



Research Paper

The Influence of Strategic Entrepreneurship on the Competitiveness of Small-Scale Businesses in South-South Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The undulating performance of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria in view of global market innovation and strategies has called for the need to deploy methods that work to enable them stay relevant and competitive. In the light of the above, the study examined the effect of strategic entrepreneurship on small and medium scale businesses competitiveness in the South-South of Nigeria. Three research hypotheses were formulated from the specific objectives of the study. Resource based view theory was adopted for the study. The study utilized the quantitative method that made use of survey approach. A sample of 399 SMEs was adopted with the aid of Taro Yamane sample size formula. Multi-stage sampling method was employed to select the SMEs that participated in the survey. The study made use of the structured questionnaire for data collection. Four point likert scale was used to measure the level of acceptance of the respondents ranging from strongly agree to disagree. The study made use of the Simple linear regression to test the hypotheses. The study found that entrepreneurial education, knowledge and innovation has positive significant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs' in South-South of Nigeria. It was recommended that education through training and workshops, be provided to entrepreneurs in the South-South to afford them the opportunity to be knowledgeable about how to identify opportunities and innovative through orientation, on how to convert opportunities to new products. This will make them compete favourably with other firms and remain relevant.

Keywords: Strategic Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness, Innovation and Small-Scale Business.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Strategic entrepreneurship, recognized as a crucial instrument for enhancing overall performance, involves the simultaneous exploration of opportunities and advantages through organizational activities. Employing tactical approaches, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises, it positions businesses competitively against both foreign and larger local entities (Dapend, Jin & Songting, 2016). Dapend, Jin and Songting (2016) stressed that the business landscape is currently marked by intense competition due to the challenges posed by globalization. They further opined that organizations are compelled to devise strategies that enable them to not only achieve and sustain their performance in the global market. The prevalence of bureaucratic structures inhibits entrepreneurial growth by fostering rigidity, risk aversion, and fatigue. Consequently, there is a growing preference for entrepreneurial firms that embrace change, take risks, and consistently promote innovation (Kantur, 2016).

In the words of Olawoye (2016), the concept of strategic entrepreneurship (SE) is a recent development that represents the intersection of strategic management and entrepreneurship. To achieve performance goals related to social value creation, Olawoye stated that customer satisfaction, market share, profit, and sales growth, microbusiness sector management is advised to recognize the importance of integrating entrepreneurship and strategic management concepts, principles, and practices. The author opined that this integration is crucial for these businesses to navigate through environmental uncertainties. While strategic management focuses on a firm's endeavors to establish sustainable competitive advantages as a determinant of its wealth creation ability. Adeyemi, Isaac, and Olufemi (2017) argue that identifying and seizing profitable opportunities within the business environment is fundamental to wealth creation through entrepreneurship. Organizations that prioritize risk-taking and exhibit a penchant for change, innovation, and creativity have been observed to be more favored in the context of strategic planning (Kantur, 2016).

The utilization of strategic entrepreneurship techniques not only offers SMEs a clear direction but also equips them with the ability to showcase their performance to key stakeholders (Kuratko&Audretsch, 2017). The absence of a strategic plan poses a risk for SMEs, as it may lead to unintended deviations from core principles, potentially hindering their ability to meet customer needs for products or services (Majama&Magang, 2017). Undoubtedly, the significance of having a strategic plan cannot be overstated, as it provides a framework for organizing and devising strategies that support the expansion, stability, and growth of SMEs. This is particularly crucial in emerging market economies like Nigeria, where large multinational corporations exert a dominant influence.

According to Audretsch, Lehmann, Belitski, and Cajazza (2018), large corporations gain a competitive advantage by strategically planning, which contributes to their greater success compared to SMEs. Strategic entrepreneurship in the opinion of the authors offers businesses the opportunity to present their growth and expansion alternatives, conduct thorough assessments of their potential, and devise a strategic plan to capitalize on these opportunities. The scope of strategic entrepreneurship extends across organizational levels, applicable to both new and established businesses, as well as small and large enterprises. As emphasized by Zafar and Mustafa (2017), the commitment of all stakeholders is crucial for enabling strategic entrepreneurship, paving the way for revitalizing SMEs as drivers of economic growth, potent tools for advancing domestic technology, facilitating rapid industrialization, creating jobs, and serving as the cornerstone of sustainable economic development.

