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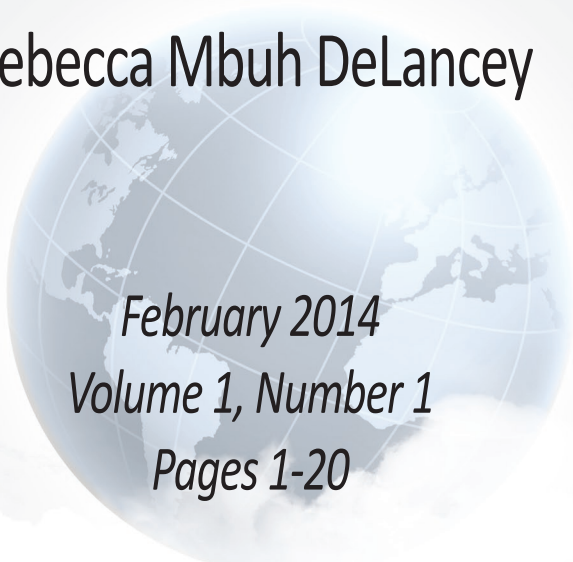
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Entrepreneurship and Immigration: A Study of Africans in the Korean Economy

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as an important player in the development of Korea's economy. This is clearly demonstrated in the humble beginnings of Korea's giant conglomerates such as Samsung, Hyundai, Posco, and LG that started as small businesses. This research presents analysis of entrepreneurial activities of African immigrants in Korea. This study combines data from questionnaires of 45 respondents and in-depth interviews with six of the respondents. The findings of this present research are different from other studies in that this study shows how immigrants fill economic gaps by creating employment for themselves while providing needed services to the immigrant and Korean populations. By creating informal employment, immigrants demonstrate that they are assets in their new environments. Coping mechanisms utilized by immigrant entrepreneurs as they confront challenges that might hinder them from pursuing entrepreneurial activities were revealed in this study.

Keywords: African immigrant entrepreneurs, Korea, entrepreneurial opportunities, entrepreneurial challenges, coping strategies

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as an important player in the development of Korea's economy. This is clearly demonstrated in the humble beginnings of Korea's giant conglomerates such as Samsung, Hyundai, Posco, and LG that started as small businesses. These companies developed into successful international businesses that have enabled the country to secure a coveted place in the global economy. Entrepreneurs continue to drive innovation, create value for society through better products and services, and ensure the productivity and competitiveness in the industry in which they operate (Bahn et al, 2011). Recently, Samsung Group, one of the country's flagship conglomerates, announced the inclusion of 12 foreigners in the executive rank of the company signaling a major shift in strategy as the company seeks to solidify its global presence. Samsung's move portrays a growing dilemma facing Korea where the birthrate has been declining steadily while the aging population escalates leaving many businesses worried about securing its future workforce in a competitive global economy. The number of immigrants to Korea is steadily increasing as government policies have been revised to facilitate immigration. Recent data released by the Ministry of Justice and the Immigration Department indicate that there were 1,501,761 foreigners residing in Korea in June 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2013). These numbers are very impressive if we consider that in 2003 there were only 678,687 foreigners living in Korea; in effect more than doubling the participation of foreigners in the workforce in just one decade. Employment data also show that there were 760,000 employed foreigners in Korea in May 2013 (Statistics Korea, 2013). Immigrants and their families will continue to play a role in filling some vacancies created by this as the number of foreigners increase while also carving a niche

in areas specific to meet the needs of immigrants. According to the Korea National Statistics Office (2012) there were 9,532 Africans living legally in Korea. It is estimated that the numbers are higher because of the increasing numbers of undocumented or illegally residing Africans in Korea.

The findings of this present research are different from other studies in that it shows how immigrants fill economic gaps by creating employment for themselves while providing needed services to the immigrant and Korean populations. By creating informal employment, immigrants demonstrate that they are assets in their new environments. Coping mechanisms utilized by immigrant entrepreneurs as they confront challenges that might hinder them from pursuing entrepreneurial activities were revealed in this study.

