

Motivation and Entrepreneurial Characteristics of Sustainable Immigrant-owned Businesses in the US

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, foreign-born individuals are more than twice as likely to start new ventures, immigrant-owned businesses, however, fail within the first 5 years. The purpose of this single case study was to explore the strategies U.S.-based Togolese small business owners who were engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Togo. The Schumpeterian entrepreneurship theory underpinned the study and served as a theoretical reference. Interview data were collected from 20 successful Togolese small business owners who resided in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, who were engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Togo, and who had been in business for more than 5 years. Data analysis involved using coding techniques and word clustering, and qualitative data analytical software. The use of methodological triangulation enabled deeper analysis and added to the rigor of the study. The key themes emerging from the coding and thematic analysis of interviews included motivation and entrepreneurial characteristics such as risk propensity, entrepreneurial education, leadership, self-confidence, and vision. The findings of the study may improve the social and business success of immigrant business owners, and entrepreneurs may use the knowledge to improve business success, which could lead to the creation of jobs and improvement in the standard of living of U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs. The discoveries from the research may also contribute for the welfare of local communities in Togo, as the diaspora flow of investments and remittances from the United States may increase.

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Introduction

Background of Togolese Business Entrepreneurs

The Republic of Togo is a West African country bordered by Ghana to the west, Benin to the east and Burkina Faso to the north with a coastline of 56 kilometers on the Atlantic Ocean in the south. Togo covers an area of approximately 56,785 square kilometers and has a population of 7,154,237 inhabitants (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2013). Immigrants from Togo represent a small percentage of the African population who venture abroad and to the United States.

Individuals from less developed countries often migrate to economically advanced nations to elevate personal standards of living. Turning to entrepreneurship is a way these individuals create businesses to earn a living and adjust to the new environment (Lin & Tao, 2012; Nkongolo-Bakenda & Chrysostome, 2013). Many researchers have discussed the positive role played by immigrant entrepreneurs in the home and host countries respectively (Agrawal, Kapur, McHale, & Oettl, 2011; Flisi & Murrat, 2011; Mullings, 2011). The U.S. government has also recognized the importance of small and immigrant-owned small businesses in contributing to the economic growth of the country (Sonfield, 2014).

Unemployment and poverty are high in Togo (CIA, 2013). Togolese citizens often travel abroad, notably to Europe and North America, to seek a higher standard of living (Ajilore & Ikhide, 2012). 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 among the sub-Saharan African countries that depend significantly on the 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. Coniglio, Boly, Prota, and Seric (2014) recognized that the diaspora contributes substantially to the trade and, financial flow, and the access to technology in the home country, especially true for developing countries.

The United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has defined immigrants as individuals to whom the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has granted the right to reside permanently and work without restriction in the United States (IRS, 2015). Immigrants often try 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.

Entrepreneurial consultants, researchers, and policymakers have recognized that small businesses play a key role in the economic development of countries (Jasra, Khan, Hunjra, Rehman, & Azam, 2011). There is limited research on U.S.-based Togolese small business owners. The intent of this study was to explore the experiences of successful U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs involved in entrepreneurial

activities with Togo in the Washington Metropolitan area. The findings from this study may be of value to 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 are more than twice as likely to start new ventures in the United States compared to others, however often fail at higher rates within the first five years (SBA, 2012). In 2010, immigrant-owned firms in the United States 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 there is a higher failure rate of immigrant-owned businesses in the United States as compared to those founded by nonimmigrants. The specific business problem is that some U.S. business owners of Togolese origin engaged in entrepreneurial activities with Togo lack strategies to operate sustainable businesses ventures.

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 be successful. The targeted population for this study included owners of U.S.-based Togolese small businesses, involved in entrepreneurial activities with Togo, and 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 also aid U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs to succeed and also serve in furthering personal aspirations and in elevating business success.

Rationale for Research Method and Design

A qualitative method served as the research approach for this study, as the aim included understanding the challenges and opportunities of successful U.S.-based Togolese small business owners engaged in entrepreneurial activities with Togo. The rationale for selecting the qualitative research over the quantitative and mixed methods approach stemmed from its suitability to serve to record, and explore the cognitive dimension of human experience (Kainth & Verma, 2011; Rennie, 2012). Quantitative research involves a deductive approach, drawing conclusions, and testing hypotheses, using statistical data from surveys and questionnaires (Horvath, 2012). The mixed methods approach is the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study (Fielding, 2012). After careful deliberation, quantitative and mixed methods research did not seem appropriate to explore the critical success strategies for Togolese immigrant small business owners. A qualitative approach seemed more suitable to explore success imperatives for Togolese immigrant entrepreneurs who have created businesses in the United States involving entrepreneurial activities with Togo.

The invocation of qualitative research presents the following five design options to the researcher: narrative study, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Hays & Wood, 2011).

The objective of understanding participants' perspectives prompted the rationale in choosing a case study and therefore also justification for the exclusion of the following research designs discussed herein. A narrative design entails participants expressing life stories and experiences in chronological order (Dickey, 2011); this was considered irrelevant because of the emphasis on the totality of information, drawn and analyzed from primary and secondary sources in a case study. The aim of a case study is also not to generate new theory, espoused with the invocation of a grounded theory design (Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, 2011). Ethnography involves immersion by the researcher in cultural groups that include communities, social movements, or organizations (Pritchard, 2011), and was outside the scope of a case study. A phenomenological study entails research efforts specific to understanding the meaning, individuals ascribe to lived experiences, and interpretations of events, (Englander, 2012; Fisher & Stenner, 2011), while for this study, the focus was on using discoveries from interviews, 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 engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Togo need to be successful?

