful. This qualitative research involved a smaller sample size; therefore, the study findings may not be generalizable to the entire population of Togolese entrepreneurs in the United States, as would be more likely for a quantitative study with a large sample size. However, the findings can be useful to immigrant entrepreneurs of some West African coastal countries such as Benin and the Ivory Coast. These countries reflect similar business environments as Togo, with a high level of poverty, unemployment, and corruption; immigrant business owners from these countries also show similar immigration propensities in seeking a better quality of life by immigrating to North America to improve personal standards of living.

Recommendations for Action

The findings from this research study may be valuable for U.S.-based Togolese business owners involved in

entrepreneurial activities in Togo, to optimally leverage opportunities and overcome challenges for sustainable businesses. The views expressed by perceptions indicate that Togolese immigrant owners should: (a) display motivation and entrepreneurial characteristics through acquiring business knowledge relevant to the laws and regulations of the United States, (b). The principal recommendation that emerged, as derived from a close scrutiny of the primary research and triangulated data, is that U.S.-based Togolese business owners must be motivated and entrepreneurial in outlook.

Bijaoui (2012) observed that motivation is the backbone of the entrepreneurial spirit and endeavor, and is interdependent with other business qualities and aptitude. The findings of the study indicated that to be successful business owners must demonstrate the ability to prepare and plan, display measured and informed risk commensurate with nature of the business and financial standing. A long-term vision, self-confidence, leadership, and entrepreneurial education are also imperatives and should be developed and acquired, consistent with the aim of continuous business improvement and development. Togolese business owners, where needed, should strive to acquire a formal business education. Fourteen participants representing 70%, attributed business sustainability of business education, which compliments the view of Zakic et al. (2012), who reasoned, that individuals are not born entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial education is critical in the successful transformation in the journey of an entrepreneur.

Conclusion

In the sphere of international business, scholars and practitioners have recognized that immigrant entrepreneurship plays a key role, which holds true in the U.S. economy (Wang & Liu, 2015). Success is never immediate, and without a steep learning curve, as many immigrant-owned businesses face a plethora of challenges and are more likely to fail as compared to those living in the country for a longer time (SBA, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore motivation, and entrepreneurial attribute that successful U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Togo, have displayed to remain successful and in business beyond the crucial first five years, which is the critical period when most new businesses fail. The theoretical underpinning of the entrepreneurship theory of Schumpeter (1934) aided to supplement the primary data analysis, with a confluence of secondary data and a plausible set of principles offered to explain phenomena. Schumpeter (1934) advanced the view that, the ideal entrepreneur exemplifies an individual in the quest for monetary gain. The entrepreneur also possesses some business aptitude, attributes, and characteristics, and displays an ability to act innovatively in searching for opportunities, while can overcome the roadblocks to successful business entrepreneurship.

In this study, twenty entrepreneurs of Togolese origin, considered immigrants because of a relatively short residence in the United States, nevertheless, who have been in business for more than five years, and residing in the Washington DC metropolitan area, participated. The analysis of the semistructured interviews of participants responses revealed the emergence of key themes. From these emergent themes, the strategies gleaned indicated that to operate sustainable businesses, motivational and entrepreneurial spirit were critical to overcoming many challenges faced, which included adjusting to a new life, often holding a job with little more

than minimum wages, yet displaying the business fortitude to develop and grow a business venture. The findings of this study may contribute to increasing business knowledge in the realm of US immigrant entrepreneurship, notably for those more recently from Africa. Business success can mean improvement in the social welfare of immigrant communities in the United States and Togo. The knowledge and findings from this study may in some way advance the cause of U.S.-based aspiring and established Togolese business owners. With the paucity of current literature on African immigrant entrepreneurship in the US, it is hoped that this study makes a worthy contribution in some way to bridge this deficit in current business knowledge. The study may also cause other researchers to pursue research and undertake studies on immigrant-owned businesses in the United States, which may be of value to foreign-born entrepreneurs. The funds and resources arising from successful business entrepreneurship, after all, holds the promise of contributing to the US economy and the upliftment of global and Togolese societies.

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