This research presents analysis of entrepreneurial activities of African immigrants in Korea. This study combines data from questionnaires of 45 respondents and in-depth interviews with six of the respondents. The findings highlight the entrepreneurial choices as well as challenges faced by many African entrepreneurs in the Korean society. This paper is divided into seven sections. Section one introduces the rationale of the study; in section two, a review of related literature is summarized and purpose of the study is discussed. Sections three and four deal with the methodology and model used and findings respectively. Section five presents the analysis and summary results and section six presents the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study. The references are included in section seven.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship has long been viewed through standard indicators such as self-employment rate, business ownership rate, and business density ratio, that focused purely on the individual or firm; but there are also implied positive relationships between entrepreneurship and economic development (Acs and Szerb, 2011; Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index, 2013). Entrepreneurship is also considered an important aspect of many economies worldwide since it is a means for economic advancement for many people and also as an alternative to unemployment (Bogan and Darity (2008)). Through various undertakings, entrepreneurs create value in addition to employment opportunities in their communities. Many new entrepreneurs utilize the formal or informal investment methods to raise start-up capital. Additional non-traditional forms of funding can be explored such as crowd funding which Gaule and Piacentini (2012) suggest may be beneficial particularly for female entrepreneurs both as startup and as growth capital. While it is not an understatement that entrepreneurship is the heart of the global economy, many owners are trapped in systems that have very complicated policies toward supporting and encouraging innovation. Arzeni (2013) argues that economic diversity and the inclusion of small businesses in many industries can be more resilient to the uncertainty or unpredictability of the global economy.

Entrepreneurship and small business play a vital role in contributing to economic development and the growth of national economies. For example, small businesses represent 99.7 percent of all firms and employ more than half of all employees in the private sector in the United States. This trend is similar in other countries from Bolivia to India to South Korea (Daft, 2012). Entrepreneurial companies impact national economies in many ways including job

creation and as a source of innovation. A comprehensive study of immigrants in the United States found that:

Immigrants create wealth and employment by growing businesses in Minnesota, and increase the state's global linkages, contribute revenue to local, state and federal governments, immigrant consumers demand products and services offered by Minnesota businesses, immigrant workers fill lower- and higher-skilled roles, often complementing the local workforce, immigrant human capital captures the value of immigrants' skills and education, including the future labor force contributions of today's immigrant children, immigrant global networks bring trade and investment opportunities and grow Minnesota's exports, and immigrant cultural assets make Minnesota a more attractive destination for global talent, business and investment" (Corrie and Radosevich, 2013, p.6).

Fairlie (2008) studied immigrant entrepreneurs' contribution to total U. S. business ownership, formation, and income and found that immigrants are nearly 30 percent more likely to start a business than are non-immigrants and they represent 16.7 percent of all new business owners in the United States. Immigrant business owners make significant contributions to business income.

Myers, et al (2013) analyzed demographic and employment trends that are changing the U. S. workforce and jobs of the future, and the role of foreign-born immigrants (the first generation and their native-born children and the second generation). The study revealed several interesting findings: first, immigrants will account for the large majority of the net increase in the workforce and fill many of the future job openings that will be created as the Baby Boom generation retires from the workforce. Second, immigrants and their children will account for 85 percent of net workforce growth over the next two decades. Third, between 2010 and 2020 immigrants and their children will make up 72 percent of net workforce growth; between 2020 and 2030 they will make up 97 percent, almost all of the workforce growth.

Previous research on entrepreneurship focused on access to start-up capital challenges, (see Arora, 2013; Denis, 2004), risks and failures of entrepreneurship (for examples, The Wenroth Group, 2002; UN, 2012; Cassisi, Esposito, Falck, and Faune, 2009), and entrepreneurship and economic development (see Acs and Szerb, 2011; Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index, 2013). Other research has been on the economic impact of Korean immigrants in other countries, especially the U. S. (see for examples: Noland, n.d.; Fairlie, 2008; Min and Kolodny, 1994; Kim and Yoon, n.d.). This present study revealed coping strategies for the many challenges immigrant entrepreneurs in Korea encounter in the course of engaging in their entrepreneurial activities. An understanding of these approaches can assist in developing programs that reduce the challenges so that business owners can be more productivity focused in providing services not only to the immigrant communities but also to the Korean society.

Purpose of the Study

As global migration increases, many people will leave their home countries for various reasons to seek opportunities in other countries. Korea is seeing an increasing number of foreigners in their society and many of these immigrants are carving out business opportunities for themselves. This study focuses on African migrants in the Korean economy by examining the following questions:

1. What role do African immigrants play in the Korean economy through entrepreneurial activities?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities encountered in the process?
3. How are challenges and opportunities approached and dealt with?