Data Analysis Technique

The case study design is suited for researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of participants (Gee, Loewenthal, & Cayne, 2013). The intent of this study was to gain knowledge and understanding of the critical business imperatives and strategies that Togolese-owned businesses in the United States, engaged in entrepreneurial activities with Togo need to increase successful ventures. Torrance (2012) observed that methodological triangulation requires two or more data sources to give a fuller insight into the interpretation of the research findings, which may also provide greater validity than using a single data source. Interviews, documentation, and additional source information aided in the triangulation (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). There was also the use of member checking to ensure completeness and accuracy of data of each participant (Torrance, 2012).

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your motivation for considering being an entrepreneur?
2. How would you describe the way you initially financed your business?
3. What was your perception of the risk you are taking, in the decision to become a business owner?
4. What from your experience are the managerial skills necessary to conduct sustainable businesses?
5. How would you attribute the relevance of your background and education to your business endeavor?
6. What information you find pertinent and would like to share in respect of what we have not discussed in this interview?

There was a systematic analysis of each response to the interview questions to identify emerging themes related to immigrant-owned small businesses sustainability. Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), notably NVivo QSR version 10, served to manage, and analyze data. Transference of the uploaded data to NVivo followed the transcription of the interviews.

NVivo is a flexible 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. Nodes come in five different forms: free nodes, tree nodes, case nodes, relationship nodes, and matrices (Ishak & Bakar, 2012). The NVivo auto-code feature helped to create case nodes for each participant, and all the 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, engaged in entrepreneurial activities with Togo, need to be successful? The lens of the entrepreneurship theory, as proposed by Schumpeter (1934) served to provide insight into the aspirations of U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs, who transact business with Togo to be successful. Answers to the interview questions revealed the attributes and strategies needed for U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs need to conduct sustainable businesses.

Critical Review of the Literature

Tengeh (2013) identified several characteristics and attributes that could contribute to sustainable immigrant-owned businesses. Schumpeter considered creativity and innovativeness the essential characteristics and attributes of an entrepreneur. Other views in literature and offshoots from the Schumpeterian theory have included risk-taking as an important reason explaining some of the motivations prompting an entrepreneur to conduct sustainable business. Economists have tried to map some critical factors of proactive entrepreneurs. Proactive entrepreneurs display personal attributes such as risk propensity and the need for achievement (Block et al., 2013). Ekpe (2011) defined among others innovativeness, motivation, managerial abilities, and education as major entrepreneurial characteristics and attributes. Frese and Gielnik (2014) used the Schumpeterian theory to identify entrepreneurial motivation, risk propensity, innovation, managerial, educational skills, and financial abilities as the key attributes of an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurial Motivation

Frese and Gielnik (2014) observed that motivation is an important factor of the Schumpeterian theory, which has received increasing attention recently in the literature on entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial researchers have identified motivation, as one major factor that often leads to the decision to start a new business. Alibaygi and Pouya (2011) opined that the desire for achievement, affiliation, or power drive the motivation often results in individuals venturing into a path of entrepreneurship. Similarly, Bijaoui (2012) noted that the motivation to create a business emanates from an individual's zeal to attain a given life goal.

Motivation is a multidimensional concept, therefore, lacks a unanimous definition acceptable to most entrepreneurship theorist and practitioners. The concept has been the subject of debate in the field of entrepreneurial research. The relationship between motive and achievement has also been an area of debate for decades. Tlaiss (2013) observed that economic and noneconomic reasons cause individuals to venture into business; these reasons include personal development, improved social status and the need for achievement, and contribution to the community welfare. Researchers have distinguished between necessity and opportunistic motivation, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

The motivation for individuals to venture into the path of entrepreneurship can be intrinsic, extrinsic, and sometimes a combination of both. The motivation is intrinsic when an individual embraces entrepreneurship for the socially responsible reasons. These motives include among others philanthropy, helping the needy, the desire for independence and family security. Extrinsic motivation involves the excitement of individuals for financial rewards, fame, and recognition. A combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations can lead potential entrepreneurs to venture into business.

Another classification of entrepreneurship motivation distinguishes between pull and push factors (Fatoki & Patswawairi, 2012). Push factors force individuals to embrace entrepreneurship to address unemployment or a low-paying job. Pull factors attract individuals to venture into starting a business by offering opportunities.

Immigrant and nonimmigrant entrepreneurs share the most of the personality traits in which typifies entrepreneurial motivation (Liargovas & Skandalis, 2012). Some traits, however, pertain exclusively to immigrants. Several studies on immigrant entrepreneurship addressed the factors that can drive an individual to venture into business.

Fatoki and Patswawairi (2012) identified three theories that have explained the motivation of immigrant individuals towards entrepreneurship. These theories are the cultural, the mixed embeddedness, and the disadvantage theory. The cultural theory considered cultural characteristics including work ethics, family ties, social values, savings, and religious beliefs as the basis of immigrants' orientation towards entrepreneurship. The mixed embeddedness theory shares similar characteristics of the cultural theory, also to the socioeconomic and socioethnic characteristics. Jones, Ram, Edwards, Kiselinchev, and Muchenje (2014) denoted, in respect of the mixed embeddedness theory, that immigrants often opt for entrepreneurship for socioeconomic situation betterment. The disadvantage theory, referred to also as blocked mobility theory, denoted that immigrant entrepreneurship often appears spurred on from disadvantages suffered by immigrants in the host country, such as the lack of access to the labor market.