In countries such as Nigeria, characterized by abundant natural resources like oil and fertile land supporting agriculture and industrial activities, entrepreneurs, particularly those in the SME sector, have experienced a certain level of suboptimal performance (Redford, 2016). This can be attributed largely to the prevalent use of informal, traditional methods by most SMEs in the South-South region, making it difficult for them to simultaneously integrate advantage-seeking and opportunity-seeking behaviors. This challenge stands as a primary impediment to the growth of SMEs in the region.

The absence of entrepreneurial education among most SMEs in the area has led to inefficiencies in various aspects, including low capital investments, limited skills and organizational capabilities, minimal utilization of labor-intensive technology, restricted access to formal credit and organized markets, unregulated and competitive market conditions, limited service access, insufficient reinvestment, and unrealized earnings and profits (Salisu& Abu Baker, 2018). The region's entrepreneurs, with generally low educational attainment, have not adequately explored the significance of entrepreneurial leadership. This has contributed to a high incidence of employee turnover within SMEs due to leaders lacking strategic approaches. About 80% of businesses lack entrepreneurial skills, adversely affecting their local and regional expansion, indicating they are not reaching their full potential (Salisu& Abu Baker, 2018).

Moreover, despite the potential for delivering oral instruction in both formal and informal settings, employees within SMEs have not fully embraced the acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge (Omare&Kyongo, 2017). According to the authors, consequently, these workers lack entrepreneurial skills in key areas such as self-reliance, resilience, long-term investment, and self-reflection. Ukenna et al. (2019) has pointed out the absence of entrepreneurial orientation among SME employees in the region, resulting in limited levels of entrepreneurial innovation in market products and technology. Furthermore, the lack of exposure to new business opportunities has led to a deficiency in competitive advantage within the business environment.

Strategic entrepreneurship, as outlined by Makinde and Agu (2018), extends beyond being merely the intersection of strategic management and entrepreneurship; it should be perceived as a concept marked by controversy rather than a conclusively defined one. Inadequate allocation of resources toward the adoption of modern technologies by SMEs may lead to a decline in the creation and advancement of new products (Makinde&Agu, 2018). This situation, prevalent among a majority of SMEs in Nigeria's South-South region, impedes the enterprise's ability to prosper both in the present and the future, ultimately resulting in its discontinuation. The limited longevity of small and medium-sized businesses is disconcerting because the continuity of businesses is crucial for the sustainability of economies, particularly considering the role of these

businesses in social and economic development. According to Majama and Magang (2017), it is estimated that only 30% of SMEs globally reach the second generation, with less than 14% making it to the third.

Statement of the Problem

To achieve economic prosperity, it is imperative for every country to establish and sustain Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). However, the stark reality is that the failure rate among most SMEs is remarkably high. Notably, Nigeria exhibits the lowest probability among the countries in the GEM sample for a new SME to survive beyond 42 months (Njenga&Theuri, 2016). In today's highly competitive economic landscape, companies of various sizes and resource capacities must secure a competitive edge for their products and services, both domestically and internationally, to thrive. In response to the fiercely competitive global business climate, businesses need to assess their internal frameworks. To enhance productivity and maintain or attain a competitive advantage, they must cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary for being proactive, innovative, and willing to take risks. SMEs should implement innovative programs, adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, and utilize strategic planning and management techniques to enhance performance. Additionally, they should continually assess the external business environment to swiftly and effectively respond to changes, thereby maintaining a competitive edge.

The foundation of strategic entrepreneurship is closely tied to planning, as it offers businesses the adaptability needed for executing their strategies. Employing strategic entrepreneurship allows businesses to outline their possibilities for growth and expansion, conduct comprehensive assessments of their potential, and devise strategic plans to fully capitalize on them. It is worrisome that SMEs more frequently resort to operational planning rather than strategic planning. This aspect needs consideration when examining the correlation between strategic entrepreneurship and the performance of SMEs in the South-South region that this study sought to address.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the influence of strategic entrepreneurship on the competitiveness of small-scale businesses in South-South Nigeria. Specific objectives include:

1. Find out how entrepreneurial education affects SMEs' competitive advantage in South-South Nigeria.
2. Analyze how entrepreneurial orientation affects SMEs' competitive advantage in Nigeria's South-South.