The Methodology and Model

The non-probability sampling or convenience sampling method was used in this study of entrepreneurial activities of African immigrants in the Itaewon area of Seoul, Korea. The majority of immigrant businesses are concentrated in Itaewon which is also close to many foreign embassies. The businesses have different operating hours making it difficult to include some of them in this study. This researcher contacted potential respondents and administered questionnaires to them; some of them were selected for interviews. Due to the close proximity of the businesses, the researcher was able to approach many respondents at their business premises or group meetings but on several occasions she accompanied respondents on their daily business errands around Seoul. In three instances, the researcher interviewed and administered questions to respondents during monthly gatherings of country or village group meetings to which respondents belonged. According to Saunders et al (2003), a reasonable and moderate high response rate from 30-50% is guaranteed when questionnaires are self-administered, hand delivered, and collected. The questionnaire survey also provides greater uniformity across research situations as respondents respond to the same standardized questions. Also the questionnaire survey technique gives the respondents enough time to respond to the questions as they were given the whole day to answer the questionnaires. Additionally, the element of anonymity improves the chances of getting honest responses.

A sample size must be at least 30 percent of the total population under research (Fielding, 2007). The sample size in this study was approximately 32 percent. The sample size of 45 respondents is relatively smaller due to time and availability of respondents. In-depth

interviews were conducted with three men and three women to further gather details of their businesses. These six participants were purposely selected because of the length of stay in Korea. The surveys and interviews were conducted over a period of six months during the summer and fall of 2013. The questionnaire consisted of thirteen items and the measures used included scale, interval, ordinal, and nominal.

The data were analyzed to determine the main background and demographic characteristics and challenges of the study participants and how they overcome them. Data was collected, processed, analyzed, and presented. SPSS 20 statistical software was used to analyze the data.

Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

Descriptive

The summary of the findings are presented in this section guided by the three research questions that constitute the purpose of this study: What role do African immigrants play in the Korean economy through entrepreneurial activities? What are the challenges and opportunities encountered in the process? How are challenges and opportunities approached and dealt with? The first part summarizes the highlights of the demographic profile of the respondents in Table 1. The second part presents a summary of the entrepreneurial characteristics of the participants in this study in Table 2. In the third part the summary of entrepreneurial challenges and opportunities of study participants are presented in Table 3.

Males constitute 64.44 percent of respondents and females 35.56 percent. About forty-nine percent of male respondents are married compared to 33.33 percent of women; the majority of

respondents (male and female) are in the age range 26 – 43 years with males constituting 48.88 percent and females 33.34 percent.

With respect to problems the respondents faced, securing funding to start a business presented one of the biggest differences between males and females with 31.7 percent of males responding that they had no difficulties getting formal investment compared to 18 percent of females. Furthermore, 16.7 percent of males responded that they financed their business with informal investment compared to 33.3 percent of females. There were no female participants for the age ranges 18-25 and 50 and above.

Concerning the reason for migrating to Korea, 17.78 percent of male participants compared to 4.44 percent of females indicated "political reasons" and 22.22 percent of male respondents compared to 4.44 percent females indicated "better economic opportunities." About twenty-seven percent of females compared to 4.44 percent of male participants indicated that the primary reason for migrating to Korea was to "join spouse." The largest numbers of respondents have lived in Korea 9-14 years; males 28.89 percent and females 15.56 percent.

The educational achievement of both male and female participants indicated that the majority were technical college or university graduates with the percentages significantly higher for males. The percent of males who graduated from technical college was 26.67; the percent for females was only 13.33. Furthermore, 33.33 percent of males compared to 15.56 percent of females were university graduates. Overall, twenty-five percent of male and female respondents are university graduates.

Table 1. Respondent Profile: Demographic Data of Study Participants.

Variable	Number		Percent	
Gender: Male	29		64.44%	
Female	16		35.56%	
Marital Status	Male	Percent of Total Sample	Female	Percent of Total Sample
Yes	22	48.89%	15	33.33%
No	7	15.56%	1	2.22%
Age	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
18-25	3	6.67%	0	0.00%
26-31	11	24.44%	4	8.89%
32-37	6	13.33%	7	15.56%
38-43	5	11.11%	4	8.89%
44-49	1	2.22%	1	2.22%
50 and above	3	6.67%	0	0.00%
Years in Korea	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Less than 3	1	2.22%	1	2.22%
3-8	7	15.56%	4	8.89%
9-14	13	28.89%	7	15.56%
15-20	3	6.67%	4	8.89%
21 and above	5	11.11%	0	0.00%
Reason for Migrating to Korea	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Better Economic Opportunities	10	22.22%	2	4.44%
Political	8	17.78%	2	4.44%

Relative Succeeding in Business	5	11.11%	0	0.00%
Join Spouse	2	4.44%	12	26.67%
Education	4	8.89%	0	0.00%
Highest Education Attained	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Secondary School graduate	0	0.00%	1	2.22%
High School graduate	2	4.44%	2	4.44%
Technical college	12	26.67%	6	13.33%
University graduate	15	33.33%	7	15.56%