The motivation for achievement is another factor that drives an individual's decision to venture into entrepreneurship. Heydaria, Madania, and Rostamib (2013) found that individuals with a stronger need for achievement are more likely to direct energies towards entrepreneurship and are more likely to success compared to others. Deshpandé, Grinstein, Kim, and Ofek (2013) shared the view of Heydaria et al. (2013) contending that there is a strong positive correlation between the need for achievement and entrepreneurial performance.

Risk-taking

The findings of many researchers have indicated, that individuals who are less risk-averse, are more likely to start new businesses ventures. Many views expressed in literature have indicated that risk preference is one of the key characteristics of entrepreneurship (Gündoğdu, 2012; Hung & Chin, 2011). Jiao and Robinson (2011) opined that there is a universal consensus about risk-taking as one of the key attributes of individuals with a natural tendency to become entrepreneurs. Hvide and Panos (2014), in a quantitative study on risk tolerance and entrepreneurship, used investment data for 400, 000 individuals, shared the view of Gündoğdu

(2012), and Hung & Chin (2011), and confirmed that risk-tolerant individuals are more likely to start a new venture.

Hvide and Panos (2014) argued that although risk-tolerant individuals are more likely to start a new venture, risk-averse businesses outperform risk-tolerant entrepreneurs. Willebrand, Lammers, and Hartog (2012) made a distinction between risk propensity and risk perception. Willebrand et al. (2012) observed that entrepreneurs with high-risk perception are the ones who take cautious action to address risk and show better performance. Elston and Audretsch (2011) posited that failure is one of the greatest challenges for risk-tolerant individuals, who often fail to assess business adequately and start a business with sufficient capital and expertise. Willebrand et al. (2012) argued that even if successful entrepreneurs are risk-tolerant, these business owners who take precautionary measures, are not gamblers. Fairlie and Holleran (2012) even found that risk-tolerant individuals are more likely to benefit more from entrepreneurship training than risk-averse ones.

Immigrants are more likely to create new businesses in the community (Bianchi, 2013). Economists also found that immigrant entrepreneurs are more risk-tolerant as compared to native-born business founders. Gedajlovic, Honig, Moore, Payne, and Wright (2013) observed that immigrant entrepreneurs have an above average level of courage, ambition, resourcefulness, and bravado, which make these business owners, highly risk-tolerant group, and relatively unafraid to venture into business.

Creativity and innovativeness.

Creativity and innovativeness form the main features of the Schumpeterian theory. Schumpeter (1934) described the entrepreneur as one who does things in a creative and innovative way. Belso-Martinez, Molina-Morales, and Mas-Verdu (2013) expressed congruence with the Schumpeterian theory and posited that creativity and doing things in an innovative way are the main attributes of successful entrepreneurs. Creativity involves the entrepreneur generating new ideas (Klonoski, 2012). Creativity is the way that an entrepreneur can achieve innovation. Baron, Hmieleski, and Henry (2012) contended that creativity is integral to innovation, which is important to the entrepreneurial process. Leita and Franco (2011) shared the same view as Baron et al. (2012) and considered creativity as the key attribute of the entrepreneur. Monahan, Shah, and Mattare (2011) even argued that with creativity and innovation, small businesses can reverse any economy.

Rosing, Frese, and Bausch (2011) opined that generating new products, new services, or new business practices starts with a person or a team having a good idea. Baer (2012) observed that a good idea is not sufficient to generate innovation, and innovation requires the implementation of the idea. The implementation of a good idea is what often distinguishes creativity from innovation. Sarooghi, Libaers, and Burkemper (2015) found a strong correlation between creativity and innovation, which is even stronger at the individual level. Sarooghi et al. (2015) argued that creativity and innovation are two sequential steps in creating new products, new services, or new business practices.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy involves assessing individuals' belief and confidence in personal capabilities to complete a given task (Heilbrunn & Almor, 2014). Researchers observed that the self-efficacy was vital for the entrepreneurial process. Barnir, Watson, and Hutchins (2011); and Shinnar, Hsu, and Powell

(2014) found that there is a positive correlation between entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), and entrepreneurial intention (EI). Barnir et al. (2011) and Shinnar et al. (2014) observed that individuals with high self-efficacy showed high entrepreneurial intention. Measuring self-efficacy has been subject to debate among entrepreneurial researchers. Some researchers recommended using a general concept of self-efficacy (GSE) while others have suggested utilizing the specific domain concept, entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) to measure self-efficacy in entrepreneurship. Tumasjan and Braun (2012), suggested that entrepreneurship behavior shows preference to the ESE rather than the GSE.

Managerial skills

Managerial skills are important for conducting sustainable businesses. Peter Drucker, the father of the modern management, suggested that proper management is critical to conduct sustainable business (Drucker, 1985). A review of the literature indicated that proper managerial skills are vital to conducting sustainable businesses. Ivanov (2011) identified management skills as a critical factor for small businesses, and the lack of these skills lack in the entrepreneurial process could lead to failure of ventures. Osman, Rashid, Ahmad, and Hussain (2011) held a different view to that of Ivanov, arguing that management skills are necessary characteristic for big and not for small businesses. Osman et al. (2011) reasoned that leadership skills are the factor that is critical for small businesses and that there is evidence that small businesses with leadership approach outperform those with the managerial approach.