Hypotheses

To guide this investigation, the following null hypotheses were developed:

1. Entrepreneurial education has no positive significant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs' in South-South of Nigeria
2. Entrepreneurial orientation has no positive significant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs' in South-South of Nigeria.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptualization

Strategic Entrepreneurship

The intersection of entrepreneurship and strategic management literature is referred to as "strategic entrepreneurship" (Kuratko&Audretsch, 2017). It can be characterized as the amalgamation of entrepreneurial actions, focused on seeking opportunities, and strategic actions, aimed at seeking advantages, to formulate and implement strategies that generate wealth. Strategic entrepreneurship emerges from the synergy of literature on entrepreneurship and strategic management, combining elements from both domains to integrate entrepreneurial actions with a strategic perspective (Putera et al., 2021).

Strategic entrepreneurship can be seen as the simultaneous pursuit of opportunities and the establishment of a competitive advantage to formulate and implement entrepreneurial strategies that generate wealth (Haider, Asad& Fatima, 2017). Strategic entrepreneurship also involves fostering innovation and leveraging creativity. Leaders in innovation significantly influence the market strength of competitors and enjoy temporary monopoly advantages, leading to extraordinary profits due to competitors' delayed responses. Salisu and Abu-Baker (2018) emphasize that a firm's ability to create wealth is heavily reliant on innovations arising from novel combinations of production elements. Innovation is closely tied to the overall economic health and the effective functioning of businesses in both industrial and service sectors.

Creating new value for clients through effective innovations enhances an organization's performance, underscoring the significance of creativity in achieving improved results. This is because creativity is increasingly vital for small and medium-sized businesses due to its capacity to generate a multitude of options (Adibe, Akam&Onuorah, 2023) Innovation, rooted in creativity, is portrayed as an ongoing process rather than a

singular act, and the effective management of resources plays a key role in nurturing creativity. Education stands out as a valuable tool for cultivating strategic entrepreneurship, leading to the concept of strategic education.

Entrepreneurial Education

Entrepreneurial education focuses on empowering workers or employees with the motivation and essential skills needed to initiate and effectively guide a business from its initial stages to maturity. In various contexts, its aim is to provide SMEs with "the knowledge, skills, and motivation to foster entrepreneurial success" (Potjanjaruwit, 2018). This approach facilitates the crucial identification and avoidance of numerous risks faced by inexperienced and careless entrepreneurs. While the investment in entrepreneurial education may initially appear to require time and financial resources, its value becomes apparent over time (Yusuf, 2017). According to Njenga and Theuri (2016), the objective of entrepreneurship education is to instill values, skills, and information necessary for recognizing business opportunities and planning, launching, and managing new ventures.

Entrepreneurial education is anticipated to empower SME trainees to identify and address issues through analytical and creative problem-solving, collaborate with others as proactive team members to enhance conflict resolution skills, and effectively identify and resolve challenges. Additional goals include developing the ability to gather, organize, analyze, and critically evaluate information, as well as fostering effective communication and negotiation skills among SME trainees or workers (Nnabugwu, 2021). Entrepreneurial education contributes to the generation of knowledge and a deeper understanding of opportunities and how to capitalize on them.

Entrepreneurial Orientation

An entrepreneurial attitude encompasses all decision-making processes that support business operations and lead to venturing into new markets. Farja, Gimmon, and Greenberg (2016) note that entrepreneurial orientation extends to the strategies employed by companies in identifying and initiating new projects, rooted in the literature on the strategy-making process. The current definition of this construct portrays an entrepreneurial organization, characterized by multidimensional innovation in products and markets, undertaking relatively risky ventures, and pioneering "proactive" innovations, outpacing competitors (Brownhilder, et al., 2017; Adibe, et al., 2023).

The adoption of an entrepreneurial mindset can potentially facilitate small businesses in gaining access to finance, contributing to their improved performance (Kiyabo, 2019). The company's performance is positively linked to top managers exhibiting a high degree of entrepreneurial orientation, willingness to take risks, possession of a significant competitive advantage, and involvement in innovative activities (Rezaei&Ortt, 2018). Businesses with an entrepreneurial mindset invest more effort in exploring opportunities in capital supply and are more determined to achieve their objectives. Developing an effective strategic direction can enhance profitability, return on investment, and attract additional external funding for businesses (Hughes & Morgan, 2017).

Competitive advantage

While the term "competitive advantage" is frequently used in strategic management, there is still a need for further refinement in its definition and operationalization. According to Mooney cited in Nnabugwu (2021) competitive advantage refers to a quality or resource that distinguishes a company from its competitors and is challenging to duplicate. A company establishes a competitive edge over rivals when it can deliver superior services, benefits, and values at higher costs, or when it can offer equivalent value as its rivals at a lower price. Nnabugwu (2021) see competitive advantage performance and capabilities to provide customers with a superior product or service compared to competitors employing a combined strategy.