Table 2 summarizes the entrepreneurial characteristics of the participants in this study. Regarding the type of business respondents were engaged in, 20 percent of males and 0.00 percent females were engaged in "Export of Garments/Cars/Electronics". About 18.00 percent of males and 6.67 percent of females were in the "Export of Used Cars/Clothes" business. While 15.56 percent of females compared to 4.44 percent of males were "Hair/Barber Shop Owner". The percentage of male and female entrepreneurs involved in "Retail of African/Asian Goods" was the same at 8.89 percent. "Restaurant Owner" and "Tutor/Translator" were indicated as business focus by 6.67 percent respectively for males and 4.44 percent and 0.00 percent respectively for female respondents.

Securing start-up capital was more of a challenge for females than their male counterparts. While 33.33 percent of males indicated they relied on personal savings to finance their business, only 2.22 percent of females started their business utilizing saving. However, more females, 17.78 percent compared to males 8.89 percent, depended on family support for initial start-up financing of their business. Reliance on bank financing was reported by 8.89

percent of males and 0.00 percent of females. Additionally, 6.67 percent of males reported financing their business with the help of rotating credit compared to 4.44 percent of females. Bogan and Darity (2008) found that Asian immigrants in the U. S. receive much more debt capital than African Americans, while over 12 percent fewer Asian businesses started with zero financial capital. Moreover, in a 1982 study in Atlanta, approximately 25 percent of the selected Korean business owners reported that money brought from Korea accounted for at least 50 percent of their start-up capital (Min, 1988).

Other studies have also found that women entrepreneurs experience more difficulties securing small business financing from formal sources. For example, studies of small businesses in the United States show that loan approval rates for women entrepreneurs are 15 to 20 percent lower than their male counterparts partly because of the kinds of businesses women engage in (Arora, 2013).

Almost all the participants reported creating employment with the majority employing between 1–3 employees with 24.44 percent and 31.11 percent respectively for males and females. Twenty percent of males compared to 2.22 percent of females responded that they employed between 4-6 employees. While 13.33 percent of males reported employing 7-9 employees, 0.00 percent of females did. Also, 4.44 percent of male respondents indicated employing 10 and more workers with 0.00 percent females. Findings by other researchers indicate that the economic contributions of immigrants go beyond self-employment and include job creation for family members as well as other immigrants and employment of workers in the immigrants' new residence (see for example, Fairlie, 2008; Min and Kolodny, 1994; Kim and Yoon, n.d.; Min, 1988; Bogan and Darity, 2008)

With regard to the length of business engagement, the male respondents have generally been involved in entrepreneurial activities longer than their female counterparts. In response to the question about years in entrepreneurship, the largest group of respondents indicated being in this field for 2-7 years, with 37.78 percent of males and 17.78 percent of females. Slightly more than 11.00 percent of males and 6.67 percent females have been in entrepreneurial activities less than two months. About 8.90 percent of males compared to 11.11 percent of females have been engaged in entrepreneurial activities for 8-13 years. Only 2.22 percent and 0.00 percent male and female respondents respectively have been involved in entrepreneurial activities for 20 and above years. Many female respondents joined their husbands in Korea after some years and therefore started their businesses after settling down and studying the environment.

Table 2. Entrepreneurial Characteristics.

Type of Business	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Restaurant Owner	3	6.67%	2	4.44%
Retail of African/Asian Goods	4	8.89%	4	8.89%
Hair/Barber Shop Owner	2	4.44%	7	15.56%
Export of Garment/Cars/Electronics	9	20.00%	0	0.00%
Export of Used Cars/Clothes	8	17.78%	3	6.67%
Tutor/Translator	3	6.67%	0	0.00%
Start-up Capital	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Savings	15	33.33%	1	2.22%
Family	4	8.89%	8	17.78%

Rotating Credit	3	6.67%	2	4.44%
Bank Financing	4	8.89%	0	0.00%
Savings and Family	3	6.67%	5	11.11%
Number of Employees	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
None	1	2.22%	1	2.22%
1-3	11	24.44%	14	31.11%
4-6	9	20.00%	1	2.22%
7-9	6	13.33%	0	0.00%
10 and above	2	4.44%	0	0.00%
Years in Entrepreneurship	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Less than Two years	5	11.11%	3	6.67%
2-7	17	37.78%	8	17.78%
8-13	4	8.89%	5	11.11%
14-19	2	4.44%	0	0.00%
20 and above	1	2.22%	0	0.00%