Researchers have tried to identify the managerial skills that are necessary to ensure sustainability for business. Fassin, Rossem, and Buelens (2011) regarded the effective manager as one who considers ethics and social responsibility in decision making beyond financial profits.

Entrepreneurial education

Several researchers have recognized the key role played by entrepreneurship in the economic growth. The importance of entrepreneurial education or training has been the subject of some debate (Drucker, 1985). Nasr and Boujelbene (2014) observed that developing training and academic programs in the small business ownership field may help to enhance the educational needs of potential small business owners. Donellon, Ollila, and Williams Middleton (2014) consistent with the observation of Nasr and Boujelbene found is a positive correlation between entrepreneurial education and intention. Donellon et al. (2014) argued that the enrollment in entrepreneurial courses triggers an individual's aspiration to embrace entrepreneurship and to construct an entrepreneurial identity. Setiawan (2012) and Donellon et al. (2014) emphasized that entrepreneurial education is strongly important and inevitable. Some researchers found no relationship even a negative correlation between entrepreneurial education and intention (Bergman, Rosenblatt, Erez, & De-Haan, 2011).

Researchers, making a case for entrepreneurial education, have argued that individuals operating businesses, with a high level in the field and involved in continuing education had a lower failure risk (Kabongo & McCaskey, 2011; Teck-Hong & Yong-Kean, 2012). Elmuti, Khoury, and Omran (2012) argued that the entrepreneurial education remains a major determinant, and it overshadows other factors in evaluating the success or failure of businesses. Box (2011) observed that the realities of the 21st century require business owners to be flexible and adaptable to meet in the

best way possible, the wants and the needs of customers. Continuing education and training may help to ensure the success of businesses ventures (Box, 2011).

Ertuna and Gurel (2011) opined that the entrepreneurial education plays a significant and positive role in an individual's decision to venture into entrepreneurship. There is, therefore, an increased awareness of the necessity of entrepreneurial education in a global environment (Pittaway, Rodriguez-Falcon, Aiyegbayo, & King, 2011). Elmuti et al. (2012) examined how entrepreneurship education and training affected the development and enhancement entrepreneurial skills, to conduct sustainable business. The sample of this qualitative study consisted of 171 entrepreneurs and prospective entrepreneurs of Togolese origin, in the United States, Elmuti et al. (2012) found a causal link between entrepreneurial education and training, and the effectiveness of the ventures.

Heilbrunn and Almor (2014) suggested that business schools should strive to achieve efficacy through programs and curricula to strengthen attitudes and behavior of their students towards entrepreneurship. There have been several areas of debate about entrepreneurial education. One question was whether higher education institutions could teach entrepreneurship or not (Warhuus & Basaiawmoit, 2014). Another concern was what and how to teach entrepreneurship (Lautenschlager & Haase, 2011).

Drucker (1985) observed that any individual could learn entrepreneurship as a discipline. Zakic, Stamatovic, and Stevovic (2012) congruently with Drucker argued that no one is a born entrepreneur. Individuals become an entrepreneur, by acquiring, knowledge, skills, and abilities through entrepreneurial education. Ollila and Williams Middleton (2011) observed that lectures and theory appeared ineffective ways to teach entrepreneurship. Nisula & Pekkola (2012) and

Ollila, and Williams Middleton (2011) suggested that the use of alternative methods such as cases studies and guest speakers could ensure the effectiveness of entrepreneurial education. Asvoll and Jacobsen (2012) made a distinction between the science of entrepreneurial practice that is teachable and the art of entrepreneurial practice that is instinctive and comes from experience. Warhuus and Basaiawmoit (2014) recommended that higher education institutions should implement programs for entrepreneurship rather than designing curricula about entrepreneurship.

The focus of some previously conducted studies was the impact of the socio-economic background of students in business schools on the effectiveness of the program. Falck, Hebllich, and Luedemann (2012) observed that parents and peers group shape the entrepreneurial identity of individuals. Heilbrunn and Almor (2014) conducted an empirical study in Israel to examine the impact of the socio-economic background on the entrepreneurship program with a sample of 1230 students from business schools. The findings of Heilbrunn and Almor (2014) indicated that the business program was very effective for students from the medium and upper socio-economic environment, who showed a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. Heilbrunn and Almor (2014) found that the program was ineffective, and even worsened the attitude of students, from a low socio-economic environment, towards entrepreneurship. Heilbrunn and Almor (2014) recommended creating business programs, taking into consideration the socio-economic environment of potential learners.

Conceptual Framework

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

Schumpeter described the entrepreneur as an innovator, seeking monetary rewards through the discovery of opportunities. The principles of the Schumpeterian theory served as a valuable theory for understanding entrepreneurship in the context of innovation, risk-taking, and proactive behavior (Crockett, McGee, & Payne, 2013). According to the postulations of the entrepreneurship theory, developed by 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 one who seeks new markets and exploits new opportunities, while also identifying and managing risk (Block, Sandner, & Spiegel, 2013). Schumpeter described the entrepreneur as an individual who addresses barriers related to entrepreneurial activities (Sadeghi, Mohammadi, Nosrati, & Malekian, 2013). Schumpeter (1934) also, viewed the entrepreneur as one who assesses the entrepreneurial potential (Zeffane, 2013). The Schumpeterian entrepreneurship theory was congruent with this research. The aim of this study, was to explore the success factors of Togolese immigrant entrepreneurs, through the lens of the Schumpeterian theory, notably across 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 as the knowledge from the findings could be useful to increase the success of U.S.-based Togolese small business owners. Immigrant-owned businesses encounter more challenges than those owned by others (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011). There is limited research on Togo-owned small businesses in the United States.