From a strategic standpoint, Barney cited in Nnabugwu (2021) define competitive advantage by stating, "When a firm is implementing a value-creating strategy that is not concurrently being implemented by any current or potential competitors, it is said to have a competitive advantage." In essence, competitive advantage is the ability to outperform competitors in the same market or industry by leveraging unique resources and qualities. Consumers are attracted to advertisements for products and services that either offer better quality or lower prices. These distinct offerings target specific markets, explaining why consumers prefer certain goods or services, displaying brand loyalty. To comprehend competitive advantage, the value proposition is crucial. A successful value proposition can create a competitive advantage for the product or service by providing customers with better and more significant value.

Entrepreneurial Education and Effectiveness

Entrepreneurial education plays a crucial role in enhancing the efficiency of SMEs in Nigeria, as revealed by Yusuf (2017). This education contributes to the development of skills and competencies within these businesses, thereby enhancing their overall performance and making a significant contribution to Nigeria's economic recovery and growth. Bosire and Nzaramba (2015) echoed these findings, demonstrating that entrepreneurship education leads to improved business practices, higher revenues, and increased profits for SMEs. They concluded that a notable factor restricting the expansion of SMEs is the lack of entrepreneurship education.

Yusuf (2017) determined that the effectiveness and profitability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria experience enhancement through globalization, the adoption of technological tools and platforms, and the acquisition of entrepreneurship education. Additional research conducted by Njenga&Theuri (2016) has also explored factors impacting efficiency. Okoi et al. (2022) in their study on strategic entrepreneurship practices and performance of small and medium sized enterprises in Nigeria established that that management of SMEs should strategically structure its resource portfolio, invest in human capital and integrate by portraying both opportunity and advantage-seeking behaviors, to update its quality products.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Competitive Advantage

Previous studies in organizational behavior have demonstrated a significant correlation between the levels of innovation and entrepreneurial orientation (Okoi et al., 2021). Kimuli, Ajagbe, Udo and Balunywa (2016) examined the relationship among strategic entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial orientation, strategic orientation and performance in selected private secondary schools in Wakiso District in Uganda. Findings revealed that there was a positive significant relationship between all the study variables of entrepreneurial orientation, strategic orientation, strategic entrepreneurship and performance. The study recommended that private secondary schools should adopt strategic entrepreneurship behaviour since entrepreneurship and strategic management are concerned with growth and wealth creation. Madanchian and Taherdoost's (2017) research suggests that entrepreneurial orientation influences innovation performance both directly and indirectly through knowledge management.

Theoretical Framework

This investigation employs the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory introduced by Wernerfelt in 1984. In Wernerfelt's exploration of RBV (1984), the theory delineates a firm's strategic options for selecting resources, emphasizing that a firm's intangible resources are pivotal to ensuring its success. Research utilizing RBV has revealed the interconnections between organizational resources, capabilities, and performance (Ibrahim &Shariff, 2016). Criticism of the RBV model has arisen due to its perceived lack of managerial implications and the notion that achieving a sustained competitive advantage restricts its applicability. Barney, Ketchen, and Wright (2011), however, posit that RBV proves more valuable in fostering understanding and providing a framework for planning. According to them, resource-based logic aids managers in comprehending the types of resources contributing to long-term strategic advantages, enabling them to assess the full spectrum of their company's resources and capitalize on those with the potential for such advantages

Within the resource-based view, human resources, encompassing abilities, competencies, and skills, are recognized as essential components of entrepreneurship education. This concept is pertinent to the research, as it delves into how small and medium-sized businesses can enhance their overall performance by embracing and leveraging technology while acquiring entrepreneurial skills through education and expertise. Consequently, the independent variables in this study are grounded in the postulates of the RBV.

The theory is applicable to the study in that it argues that a firm's competitive advantage lies primarily in the application of a bundle of valuable tangible or intangible resources at the firm's disposal. Additionally, competitive advantage depends on the unique resources and capabilities that a firm possesses, rather than simply evaluating environmental opportunities and threats in conducting business. The resource-base view of the firm predicts that certain types of resources owned and controlled by firms have the potential and promise to generate competitive advantage and eventually superior firm performance.