The largest group of the participants in this study reported “Getting Bank Loan” as the biggest challenge they faced in their entrepreneurial activities. Forty percent of males compared to 17.78 percent of females indicated that they encountered difficulties getting funding from formal financing sources such as banks. This finding is inconsistent with other studies that showed more female entrepreneurs encountering difficulties with bank financing. For example, Arora (2013) and Denis (2004) found in their studies that new entrepreneurs usually faced difficulties in access to start-up capital challenges, particularly by female entrepreneurs. It is not surprising that more males than females in this present study

experienced difficulties with bank financing given the nature of their entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, the females in this study relied on family contributions to fund their business. As one female participant stated, "I do not have savings in a bank account or other properties to use as guarantor to secure a loan. It would be foolish of me to think that the bank will trust that my business will succeed and just hand over the loan." "Reluctance of Korean Business Partner/Suppliers" was indicated by 13.33 percent of males and 4.44 percent of females as a major challenge to their entrepreneurship. Due to the nature of their business endeavors, the percentage of males experiencing reluctance by Korean business partners and supplies was much higher than the percentage of females. One male participant indicated: "Without a bank account with a large balance, a credit card, and lack of communication skills in the Korean language, it is difficult to negotiate with a Korean businessman. When I first started I used a Korean friend as a partner in order to get the best deals and eventually build credibility." The males tended to engage in high capital entrepreneurial activities; the females were more into businesses that required minimal start-up financing. The male respondents experienced more difficulties with language than females with 6.67 percent and 4.44 percent respectively. The nature of the business venture guides the interaction with Korean business persons. Many female respondents interacted mostly with customers from their home countries or areas where the English language is commonly used. However, during the interviews, both male and female participants indicated investing in learning the Korean Language not only to facilitate their entrepreneurial activities, but also to better adapt to the Korean business culture. All the interviewees had taken advantage of free Korean language classes offered by various community organizations and government agencies as well as taking intensive courses at some

universities. One interviewee eagerly stated that, “the attitudes of my business associates change when they see me struggling sincerely to speak their language. I think I get better deals because of this and I am motivated to try harder.” Another emphasized that, “Because I want to work for myself, I will do all it takes to succeed rather than work in factories for low pay, long hours, no benefits. In fact I have heard that some of my friends working in the factories are not even paid overtime or on time.”

Table 3. Entrepreneurial Challenges and Opportunities.

Entrepreneurial Challenges	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Language Difficulties	3	6.67%	2	4.44%
Getting Bank Loan	18	40.00%	8	17.78%
Reluctance of Korean Business Partner/Suppliers	6	13.33%	2	4.44%
Climate	1	2.22%	2	4.44%
Business Culture	1	2.22%	2	4.44%
Entrepreneurial Opportunities	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Yes	23	51.11%	5	11.11%
No	2	4.44%	5	11.11%
Maybe	4	8.89%	6	13.33%

Regarding entrepreneurial opportunities, the male respondents were more optimistic than their female counterparts with 51.11 percent compared to only 11.11 percent respectively viewing the future prospects positively. This can be due to the fact that most female participants came to Korea to join their husbands and are not the main breadwinners of the

household. One female participant indicated that she entered into small business to stay busy and because of the flexibility her business offers.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examines the background and demographic characteristics of African business owners in Seoul, Korea. Second, it describes the motivation, challenges, and opportunities of these entrepreneurs. Data were collected through surveys and selected interviews and were analyzed using standard statistical methods. Demographics such as age, gender, education, marital status, length of stay in Korea, type of business, and reasons for migrating are related to entrepreneurial activities and ambitions of this study group.

In spite of difficulties in starting and maintaining their entrepreneurial activities such as securing financial capital, language barriers, and different business culture, there still exists a strong interest in creating businesses by African immigrants in Korea. Their abilities to create employment for themselves and others in these circumstances demonstrate that given the opportunity these entrepreneurs make significant contributions in the economic advancement of Korea. The majority of the participants view challenges as temporary and are planning for long term growth. Furthermore, while entrepreneurship offers an alternative to low paying or menial jobs in the secondary sector, it offers immigrants a sense of pride and motivates them to work harder. These immigrants are highly educated and given the support and opportunity they can be successful entrepreneurs. Policy makers and other agencies can facilitate the contributions of immigrant groups in the economic development by providing assistance in securing start-up capital to immigrants.

There are some limitations related to this study. First, the study was conducted in an area of Seoul populated by immigrants and second, the participants' entrepreneurial activities are within close distance of each other which may influence their experiences. The characteristics of a business location can have significant implications since commercial activities usually have a target group of consumers. It is suggested that future research should investigate whether the outcomes found here are applicable in other cities of Korea with a large concentration of immigrant populations.

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