Contribution to Business Practice

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

Implications for Social Change

The discoveries of this study might contribute to positive social improvement as the findings could help U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs to be successful. Sustainable Togolese-owned ventures could contribute to the economy as immigrant-owned businesses play a significant role in the United States (SBA, 2014). Successful business ownership could imply that individual and community economic

empowerment can help entrepreneurs of Togolese origin to improve the standard of living. This research study may contribute to improving the welfare of Togolese citizens, as the diaspora plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of the home country through investments, remittances, and job creation (Vaaler, 2013).

Reliability and Validity

Researchers have the critical responsibility to ensure credibility to studies through appropriate measures intended to improve reliability and validity (Hassi, Storti, & Azennoud, 2011). Houghton et al. (2013) suggested that in qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness should replace the quantitative criteria of reliability, validity, and objectivity. Criteria to ensure trustworthiness should include credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Whiteley, 2012). Ensuring rigor in this study involved instituting appropriate steps to ensure its credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability with strategies recommended by Houghton et al. (2013).

Reliability

Miner-Romanoff (2012) observed that the researcher must be aware of biases that could occur during the research process; the researcher has, therefore, a critical responsibility to ensure reliability at each step of the study. There are no straightforward tests to evaluate the reliability of qualitative inquiry; however, adopting some steps can enable the researcher to ensure reliability to the study (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). Evaluating the reliability of qualitative research involves exploring its dependability and confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013).

To ensure dependability in this study, strategies used included member checking and methodological triangulation that involves the use of multiple sources to ensure the collection of comprehensive data to address the research topic (Torrance, 2012). In this study, there was a collection of data by interviewing eligible participants and review of documents from credible sources about 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).

Maintaining an audit trail, which consists of a thorough collection of documentation regarding all aspects of research, facilitates conducting an orderly and organized study, served to ensure confirmability in this study (Houghton et al., 2013). For this research, keeping comprehensive notes on the contextual background of the data, and rationales for all methodological decisions helped in increasing research rigor. The use of the NVivo enables a researcher to achieve deep qualitative analysis through the features within this software, which enables querying, auditing, and coding of interview data (Bergin, 2011). Optimally leveraging the technical capabilities of the NVivo software further aided to enhance quality and in implementing strategies that increase dependability and confirmability of data in this study.

Validity

Researchers should show both ability and efforts to ensure truthfulness and certainty to the findings of studies (Trotter, 2012). Credibility replaced 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 ensure credibility to a study, the researcher should select among techniques such as triangulation, prolonged

engagement and persistent observation, member checks, peer debriefing (Houghton et al., 2013). Member checking, triangulation, and prolonged engagement and persistent observation were the validation strategies used in this qualitative study. The implementation of member checking provided 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). Togolese immigrant small business owners, participating in the study received, therefore, a copy of the transcription of respective interviews for review. After the review, interviewees had the opportunity to request amendments and changes to any part not reflecting personal perceptions accurately.

Methodological triangulation involves using several sources on the same phenomenon to confirm data and ensure completeness to increase the credibility of findings (Houghton et al., 2013) served to provide credibility in this qualitative research. Various secondary sources helped to check and establish the validity in this qualitative inquiry. These sources included government publications such as reports from the Chamber of Commerce of the, the USCIS, and other stakeholders such as organizations or advocate programs for immigrant entrepreneurship. There was in this study a comparison of primary data against these secondary sources for a holistic analysis.

The third technique was data saturation or prolonged engagement and persistent observation. This strategy requires the researcher in the data collection process, to strive to reach a level where there is no new emerging data, which means data saturation occurred, and there is a full understanding of the phenomenon under study (Houghton et al., 2013). 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, if participants have, the most knowledge to answer the research questions. Responses of 20 participants involved in this study were optimal to reach data saturation. A contingency plan consisted of recruiting new participants and administering additional interviews based on similar criteria for the initial interviews if the sample size of 20 participants was not sufficient to reach data saturation.

A critical responsibility of the researcher is to ensure to the study transferability to the study by describing the original context of the research (Houghton et al., 2013) appropriately. External validity or transferability in qualitative research consists of the extent that the findings of the study are analytically generalizable to other populations (Ali & Yusof, 2011). The purpose of a qualitative study was more about understanding than generalizability (Nicola, Oliver, & Graham, 2012). Thick description is a strategy that 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). Verbatim transcription of each interview helped to ensure accuracy and original responses of participants remain intact in a standard data set.