III. METHODS

This study employed cross-sectional research method. The respondents consisted of small and medium-sized businesses in South-South Nigeria, selected for their ability to provide valuable insights into the impact of strategic entrepreneurship on the competitiveness of SMEs. The research included 272424 participants chosen from states in South-South Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2022). The selection of 399 SMEs from the population was determined using the Taro Yamane sample size formula. The selection of SMEs from the research area was carried out using a multistage sample technique. To ensure objective and proportionate sampling and to adequately represent every segment of the population, the South-South region was divided into three portions based on the traditional mid-west division. The structured questionnaire was used for the study and was divided

into two sections demographic and research issues). Face and content validity were used for the study. The reliability of the pre-test was assessed through a two-tailed test with a P value of 0.05. The reliability score, determined using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation, resulted in a value of 0.79. This score, indicating reliability, was considered satisfactory for the instruments employed in data collection. Simple linear regression was then conducted to examine the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable and analyze the acquired data. A total of 399 questionnaire were distributed to the respondents however, only 375 copies of the administered instrument were retrieved. This showed that 94% of the instruments were retrieved and 6% were lost.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of Respondents' Socio-Demography

Table1: The Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	
Sex	Male	223	59.5
	Females	152	40.5
	Total	375	100.0
Age	18-28 years	122	32.5
	29-39 years	185	49.3
	40 and above	68	18.1
	Total	375	100.0
Educational Qualification	Primary education	121	32.3
	Secondary education	143	38.1
	Higher education	111	29.6
	Total	375	100.0
Occupation	Artisan	112	29.9
	Trader	97	25.9
	Farmer	102	27.2
	Private company owner	64	17.0
	Total	375	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

The socio-demographic details of the respondents who took part in the survey are shown in Table 4.1. According to the distribution of respondents by sex, male made up 59.5% and females made up 40.5% of the population. According to age distribution, 49.3% of them were between the ages of 29 and 39. Other age groups included those aged 18 to 28 (32.5%) and those aged 40 and over (18.1%). The table shows that the bulk of the respondents (38.1%), are those with secondary school certificates, those with primary school leaving certificate had (32.2%), and those with higher education (29.6%). All had SSCEs as their highest level of schooling. Finally, the respondents' occupational distribution showed that 29.9% of them were artisans, followed by famers with 27.2% and next is traders with 25.9% with the last being private company owners with 17.0%.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one

Entrepreneurial education has no positive significant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs' in South-South of Nigeria

Table 2 Summary of Regression analysis for hypothesis One

		Coefficients ^a				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.503	258		9.694	.000
	Entrepreneur education	266	122	.599	12.192	.003
Multiple R = .599		Multiple R ² = 0.71, Adjusted R = .70, F (375) = 4.803				

Table 2 showed that in South-South Nigerian SMEs, entrepreneurial education significantly improves their competitive edge. The results indicate that the null hypothesis is rejected (t = 12.192, p< 0.05). According to the table, there is a substantial multiple correlation (r = 0.599, p<0.05) between the predictor variable (entrepreneurship education) and the competitive advantage of SMEs in South-South Nigeria. With a coefficient of determination of R2 = 0.71, it can be inferred that entrepreneurial education explains roughly 71% (R2 x 100) of the observed variance in the competitive advantage of SMEs in South-South, Nigeria. Other variables that are not included in the regression model account for the remaining 29% of the observed variance in competitive advantage of SMEs in the South-South region of Nigeria. At the significance level of 0.05, the computed F-ratio

(4.803) is statistically significant. This suggests that a substantial explanation for the difference in the competitive advantage of SMEs in South-South Nigeria can be found in the predictor variable.

Hypothesis two

Entrepreneurial orientation has no positive significant effect on competitive advantage of SMEs’ in South-South of Nigeria

Table 3 Summary of Regression analysis for hypothesis Two
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.309	.372		6.203	.000
	Entrepreneurial orientation	.125	.176	.501	7.710	.000
Multiple R = .501, Multiple R ² = .660, Adjusted R = .600, F (375) = .504						

a. Dependent Variable: competitive advantage of SMEs⁷

Table 3 demonstrated the strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and competitive advantage in South-South Nigerian SMEs. The null hypothesis is implied to be rejected (t =7.710, p< 0.05). The table shows that the competitive advantage of SMEs in South-South Nigeria and the predictor variable (Entrepreneurial orientation) have a substantial multiple correlation (r = 0.501, p< 0.05). Entrepreneurial orientation accounted for approximately 66% (R2 x 100) of the observed variance in the competitive advantage of SMEs in South-South, Nigeria, according to the coefficient of determination (R2 = 0.660). The remaining 34% of the variance that could not be explained by the regression model is primarily attributable to variables other than those included in the model that can account for competitive advantage in SMEs in South-South, Nigeria. At the significance level of 0.05, the computed F-ratio (1.504) is statistically significant. This suggests that the variation in the competitive advantage of SMEs in South-South Nigeria can be significantly explained by the predictor variable.