Table 1. Motivational Spirit (Interview Question 1).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question #1: How would you describe your motivation for considering being an entrepreneur?	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
PP1 "... I worked for long hours, but my income was not enough to pay my bills and take a good care of my family". PP2 "...finding a job was very hard, and the one job I found was very difficult for a little pay." PP11 "But the only job I could find was in the factory and job was very hard and paid \$ 9 an hour, ridiculous, right?"	Several participants related motivation to start businesses ventures to how it is hard to find a job in the United States. Many other participants, who were employed, were not also satisfied.	Unemployment or job dissatisfaction provided the impetus to start personal businesses
PP1 "...I decided to become an entrepreneur to have a better life." PP7 "...I came to the conclusion that creating my own business would be the best way to improve my life standards". PP10 "I travel to the United States because it is a land of opportunities where I can improve my standard of living."	Participants consistently asserted that improving the personal standard of living was the reason to embrace entrepreneurship. Participants used the phrase consistently "improving the standard of living."	The desire to improve the personal standard of living inspired business entrepreneurship.
PP20 "...Another motivation for considering being an entrepreneur is the fact that I will be my own boss." PP3 "So I challenged myself not to waste... not working for anybody anymore." PP13 "because I am tired to work for others and make money or them. I want to be me, my own boss and free myself from the pressure of working for a company."	Participants frequently mentioned the willingness to control the source of income or being one's own boss, as the main motivation for running personal businesses.	Seeking greater personal financial control motivated entrepreneurship.
PP13 "...My motivation is also to operate my business and give others the opportunity to rise." PP5 "... would say that my primary motivation is to help people in Africa by creating opportunities for them in better ways. PP6 "I grew up to be a dreamer and have always felt that I have a mission to contribute to my society."	The data analysis also revealed that participants consistently related the motives to become an entrepreneur from the eagerness to help families and communities in Togo.	Residing in an advanced country provided the aspiration to help other in Togo through the creation of personal businesses.

Presentation of Findings

Theme 1: Motivation

A thematic analysis of the participants' answers to interview question 1 portrayed the motives that often provoke immigrant entrepreneurs participating in the study to venture into setting up personal businesses (See Table 1)

In the data analysis, using the technical features of NVivo helped to generate the word clustering and tree projection of the dominant perceptions of participants on the reasons that motivate immigrant individuals to start businesses (Figure 1). The core themes from data analysis revealed the following four perceived motivations for the participants involved in the study: lack of job or job dissatisfaction, improving the standard of living, exercising control and freedom or being one's own boss, and helping less-privileged people.

Bijaoui (2012) observed that motivation is fundamental to running a sustainable business. Motivation has a link to the sustainability of any business (Sullivan & Meek, 2012).

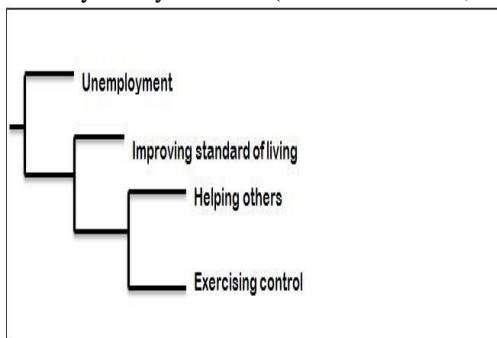


Figure 1. Word clustering depicting the major views of participants on entrepreneurial motivation.

Fourteen participants (Table 2) representing the highest frequency of occurrence, related the motivation to become a business owner to a lack of job or job dissatisfaction. The perception of these 14 participants is congruent with the view of Fatoki and Patswairi (2012), who defined unemployment or a low-paying job, as push factors that force immigrant individuals to embrace entrepreneurship. From the

findings, it appears that Togolese immigrants have ventured into businesses to overcome the job disadvantage suffered in the host country, the United States. Table 1 indicates that 70 % of participants confirmed that unemployment or low-paying job was the major motivation to become an entrepreneur. For example, Participant PP1 stated "... I worked for long hours, but my income was not enough to pay my bills and take a good care of my family." Participant 2, narrating a personal story, noted "...finding a job was very hard, and the one job I found was very difficult for little pay. These two factors combined have shaped my aspiration to become an entrepreneur." Participant PP11 shared a personal story, "But the only job I could find was in the factory and job was very hard and paid \$ 9 an hour, ridiculous, right? So I contemplated running my own business."

I owned my business in Togo, and I was doing well before I won the Lottery Visa. First, I didn't want to come to this country, but family members and friends advised me to travel to the United States because it is a land of opportunities where I can improve my standard of living. I sold my business and came to the Wonderland (laughter), and I started my business. Therefore, that was my motivation if I can say so.

Six participants related the motivation to create and operate their own business for altruistic reasons. Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013) observed that altruism is one of the major reason that leads individuals from the diaspora to venture into entrepreneurship. Participants confirmed that they became entrepreneurs to help less-privileged people in Togo. Participant PP13 observed, "My motivation is also to operate my business and give others the opportunity to rise." Participant PP5 stated, "I would say that my primary motivation is to help people in Africa by creating opportunities for them in better ways." Four participants asserted that the motivation for creating their own business came from the desire to exercise control and freedom or be their own boss. Participant PP13 stated, "I want to be me, my own boss, and free myself from the pressure of working for a company that does not value you."

Participant PP20 also shared his perception, “Another motivation for considering being an entrepreneur is the fact that I will be my own boss.”

Table 2. Frequency of Emergent Themes: Perceived Motivation.

Motivation	N	% of Participants
Lack of job or Job dissatisfaction	14	70
Improving standard of living	8	40
Altruism or helping other	6	30
Exercising control and freedom or Being own boss	4	20

Theme 2. Emergent entrepreneurial characteristics

An analysis of participants’ responses to interview questions 4, 5, and 6 revealed the emergent themes in respect of the entrepreneurial attributes needed for immigrant business owners to be successful (See Table 3).