V. Summary of Results

This study assessed the competitive advantage and strategic entrepreneurship of SMEs in Nigeria's South-South area. The outcome demonstrates the analysis of the generated data.

1. Entrepreneurial education has a significant positive influence on competitive advantage in SMEs’ in South-South region of Nigeria (t =12.192, p<0.05).
2. Entrepreneurial knowledge has significant and positive effect on competitive advantage of SMEs’ in South-South region of Nigeria (t =8.213, p<0.05).

VI. Discussion of the findings

The initial hypothesis test results indicate that entrepreneurship education significantly enhances the competitive advantage of small and medium-sized businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Yusuf's (2017) discovery that entrepreneurship education positively influences the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria, enhancing their skills and competencies, thereby contributing to Nigeria's economic recovery and growth. These findings align with the assertions of Njenga and Theuri (2016), who emphasized the substantial impact of entrepreneurship education on the success of Nigerian SMEs in the market. Okoi et al. (2021) also reported similar outcomes, emphasizing that entrepreneurship education leads to improved business practices, higher revenues, and increased profitability for SMEs. They concluded that a significant hindrance to SME growth is the absence of entrepreneurship education. Additionally, Makinde and Aguasseted that strategic entrepreneurship results in success for firms where there is education to fine tune it. In summary, these findings suggest that entrepreneurship education plays a crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial growth, potentially providing a competitive advantage to small and medium-sized businesses in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Result for the second research hypothesis is found in the substantial benefits that SMEs in South-South Nigeria derive from an entrepreneurial orientation, particularly concerning their competitive advantage. This aligns with scholarly works by Madanchian and Taherdoost (2017), Kimuli et al. (2016) and Okoi et al. (2021). They emphasizes the influence of an entrepreneurial perspective on the innovation process, positing that it can lead to a competitive advantage. Madanchian and Taherdoost highlighted the positive correlation between proactivity, risk-taking, and innovations, which inherently possess a competitive dimension. Kimuli research underscores the connection between creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset, differentiating a company from its competitors.

Okoi et al. (2021) provide a comprehensive set of arguments and supporting evidence, affirming that an entrepreneurial approach significantly enhances a company's innovation levels. This aligns with various academic perspectives. Furthermore, entrepreneurial orientation positively influences innovation inputs, innovation adoption, and innovation generation. The study by Kaya and Agea (2019) indicate that the adoption of innovations contributes positively to performance, including product innovation performance. The robust reasons presented by other scholars bolster the findings of this study, highlighting that entrepreneurial orientation significantly enhances the competitiveness of SMEs in Nigeria's South-South region.

VII. Conclusion

Entrepreneurship has become a focal point in contemporary business dynamics due to its potential to create numerous job opportunities and income sources, particularly for individuals lacking access to formal education. Consequently, the study asserts that entrepreneurial education, knowledge dissemination, and orientation serve as authentic tools that positively influence entrepreneurial development, aiming to sustain market competitiveness. This conclusion is drawn from the research findings, highlighting the dynamic nature of modern society propelled by technological advancements and innovation. Hence, emphasizing the significance of entrepreneurial education, expertise, and orientation becomes imperative for fostering entrepreneurship competitiveness in Nigeria's South-South region.

VIII. Recommendations

1. To bolster small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria's South-South region, it is imperative for both federal and state governments to provide entrepreneurship education. This proactive measure is essential to equip SMEs with the necessary intellectual resources for their sustenance and development, especially in the face of intensifying competition, considering the advent of modern technological tools that can be leveraged for SME growth and resilience.
2. Furthermore, the recommendation emphasizes placing a high priority on business innovation and fostering an entrepreneurial orientation in the South-South Nigerian entrepreneurial landscape. Business owners should be committed to offering regular training programs that empower their workforce to cultivate creativity and innovation—a crucial requirement for maintaining competitiveness.

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