Table 3

Entrepreneurial Characteristics (Interview Questions 4, 5, 6)

Figure 4 indicates the word frequency in participants’ responses to the question, on how participants relate personal success to some entrepreneurial characteristics. The perceived entrepreneurial characteristic that emerged were: (a) risk propensity, (b) entrepreneurial education, (c) self-confidence, (d) leadership, and (e) vision.

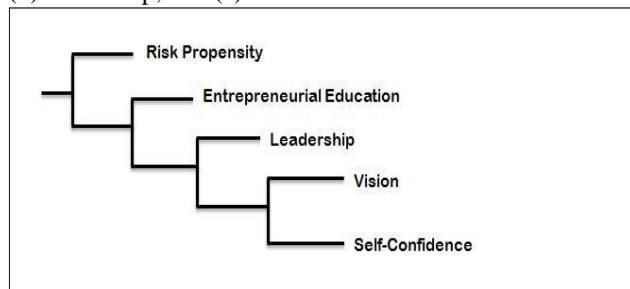


Figure 2. Word clustering depicting the major participants’ views on entrepreneurial characteristics.

Table 4 reflects the numbers of participants who relate business sustainability to each entrepreneurial attribute.

Table 4. Frequency of Perceived Entrepreneurial Characteristics

Characteristics	N	% of Participants
Risk propensity	20	100
Entrepreneurial education	14	70
Leadership	8	40
Self-confidence	7	35
Vision	6	30

Risk propensity. Participants, in response to question 4 on the awareness of the risk in creating personal businesses, displayed various views. For some participants such as PP4 there was “a big risk,” others participant such as PP1 “didn’t think about risk...” All participants, however, were unanimous that risk-taking is a key entrepreneurial characteristic. The perceptions of the U.S.-based Togolese business owner involved in this study is congruent with the view of the literature on immigrant business owners’ risk propensity. Gedajlovic et al., (2013) observed that immigrant entrepreneurs often have more than the usual amount of ambition, courage, resourcefulness, and bravado, which enable them to have a higher likelihood of taking risks and starting a business. Most of the participants observed that all the human existence is about taking risks (PP2, PP13, and PP18). Participant PP2 observed that: “I know that there is a risk in any human undertaking. But I know also that it is up to the undertaker to strive to make the risk irrelevant.” PP7 stated, “There is a risk in everything you plan to do. I know it is risky to own a business.” Most of the participants while sharing perceptions acknowledged awareness of the risk, however, seemed undaunted in venturing to start a business. For example, PP18 stated that: “I knew that there was a risk, but my willingness to succeed was stronger.”

Table 3. Entrepreneurial Characteristics (Interview Questions 4, 5, 6).

Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 4: What was your perception of the risk you are taking, in the decision to become a business owner?	Interpretation & Analysis	Emergent Themes
PP1 “didn’t think about risk...” PP2 “I know that there is a risk in any human undertaking.” PP7 stated that: “There is a risk in everything you plan to do. I know it is risky to own a business.” PP18 “...I knew that there was a risk, but my willingness to succeed was stronger.”	An analysis of the responses indicated that all the participants did not consider the risk to venturing into personal businesses. The perceptions of the participants were congruent with an extensive view of literature on immigrant risk propensity.	Willingness to take the measured risk reflects willingness for moderate risk propensity.
Excerpts of answers to Interview Question # 6: How would you attribute the relevance of your background and education to your business endeavor?		
PP3 “...I have a bachelor in finance. With this educational ability, I have managed my money to be where I am today.” PP4 “...I have an MBA in project management, which has been very fruitful to me in readability of my business, and take necessary action when needed.” PP10 “I have an associate degree in business administration, and an accountant certificate. I can tell you today that my education has been very relevant to my business.”	Participants viewed formal entrepreneurial education as important in establishing sustainable businesses. Many participants related success to a bachelor degree in business.	Entrepreneurial education is important in setting up businesses in the United States involving commerce with Togo.
Excerpts of Answers to Interview Question # 5: What from your experience are the managerial skills necessary to conduct sustainable businesses?		
PP6 “Leadership is the key.” PP11 “you have to be on the top of everything regarding your enterprise.” PP14 “Leadership is another important ability.”	Some participants pointed out that leadership is a critical trait to be successful.	Leadership and personal drive, important for an entrepreneur.
PP5 “First and foremost, self-confidence.” PP6 “it is self-confidence and courage.” PP9 “I would say run your business with confidence.” PP15 “Self-confidence is the key managerial skill that can make someone a successful entrepreneur.”	Other participants claimed self-confidence as a vital attribute for immigrant entrepreneurs to be successful.	Self-confidence, an important attribute for sustainable businesses.
PP4 “You have to be alert to recognize and address any single signal.” PP2 “Being a visionary... is very important” PP20 “. Importantly, the business owner needs to be proactive, visionary, flexible, and adaptable”.	Participants’ responses revealed that being visionary as an important characteristic to operate sustainable ventures.	Vision important characteristic for business sustainability.

PP11 claimed that: "With the eagerness of owning my business at that moment, the potential risk meant nothing to me."

Entrepreneurial education.

Interview Question 6 involved gaining insight into the impact of formal entrepreneurial education on business sustainability. Table 4 indicates that 14 individuals representing 70% of the participants attributed personal success to a formal entrepreneurial education. Six participants acknowledged not having a formal business education; however, related success to prior business experience. For example, Participant PP6 narrated, "...I have to admit that I didn't have a lot of education, business degree or anything relevant in that domain.

However, my business heritage contributed enormously to my success. Business is not only about book knowledge."

The perception of the 14 participants is congruent with the views of literature on the relevance of a formal business education for business sustainability. Nasr and Boujelbene (2014) observed that developing training and academic programs in the small business ownership field is critical to enhancing the educational needs of potential small business owners. Donellon et al. (2014) argued that the enrollment in entrepreneurial courses trigger an individual's aspiration to embrace entrepreneurship and to construct an entrepreneurial identity. For example, Participant PP3 claimed, "I have a bachelor in finance. With this educational ability, I have managed my money to be where I am today." PP4 stated, "...I have an MBA in project management, which has been very fruitful to me in readability of my business, and take necessary action when needed."

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of Participants' Views on the Entrepreneurial Education to Influence the Sustainability of Togolese-owned Businesses.

Code	N	% of Participants
Formal education	14	70
No formal education	6	30
Note: N = 20		

The frequency of distribution of the degree earned by participants with formal education, as shown in Figure 1, indicated that nine business owners, representing 65% of the respondents, held at least a bachelor degree, including two Master's degrees. Three participants held an associate degree, and two a business specialized high school diploma. The outcome of the data analysis challenges the study of Lin and Tao (2012) who describe a successful immigrant business owner as an individual holding a Master's degree or higher. The views of participants in this research indicated a minimum of a

Table 6. Distribution of Perceived Degree Earned for Participants with Formal Education.

Degree Earned	N	% of Participants
Master's	2	15
Bachelor	7	50
Associate	3	20
Specialized business high school diploma	2	15

Note: N = 14

Leadership. Eight participants mentioned leadership as key entrepreneurial characteristic (See Table 6). Osman et al. (2011) contended that leadership skills are critical for small business owners to be successful. Participants related their success to effective leadership. For Participant PP6, "Leadership is the key." Regarding leadership, Participant PP11 thought, "You have to on the top of everything regarding your enterprise."

Self-confidence. Self-confidence is another core theme that emerged from the data analysis. Seven participants attributed sustainable businesses ventures to self-confidence. Halim, Muda, and Amin (2011) observed that self-confidence plays a critical role in an entrepreneurial endeavor, especially to address new challenges. Participants in this study concurred with the view of Halim et al. (2011), mentioning self-confidence as a key entrepreneurial characteristic. For example, Participant PP5 stated, "First and foremost, self-confidence. Because you have to trust in yourself before you can make a good decision or a bad one. Self-confidence is primary." To operate a sustainable business, Participant PP9 advised, "...run your business with confidence..." while PP8 suggested, "You have to hang on tight there will be some events, that will deflate you but never give up, and the success will be yours."

Vision. The vision was also a core characteristic that participants perceived as essential to conduct sustainable businesses. For Participant PP2, "Being a visionary, I mean anticipating one's business outcomes and addressing them is very important managerial skill, to conduct successful business operations." In the same vein, Participant PP6 recommended, "You need to have a good vision about the direction in which you want to steer your business. Although PP4 did not use the word vision, the thematic analysis revealed personal view, "You have to learn from the past to manage the present, and to predict the future. You have to be alert to recognize and address any single signal."

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 addressing 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

This research may be a wake-up call for U.S.-based Togolese business owners involved in entrepreneurial activities in Togo, to leverage opportunities, and overcome challenges for sustainable businesses. The shared perceptions revealed that Togolese immigrant owners should: (a) display motivation and entrepreneurial characteristics, (b). The main recommendation is that U.S.-based Togolese business owners must be motivated and entrepreneurial in outlook.

Bijaoui (2012) observed that motivation is the backbone of any entrepreneurial endeavor, and is interdependent with other characteristics. The findings of the study indicated that to be successful business owners must reflect attributes such as risk propensity, vision, self-confidence, leadership, and entrepreneurial education.

Togolese business owners should strive to have a formal business education. Fourteen participants are representing 70% related sustainability of their businesses to a formal business education, which is compliments the view of Zakic et al. (2012), who argued that individuals are not born entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial education is a critical factor that makes entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

Scholars and practitioners have recognized that immigrant entrepreneurship plays a key role in the U.S. economy (Wang & Liu, 2015). Immigrant-owned businesses, however, face several additional challenges and are more likely to fail as compared to others (SBA, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore motivation and entrepreneurial characteristics that successful U.S.-based Togolese entrepreneurs, engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Togo, displayed to remain in business beyond the first five years. The entrepreneurship theory, as developed by Schumpeter (1934) served to underpin this study. Schumpeter (1934) described an entrepreneur as individual seeking monetary rewards who possesses some key attributes and characteristics, uses innovation, uncovers opportunities and addresses barriers related to entrepreneurial activities.

Twenty Togolese entrepreneurs, who have been in business for more than five years, and residing in the Washington DC metropolitan area, participated in the semistructured interviews for this research. The analysis of the participants' responses revealed key themes, denoting strategies required to operate sustainable businesses, which are a motivational and entrepreneurial spirit. The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change in the United States, and Togo as the knowledge from it may help U.S.-based Togolese business owners to be successful. Based on the findings, also, undertaking future studies on immigrant-owned businesses in the United States may be of value to foreign-born entrepreneurs, and individuals with entrepreneurial aspirations to conduct sustainable ventures.

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